Kautsky was quite clearly at his strongest in criticising Bernstein’s conceptions about the role of the ‘property owners’ and the middle classes in society – as can be seen from Kautsky’s discussion of the role of the new middle class, which he preferred to call the intellectuals. Bernstein was generally referring to the increase in the number of property owners or people deriving some income from their property – and not from wage labour exclusively – or to small entrepreneurs in different fields of industry. According to Kautsky, it would be more valid to discuss the role of intellectuals rather than property owners as the new middle class in modern capitalist society:

Had Bernstein wanted to say nothing other than that the middle class is not dying out, with a new middle class taking the place of the old one, i.e. the ‘intelligentsia’ taking the place of the independent craftsmen and small merchants, then we would have conceded this to him without further ado.¹

Kautsky’s concept of the intellectual was very broad. To him, an intellectual was any qualified worker representing some kind of organisational function in society. The representatives of free professions were a clear and rather uninteresting case of intellectuals – as part of the old middle classes. The reason for the increase in the number of middle classes is the transmission of some of the functions of the exploiting classes to specific employed functionaries, qualified wage workers. The broadening of the functions of the modern state and modern enterprises has led to a remarkable increase in these functions. A relatively well-paid group of people with a specially qualified labour power has emerged. It would, however, be a grave misunderstanding to consider the new groups to be identical with the old middle classes. Their position and functions in society are rather different. It would, however, be equally erroneous to regard them as similar to the proletariat in a straightforward way.

¹ Kautsky 1899a, p. 19.
They resemble the bourgeoisie in their way of life and they have close relations with it in other respects too. While representing the functions of capital, they assume many of the mental attitudes of the bourgeoisie as well: ‘From this too, an antagonism against the proletariat arises between the proletariat and the several “intelligentsias”’.

The main characteristic of the new middle class stems from its privileged position based on the privilege of education [der Privilegium der Bildung]. Even though education has become relatively common among the population compared with the period of feudalism, it is still a privilege preserved for a narrow section of the population. Kautsky’s most interesting contribution to the analysis of the intellectuals was, however, his analysis of their class position. From this point of view, intellectuals do not form a homogeneous class. Their more privileged members are close to the bourgeoisie, while their least privileged members are almost proletarian in position. The most interesting group of intellectuals is, however, the increasing middle stratum of the middle class [die Mittelschichten der Mittelschichten], which is situated between the anti-proletarian intellectuals sharing the attitudes of capitalists and the genuinely proletarian intellectuals. This group shares some of the features of both strata in a way similar to the old traditional petit bourgeoisie. There are, however, two important differences: first, there is an important advantage from the point of view of the socialist movement:

It is distinguished from it by its broad intellectual horizons and its instructed ability to think abstractly. It is the stratum of the population that is most easily able to rise above its class and caste-narrowmindedness, to feel idealistically ‘above’ momentary and sectional interests, to look the enduring needs of the whole of society in the eye and to represent them.

On the other hand, the middle stratum of the new middle class presents a feature that is disadvantageous from the point of view of socialism: it lacks the readiness to fight against capital. Being a relatively small group, without any specific class interest and without a unified organisation, it is not willing to fight for its interests. Moreover, it can easily safeguard its interests even without fighting, while being in a relatively privileged position:

2  Kautsky 1899a, p. 131.
3  Kautsky 1899a, p. 133.
They hate the class struggle and preach its abolition or at least its mitigation. For them, class struggle means insurrection, rebellion and revolution: such things are to be rendered superfluous by social reform.⁴

The future social and political development of the new middle class is a genuine problem for the fighting proletariat. Its social position is contradictory by its nature:

Claiming them entirely for the cause of the proletariat would go too far. But it would be even more erroneous to simply count them amongst the ‘propertied’. In this social stratum we can find all the social contradictions that characterise capitalism compressed into a small space. But in this microcosm, like across society as a whole, we find the proletarian element taking steps forward.⁵

The analysis of the new middle class (the intellectuals) is once again characteristic of the whole argumentation presented in Kautsky’s anti-critique against Bernstein. Kautsky did not try to deny the importance of all the arguments that Bernstein presented against the thesis of the concentration – or rather polarisation – of society. His aim was more to prove that despite the continued existence and even increase of the middle classes (small property owners, members of the new middle class), their position and functions in society had radically changed due to the development of capitalist relations and the concentration of capital. The groups remaining in between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie – even if not wholly proletarian in position and consciousness – had important features in common with the proletariat. They were gradually being proletarianised.

