Chapter Nineteen

‘Old and New Revolution’ (December 1905)

Karl Kautsky


Rosa Luxemburg’s article and Kautsky’s ‘The Sans-Culottes of the French Revolution’ (a chapter from his 1886 booklet on the French Revolution)

---

1 Karl Kautsky 1905b, pp. 3–5. (Although the *Festschrift* was to mark the anniversary of Bloody Sunday in January 1905, it appears to have been published in December 1905, the date we have provisionally used here.)

are included in this anthology. Mehring’s article on the French Revolution was not reproduced in the two editions of his collected writings. Hugo Schulz (1870–1933), who in the Festschrift wrote about the English Revolution of the seventeenth century, was an Austrian Social-Democratic journalist and military writer. His main work was the two-volume book Blut und Eisen: Krieg und Kriegertum in alter und neuer Zeit [Blood and Iron: War and Warfare in Ancient and Modern Times], published in 1906.3 After the outbreak of the First World War, Schulz was mentioned as a social-patriot in Rosa Luxemburg’s Junius Broschure.4 Kautsky’s article was published separately in Russian, French and Italian periodicals.5 An English version appeared in 1906 in the International Socialist Review, the theoretical organ of the left wing of the Socialist Party of America, under the title ‘Revolutions, Past and Present’.6 A Russian version of the entire Festschrift was published the same year.7

In ‘Old and New Revolution’, Kautsky pursues a theme similar to Rosa Luxemburg’s in ‘The Russian Revolution’. Speaking of a ‘dual’ revolution, Luxemburg conceived the Russian Revolution as formally ‘the last offshoot of the Great French Revolution of a century ago’, meaning its ‘immediate outward task is the creation of a modern capitalist society with open bourgeois class rule’. But in terms of content and method, the Russian Revolution represented ‘a transitional form from the bourgeois revolutions of the past to the proletarian revolutions of the future, which will directly involve the dictatorship of the proletariat and the realisation of socialism’.

In the document translated here, Kautsky made much the same argument: in terms of its violence and scope, the Russian Revolution could be compared to those in England in 1648–9 and France in 1789, but, beyond superficial resemblances lay fundamental differences that distinguished events in Russia as an entirely new type of revolution. In the first place, the proletariat was now the principal driving force, not the petty bourgeoisie; second, the peasantry – as in France but not in England – would demand redistribution of the landed estates and would subsequently defend the revolution against any attempt to

3 Schulz 1906. See the review of this work by Mehring 1907, pp. 374–6.
5 Kautsky 1905i; Kautsky 1906b.
6 Kautsky 1906f.
7 Kautsky (ed.) 1906.