

Karl Korsch: Revolutionary Theory

Edited by Douglas Kellner

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Douglas Kellner

## Karl Korsch: Revolutionary Theory

## Korsch's Revolutionary Marxism

By Douglas Kellner

Karl Korsch is being increasingly recognized as one of the most interesting, neglected, and relevant political theorists of the century.<sup>1</sup> Korsch's early works contain reflections on workers' control and industrial democracy, focusing on the theme of the socialization of society. His essays on the transition to socialism and critique of both Social Democratic reformism and Soviet state socialism remain provocative contributions. He was one of the first to criticize the repressive turn of the Soviet Union under Stalin and developed a sharp critique of authoritarian communism. He also evolved a critique of Leninism, which he believed had become a fetter on the working-class movement that had to be removed to make possible a new era of revolution. Korsch was one of the most original and interesting proponents of revolutionary Marxism, and his analysis of "the crisis of Marxism" contains a challenging critique of the Marxian political theory and theory of revolution.

Korsch was also an early opponent of nazism and developed a theory of fascism and counterrevolution on a world-wide scale to explain the defeats of the working-class movement and their failure to follow the Marxian scenario. At the same time, he attempted to discover and elucidate other models of social change in syndicalism and anarcho-communism, and he studied the Paris Commune, the Russian Soviets, and the Spanish Collectives as alternative forms of industrial and agricultural organization. Further, Korsch was one of the first Western theorists to call attention to developments in the so-called Third World, which he perceived might be a locale for the sort of social revolution that had failed to materialize in Europe and America.

Korsch's works provide a privileged perspective through which to view and interpret the process of revolution and counterrevolution that has constituted the political dynamic of our beleaguered century. For Korsch was both an impassioned participant in the political struggles in Germany during the Weimar Republic and an illuminating interpreter of a fateful stretch of modern history. His writings provide an attempt to grasp his age in thought, to get a hold on historical reality through theory. Moreover, Korsch's theory was always geared toward political practice, toward showing the possibilities of and obstacles to radical social change; hence, his work provides a paradigm of the theorist of practice, of the political-

theoretical activist. Although the triumph of nazism forced Korsch into an American exile that cut him off from participating in the central political events of the day, he continued to reflect upon and interpret the major movements of history. His essays in the 1930's and 1940's provide penetrating insights into the movement of contemporary history and brilliant critiques of theories which he felt offered a distorted and ideological picture of current history.

Korsch's interaction with his historical environment requires a detailed reconstruction of the historical events to which his writings were a response and an expression in order to provide the proper context to understand his work. In a 1954 review of a Bakunin anthology, Korsch complained, "Unfortunately they [Bakunin's writings] do not appear here in close connection with the historical conditions and concrete actions which entered into every theoretical concept of Bakunin. Without them, the living body of his 'thought in action' is transformed into a purely ideological system."<sup>2</sup> The same holds for Korsch. My introduction will attempt to elucidate the "close connection with the historical conditions and concrete action which entered into every theoretical concept" of Korsch, and to bring to life his "thought in action."

### Notes

1. A complete edition of Korsch's works is being prepared in Germany, and translations of his major works are appearing in every European language. His works are being frequently discussed in Europe and there is a growing interest in his work in the United States. Two examples: Claudio Pozzoli, ed., *Über Karl Korsch* (Frankfurt: Fisher, 1973), and the Korsch issue of *Telos* 26 (Winter 1975-76).

2. Karl Korsch, "A Bakunin Sampler," *Dissent* 1, no. 1 (Winter 1954): 110.

## 1. Korsch's Road to Marxian Socialism

Little is known of Korsch's early life.<sup>1</sup> He was born on August 15, 1886, in Todstedt, Germany, a small village southeast of Hamburg. He was one of six children in a middle-class family. The father rose from secretary in a city hall bureau to vice-president of a bank. He was well educated and had unfulfilled intellectual ambitions that were to be realized in an unexpected way by his son Karl. The mother, on the other hand, was not at all intellectual and was said to have maintained a rather untidy appearance and household. His wife Hedda Korsch's "Memories" contain the most detailed information on Korsch's family:

Korsch came from a medium middle-class background. His father had been through secondary school, had taken the *Abitur*, and possessed great intellectual ambition. He was very interested in philosophy and wrote an enormous unpublished volume on the development of Leibnitz's theories of monads. He tried to put the whole of the cosmos into this philosophical system. It was his life's work and purely theoretical. The family came from East Prussia, from a farming background. But he wanted something more urban and intellectual. Soon after he married Teresa Raikovsky, Korsch's mother, they moved west to Todstedt. The father wanted to be closer to western culture, and he disliked the agricultural Junker environment in which they lived. Because although the Korsch family themselves had only a modest-sized farm, the big estates were all around them and his father had no interest in agriculture. His mother was totally unconcerned with intellectual matters and never read a thing. She was pretty and extremely temperamental; she cooked well when she was in a good humour, burnt everything when she was angry. She was terribly untidy and if there is one reason why Karl was so tidy it was because of his mother.<sup>2</sup>