Summing up the various proletarian elements in modern society, Kautsky came to the conclusion that at least two-thirds or even three-quarters of the population were already proletarian in character – and hence potential supporters of revolutionary social democracy.⁶ Even though they were not uniform in their interests, in future it would be possible to unify all the proletarian elements behind the Social Democratic Party and win their support for genuine workers-rule.⁷ All that was needed was skilful and forceful agitation by the

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⁴ Kautsky 1899a, p. 134.
⁵ Kautsky 1899a, p. 135.
⁶ Kautsky 1899a, p. 186.
⁷ Kautsky 1899a, pp. 192–3.
party and its representatives. One of the best-known elements in Kautsky’s thinking in this respect was his conception of immiseration.

A two-fold tendency towards the repression and elevation of the proletariat constantly operates in capitalist society. The contradiction in the tendency is, however, nothing but an expression of the general contradiction between capitalists and wage workers.\(^8\) The growing working class and its organisations are able to fight against increasing exploitation and its effects. However, exploitation as such cannot be eliminated in capitalism by an organised working class. The proletariat is able to improve its social position through class struggle, but this pertains to its moral rather than economic standing.\(^9\) In this respect, Kautsky is rather more pessimistic than Engels. In his critical comments on the Party Programme proposal (the Erfurt Programme), Engels pointed out that the workers are able to oppose – at least to some extent – the tendency towards increasing misery. They cannot, however, avoid the insecurity characteristic of their existence in capitalism.\(^10\) As Kautsky formulated it, there exists a constant tendency towards increasing misery in capitalist society, even though many of its effects on the working class have been modified and changed:

Thus in the sense of tendency which cannot be eradicated in capitalist society, and which is asserting itself on an ever greater scale, the phrase about an increase in misery and subordination, as well as outrage amongst the workers, is completely correct.\(^11\)

The fight of the organised working class against exploitation has, however, changed the nature of misery in capitalism. In modern capitalism, it would be better to speak about *social* misery, rather than *physical* misery:

However, yet another point of view is compatible with the facts. The word *poverty* can mean *physical* poverty, but it can also mean *social* poverty. Poverty in the first sense of the word is measured by the *physiological* needs of human beings. However, these are not the same in all places and

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\(^8\) Kautsky 1899a, p. 115.
\(^9\) Kautsky 1936, p. 200.
\(^10\) Engels 1974–2004e, p. 223. Engels’s *Critique of the Draft of Social Democratic Programme of 1891* was originally written in 1891, but it was first published in 1901 in *Die Neue Zeit* (see Engels 1974–2004e, p. 599, n. 183).
\(^11\) Kautsky 1899a, p. 116.
at all times. Yet the differences they exhibit are nowhere near as large as the social needs, the non-satisfaction of which creates social poverty.\textsuperscript{12}

In the physiological sense, the Marxist conception of growing misery would obviously be false. But in its wider social meaning, the concept is still valid:

But if the working class rising out of physical poverty is such a slow process, then it follows that there is a constant increase in the class's social misery, because labour productivity increases tremendously quickly. This then means nothing other than that the working class remains cut off from the progress of culture to an increasing extent, that the bourgeoisie living standard rises more quickly than that of the proletariat, that the social contradiction between the two of them grows.\textsuperscript{13}

In the above quotation, the growing social misery of the working class could be understood as being almost synonymous with the increasing accumulation of capital. Due to the increase in the productivity of labour, capital accumulates faster than the total wages in society. The relative share of the national product received by the bourgeoisie is getting bigger. If the struggle against capital is caused by growing misery, and if the growing misery is synonymous with the accumulation of capital in general, then the theoretical implications of this conception are rather devastating. But in Kautsky's opinion, the growing misery is also reflected in the increasing number of women and children among the labour force. Social misery is indeed a permanent element of capitalism, as permanent as exploitation, and in countries where capitalism is still only establishing its relations, the misery is even more obvious. In such regions, one could even speak of pure physical misery. Hence, Kautsky was able to summarise his discussion of immiseration as follows:

Thus poverty is everywhere in the capitalist mode of production. This poverty is even greater, the more proletarians there are, the more small-scale enterprises are degraded by or made dependent on capital. But this also means more struggle against poverty, more working-class indignation against capitalist rule.\textsuperscript{14}

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{12} Ibid.
\bibitem{13} Kautsky 1899a, p. 118.
\bibitem{14} Kautsky 1899a, p. 127.
\end{thebibliography}
In The Theory of Immiseration: A Helpless Critique of Capitalism [Die Verelendungstheorie: eine hilflose Kapitalismuskritik], Wolf Wagner discussed the dispute over revisionism mainly as a dispute of the theory of immiseration. Wagner is ready to admit that the study of the polemical writings of both Bernstein and Kautsky does not reveal so many explicit references to the problem of immiseration. The dispute seems to be primarily concerned with the theory of the collapse of capitalism. The development of the social position of wage workers was discussed only sporadically. Still, it is easy to agree with Wagner that the concept of immiseration was perhaps the most important single part of the revolutionary socialist doctrine as presented by Kautsky. It was essential to Kautsky’s thinking because it made sense of the general emphasis he placed on the future development of the socialist revolutionary consciousness among wage workers. And it was generally understood to be one of the cornerstones of the scientific socialism of Engels and Marx.

To Bernstein’s general theoretical argument, the fate of the working class was important too. It was important to show that the worker’s position could be improved in capitalism. Bernstein did not, however, primarily discuss the development of the value and price of labour power. Rather, he tried to show that the devastating consequences of the capitalist-wage labour relation could already be avoided or at least sidestepped in capitalism by introducing workers’

15 Wagner 1976, p. 23.
16 However, in The Agrarian Question, Kautsky definitely denied that the growing misery of the proletariat was a necessary precondition of its revolutionary aspirations. Improving the position of the proletariat as consumers did not eliminate the necessity for class struggle; on the contrary, it even improved its conditions: ‘Modern wage-labourers remain proletarian so long as they are not in possession of their means of production, regardless of how satisfactory their status might be as a consumer, and what they – as a consumer – might own, be it jewellery, furniture or even a small house. In fact, far from making them unfit for proletarian class struggle, improving their position as a consumer enables them to struggle all the more vigorously. Proletarian class struggle is not the outcome of poverty, but of the antithesis between the proletarian and the owner of the means of production. The establishment of social peace will not be brought about by the overcoming of poverty – even if this were to prove possible – but by overcoming this antithesis. And this can only occur when the working population regains possession of its means of production’ (Kautsky 1988, p. 314).
17 Wagner presents a list of the works of Marx supporting the thesis that Marx also shared a conception of immiseration. In Wagner’s opinion, it does not, however, form a central element of the works of the ‘mature’ Marx (i.e. Capital). (See Wagner 1976, p. 18, n. 14; for a discussion of the role of immiseration in Marx’s Capital, see Chapter 17).
co-operatives and juridical measures by the state and local authorities. The fate of the working class could be improved in spite of capitalism.

In answering Bernstein’s critique, Kautsky formulated his revision of the immiseration doctrine – and introduced the concept of social misery discussed above. (Kautsky was, of course, trying to show that it was no revision after all. According to Kautsky, the Erfurt Programme should have been quite understandable to anyone familiar with Marx’s work. The misunderstandings were due to an imperfect knowledge of Capital). In defending the ‘Marxist’ conception of immiseration against various critics, Kautsky gave various definitions of the concept – the growing misery had to be understood as only a tendency – but in its most general meaning it became equivalent to the discrepancy between the growing cultural needs of wage workers and their means of satisfying them. There cannot be any fixed definition of these needs. They are cultural needs because they vary from one society to another. The growth of cultural needs kept pace with the struggle and organisation of the proletariat.

The discussion of the Gorlitz Party Programme shortly after the war is even more interesting in this respect. Kautsky defended the Erfurt Programme against the revisions in the new programme. According to him, the doctrine of immiseration could be understood in three different ways: (1) The increase in the share of wage workers was, as such, part of immiseration – more and more workers were working for capital and under the command of capital; (2) Immiseration was only a tendency, the realisation of which depended on several factors, especially the power of the organised working class; (3) The misery of the wage workers is only a ‘relative’ concept: ‘Under different historical circumstances, this same life situation can on one occasion be perceived as favourable, and on another occasion as unfavourable’.

The last formulation is by far the most interesting and at the same time most problematic. It could be interpreted as proving that Kautsky had adopted a position similar to the concept of ‘relative deprivation’ in sociology (workers compare their position with that of other groups or classes in society and/or with their own former position and feel deprived if the experience is unsatisfying). However, this interpretation is not correct. Kautsky represented a position that was, after all, more materialist.

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18 Kautsky 1889a, pp. 127–8.
19 Kautsky 1889a, p. 115.
20 Kautsky 1889a, p. 118.
22 Kautsky 1968a, p. 249.
For Kautsky, as well as for Bernstein, the ‘civilising’ influence of the struggle of the organised working class and its organisations was enormous; the working class was supposed to develop nothing less than a new and higher sense of morals in its common struggle. And the new cultural needs were going to develop in the common action of the workers too. The growing sense of solidarity among the workers was an important factor in this development. The organised and educated working class would not be content with its former means of satisfying needs. This is the basis for the different experiences of the same life situation [Lebenslage] at different times. The conflict between classes would not diminish in power despite the concessions the capitalists were forced to make to an organised working class. New needs were continuously developed in the common action of the working class. Hence, even though Kautsky did not formulate the problem accordingly, he could perhaps be interpreted as having claimed that there is a permanent discrepancy between the value of labour power and the wages actually paid by the capitalists.

Kautsky did not, however, base his ideas of the new conditions of wage workers on any analysis of the possible changes in the production process of capital. (He was not actually speaking of any reproduction of the labour power at all, nor did he use the phrase ‘value of labour power’ [der Wert der Arbeitskraft] in this context.) The thesis of growing misery in the Erfurt Programme was based on an analysis of the growing use of unskilled labour, the use of women’s and children’s labour power, the moral dispersion of the working class family, and so on. The new needs of the wage workers were not a result of any new ‘needs’ in the production process of capital (such as the use of skilled labour and the rise in the general level of education; the only factor that is mentioned in this context is the growing intensity of labour). The new needs are produced by the organised class struggle only: ‘In this way, the proletariat unceasingly grows in number, moral strength, intelligence, unity and indispensability’.

The class struggle fought by the organised proletariat constitutes a permanent learning process for the workers. That is why Kautsky’s vision of the condi-

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23 In an article published in 1907–8, Verelendung und Zusammenbruch, Kautsky emphasised the role of immiseration as a factor contributing to the moral and intellectual power of the proletariat: ‘Marx’s great deed precisely consisted in not merely seeing the aspects of the working class’s misery which degrade it, but also those that cause them to revolt and thus rise up’ (Kautsky 1907–8b, p. 550).

24 Kautsky 1968b, p. 164.
tions of the socialist revolution included the growing strength of the proletariat, the growing needs of the proletariat, and its growing exploitation and repression by capital.\textsuperscript{25}

The theoretical core of Kautsky’s theory of capitalism could be summarised as follows: The other side of the concentration and centralisation of capital is increasing proletarianisation. Capitalism produces a steadily increasing proletariat. Revolution is not, however, an automatic outcome of the concentration and crisis development of capitalism; it is not caused by any final crisis or collapse of capitalism. It is a conscious deed by the organised socialist working class. In this sense, Kautsky was not really the fatalist criticised by Bernstein.\textsuperscript{26}

On the other hand, the growth of the revolutionary movement – the subjective factor or agent of revolution – is understood as taking place almost automatically. Kautsky had no doubts about the development of the socialist elements inside the working class. The development of capitalism was a necessary and automatic training ground for the wage workers. It makes them realise that socialism is the only realistic alternative to the ‘misery’ of capitalism.\textsuperscript{27}

\textsuperscript{25} In a preface written in 1906 to the Russian edition of \textit{Handelspolitik} [Trade Policy], Kautsky stated his position without any reservations: ‘The capitalist mode of production exhibits two sides: the misery of the proletariat and the wealth of the capitalists. Both are preconditions of socialism. The misery of the proletariat, its exploitation and repression, awakens its indignation, drives it to organise itself, to fight against the state and society, and in so doing to raise itself morally, intellectually and often physically so as to fashion the revolutionary force that is called upon to transform society, to abolish private property in the means of production and to get rid of class differences’ (Kautsky Nachlass A 48).

\textsuperscript{26} In this respect, one can agree with Hühnlich’s interpretation of Kautsky’s conception of socialist revolution: Considerations of the subjective factor are always present in his analysis. But the relationship between the development of the productive forces, or rather of the concentration of capital, and the subjective conditions of revolution, is, after all, a mechanistic one: The development of the revolutionary working class is an automatic process following from the economic development of capitalism (see Hühnlich 1981, pp. 59–60, 67–8).

\textsuperscript{27} According to \textit{Videnskab og kapital} [\textit{Science and Capital}] (1974, pp. 15–16), the strategic expectations of traditional Marxism are deduced from a theory based on the history of the working class – and thus their character is different from that presented by Marx. They are based not on the analysis of the inner contradictions (or rather form determinations) of capital, but rather on the postulated ‘subjective factor’ deduced from the history of the working class. As a consequence, the struggle of the proletariat becomes a struggle of an oppressed class fighting to realise its ideal of a better society. In this sense, Kautsky’s theory is a good example of Marxism.
In this sense, there is some truth in Bernstein's accusation of the fatalistic or rather deterministic – and voluntaristic – nature of Kautsky's theoretical thinking. Scientific socialism is based on the idea of a natural, law-like development of capitalism into two opposite classes, the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, the proletariat growing in 'moral and economic strength' and becoming mature to take over the rule of society.

As already pointed out, Bernstein's critique was, however, rather ineffective and Kautsky was able to defend his position against the accusation of fatalism, because Bernstein formulated the problem in terms of the neo-Kantian tradition as a problem of the relation between the free will of individuals and the natural necessary laws of development. Bernstein thus did not actually take up the theoretical issue of the constitution of the revolutionary subject. On the one hand, he questioned the empirical validity of the economic laws of Marxism, and on the other, the 'fatalistic' version of historical materialism.

If the position of Kautsky's *Antikritik* were taken seriously, then quite clearly there would not be any problems with the development of revolutionary consciousness among the working class. In other contexts, however, Kautsky presented a conception that would seem to contradict the above one, namely, that there are principal limits to the spontaneous consciousness of the wage workers. The wage workers can never develop anything but a limited economic or trade-unionistic consciousness all by themselves. They can become conscious of their common economic (wage) interests as opposed to the capitalists and, at best, learn to understand that these interests must be defended by trade unions in organised common action. But the wage workers can never achieve socialist consciousness by themselves. Socialism must be brought into the working class from the outside. Its representative is the socialist party, which is in possession of the scientific theory of the development of capitalism and the socialist strategy based on it. The creators and carriers of this theory are the socialist intellectuals, who represent science in relation to the working class.

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29 In the *Erfurt Programme*, Kautsky seemed to be representing another kind of position which was not, however, less deterministic. To begin with, it is suggested that in defending their economic interests, workers will inevitably come to state political demands as well (such as the demand of free assembly or free association). Economic struggle will thus inevitably lead to the formation of a political workers’ party. Secondly, this party will develop, out of necessity, into a socialist or social-democratic party. In Kautsky’s opinion, workers schooled by machines will come to understand wider social problems and the right nature of class relations will be revealed to them because of the rapid economic
One of the clearest formulations of the relation between the working-class movement and scientific socialism was formulated by Kautsky in his 1908 pamphlet *Die historische Leistung von Karl Marx. Zum 25. Todestage des Meisters*. The difference between trade-unionistic consciousness and socialist revolutionary thought as presented by scientific socialism is strictly one of principle:

It is not at all the case that the workers' movement and socialism are one by nature. The primordial form of the workers’ movement is the purely economic form, that of the struggle around wages and working hours. At first this assumes the form of simple outbreaks of despair, of unprepared mutinies. Soon, however, *trade union organisations* translate this into higher forms.30

But even the spontaneous common economic interests of the wage workers are by no means obvious. The organisation of the workers into unified trade unions is problematic *per se*. To begin with, the interests of the workers in various industries are not always identical; indeed, they are often even contradictory:

Yet since the trade union only represents the immediate interests of its members, it does not automatically stand opposed to the whole bourgeois world, but initially only to the capitalists of its profession.31

Secondly, organised action by the trade unions can easily lead to a new rift inside the labour movement. There is a widening gap between organised and non-organised workers:

Thus, however much the trade-union movement may strengthen individual strata of the proletariat, if it is not imbued with a socialist spirit, then it can actually lead to a weakening of the proletariat as a whole.32

As a result, a new aristocracy emerges among workers, an aristocracy having no interest in the common cause of the proletariat. Even though trade unions are

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30 Kautsky 1919a, p. 29.
31 Ibid.
32 Kautsky 1919a, p. 30.
an important field of recruitment for the socialist movement, left to themselves they easily develop into a force opposing socialism rather than supporting it. In order to overcome the limitations of the trade union organisation, a wider perspective must be introduced into the workers’ movement to make it understand and realise its common historical goals. This can be accomplished only by introducing scientific socialism into the movement. Originally, scientific socialism is a product not of the proletariat, but of the bourgeois intellectuals taking a proletarian standpoint in their theoretical thinking:

Only somebody who was able to place himself on the ground of the proletariat, to observe bourgeois society from this point of view, could arrive at a socialist understanding. Yet it could only be somebody who had mastered the tools of science, which back then were far more the preserve of the bourgeoisie than they are today ... All over the world [überall], socialism could at first only arise from the bourgeois milieu.33

Furthermore, scientific socialism is nothing but a social science having as its starting point the proletarian position.34 On the one hand, socialist society can be established only by the power of the working class; the proletariat is able to liberate itself only through its own action. On the other hand, the social liberation of man is not possible without scientific socialism:

It is not able to achieve this [socialist society] without a socialist theory, which alone is capable of figuring out the interests common to all proletarians in the multi-coloured multiplicity of the different proletarian strata, and of sharply and permanently separating them all from the world of the bourgeoisie. The naïve workers’ movement that arises by itself against the growth of capitalism, and which is devoid of any theory, is incapable of achieving this.35

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33 Kautsky 1919a, p. 27.
34 Ibid.
35 Kautsky 1919a, p. 29. It is possible that Kautsky was further developing an idea presented by Marx and Engels in the Communist Manifesto. In the Communist Manifesto, communists are said to be theoretically superior to the other masses of the proletariat, having understood the conditions, the development and the results of proletarian struggle. The next task of the communists – a task shared by all the other workers’ parties – is to develop the proletariat into a class (see Marx and Engels 1974–2004c, p. 498). There is, however, an important difference between Marx’s, Engels’s and Kautsky’s respective formulations.
Scientific socialism was first developed by Marx and Engels. According to Kautsky, the socialist theoreticians before them were certainly familiar with the political economy of their time. They did not, however, achieve a systematic critique of old science, and instead used it only to draw conclusions favourable to the proletariat. It was Marx who first undertook an independent study of the capitalist mode of production and proved that it could be understood and analysed much more deeply and clearly from the standpoint of the proletariat: ‘Only this point of view, which considers capitalism to be a transitory form [of society], allows it [the proletariat] to fully grasp its revolutionary character’.

By formulating the scientific laws of capitalism and its historical role, the founders of scientific socialism developed a science far surpassing any of its bourgeois predecessors:

Using this reasoning, Marx and Engels created the basis on which social democracy arises, the basis on which the fighting proletariat of the entire globe is increasingly placing itself and the basis on which the proletariat has begun its illustrious triumph.

Compared with the socialist perspective as presented by Kautsky in his answer to Bernstein, the discussion about the limits of spontaneous economic consciousness is somewhat peculiar. In Kautsky’s Antikritik – and in the Erfurt Programme – the development of revolutionary consciousness was taken to be a self-evident fact, whereas in the Historische Leistung [Historical Achievements], socialist consciousness and perspective are understood to be a product of the intellectuals which must be especially incorporated or introduced into the workers’ movement. The spontaneous development of the movement is

\[\text{of the problem: in the Communist Manifesto, the communists are not claimed to be anything other than a part of the proletarian mass; cf. Engels's Socialism: Utopian and Scientific (Engels 1974–2004c, pp. 304, 325).} \]

36 Kautsky 1919a, p. 37.
37 Kautsky 1919a, p. 36.
38 Przeworski explained, in an interesting way, the evident contradiction in Kautsky’s thinking concerning the formation of a revolutionary, socialist working class: Whenever Kautsky stated that the proletariat spontaneously acquires consciousness of its historical mission – and that the party merely assists, supports and participates in the class struggle alongside the working class – he was referring to the situation after the 1890s, whereas the problem of the development of socialist consciousness and the organisation of workers by socialist parties and intellectuals always refers to the situation around 1848 before...
even apt to prevent the development of a unified socialist movement as evidenced by the formation of a new workers’ aristocracy. As a matter of fact, the introduction of the socialist theory and perspective is not, however, even now considered to be problematic. The new science of political economy by definition presents the authentic proletarian standpoint. Once the principles of the new science have been taught to the workers, they will readily and naturally adopt the right political conclusions.

On the other hand, the discussion about the new workers’ aristocracy – later to be adopted by Lenin in his theory – also seems somewhat out of place in this connection. If the distinction between economic and socialist consciousness really is one of principle, then any rift within the movement caused by a labour aristocracy would seem to be a minor problem compared with the general restrictions of the spontaneous economic interests of the workers.

The postulated distinction between the two kinds of consciousness within the labour movement has quite serious consequences for Kautsky’s understanding of the role of intellectuals and the Social Democratic Party in relation to the struggle of the workers. Leineweber proposed an interesting formulation of the consequences resulting from the understanding of the socialist science as presenting the authentic proletarian standpoint:

Firstly, theory appears as, so to speak, the proletariat’s natural form of consciousness, thus losing its independence as a product of a self-sufficient and distinct [selbständig und eigenständig] mode of production ... Secondly the proletariat loses the independence of its mode of production in that it does not produce any experiences, ideas, thoughts etc. which are opposed to theory, because otherwise these could not become ideational reflections in the rear-view mirror [ideele Rueckspiegelungen] in the minds of the class. Only with the help of theory can and should it gain insight into the sequence of the historical process in which it has a role to play.39

Kautsky’s formulation of the problem of socialist consciousness thus has far-reaching consequences both for the understanding of the role of theory and that of the proletariat in the socialist movement; representing the authentic

proletarian standpoint, theory – and intellectuals – legitimate their leading role in the movement. And in this respect, Kautsky’s concept of Marxism is representative of the theoretical thinking of Second International Marxism.