The family moved to Meiningen in the Thuringen region when Karl was eleven, to provide better educational opportunities for the children. Karl entered the local school (*Gymnasium*) and did well in his studies. When he was eighteen he moved into an abandoned garden house where he read German literature and Kant—fleeing into nature and a higher aesthetic-philosophical world to escape from bourgeois reality: typical be-

havior of German youth fed up with their surroundings and in search of something more.<sup>8</sup> Michael Buckmiller, Korsch's biographer, suggests that Korsch began to put in question and oppose the society around him: "His oppositional stance to his parents and school grew quickly as he increasingly experienced the contradiction between beautiful sounding phrases and the harsh petty-bourgeois reality which surrounded him: the teachers who hammered with a Prussian cane the elevated moral values of German culture into the pupils' youthful heads and who were frequently themselves rather pathetic alcoholics; his father who in his leisure wrote lofty studies in natural philosophy on Leibnitz's theory of monads and who tried to lead a harmonious and healthy life guided by science, while in practice he led a self-dominating authoritarian regime and frequently beat his children."<sup>4</sup>

In 1906 and 1907 Korsch studied successively at Munich, Geneva, and Berlin to gain a broad foundation in philosophy and the humanities as background for his studies in law. Korsch entered the University of Jena in 1908 where he worked on a law degree and engaged in student politics. He joined a student group, the *Freie Studenten*,<sup>5</sup> which militated for a democratization and humanization of the University. Korsch was one of its most active members. He became editor of the student newspaper and organized lectures featuring socialist speakers, such as Edward Bernstein and Karl Liebknecht. The students arranged contacts with workers in the nearby Zeiss optical factory, which was presented as a model factory that shared profits with the workers, instituted workers' democracy, heavily financed the University, and built a culture center with lecture and theater rooms. Korsch published many articles in the student newspaper and actively participated in debates and lectures.<sup>6</sup> On a lecture tour he met Hedda Gagliardi whom he was to marry in 1913. Korsch graduated from the Jena law school *summa cum laude superato* in 1911.

During this period Korsch became attracted to socialism through his activities in the *Freie Studenten* group, his contact with local socialists and social reformers in the Zeiss optical factory, and his study of socialist literature. Hedda Korsch reports: "He was also a convinced socialist by the time of his last year in school. He looked around to see if there were any socialists among his school-mates, but he did not find any. He read a lot: I do not know when he first read Marx but I am inclined to think it was at school, because when he was a student he was an outspoken socialist—by conviction, although not a member of any organization."<sup>7</sup> The young Korsch had thus progressed from an attitude of withdrawal from, and individualistic opposition to, German society to a stance of reformist political activism. Like many intellectuals he was attracted to

socialism but he saw socialism mainly as an ideal human society, and thus criticized the Social Democrats, who in his view only represented particular interests (the working class) and thus did not embrace "the whole future of the German nation."<sup>8</sup> Nonetheless, he supported the practice of the Social Democrats who "through social-political reforms . . . would introduce bearable conditions."<sup>9</sup> Socialism was indeed necessary in his view because the "capacity for culture" of a nation "depended upon whether it succeeded in eliminating a system of unlimited exploitation and domination by violence."<sup>10</sup>

The ideal of socialism for Korsch at this stage was not to be realized through parliamentary politics or trade union activity but through educating broad segments of the public to progressive ideas and the ideals of socialism. Korsch had thus overcome the romantic individualist tendencies of many German youth, but still had a highly idealistic vision of social change that was as much influenced by Kant as Marx.<sup>11</sup>

In 1912 Karl and Hedda went to England where he had received a grant to translate and write a commentary on a legal text of Sir Ernest Schuster.<sup>12</sup> The Korsch's soon joined the Fabian society and became enthusiastic participants in its young people's group. Korsch published many articles on the Fabian activities and his experiences in England in the German journal *Die Tat*.<sup>13</sup> He was becoming an increasingly convinced advocate of socialism and, in an interesting article in 1912, he turned to a subject that was to be a life-long concern: the search for "The Socialist Formula for the Organization of a People's Economy." Korsch complained that the socialists had not yet found "an adequate formula for the construction and organization of a people's economy" that went beyond the demand for the "socialization of the means of production."<sup>14</sup> Already Korsch was criticizing the "leading dogmas of Marxism" and searching for practical, viable plans to carry through and realize socialism. He was sympathetic to Fabian proposals to gain public control of industry and their detailed plans to socialize society. Korsch believed that the Fabians' "marvelous undertaking" combined "observation, experiment, theoretical study, fantasy, and the power of judgment"; he urged German socialists to develop similar detailed plans to socialize German society.<sup>15</sup> Later he was to suggest that a Fabian society be developed in Germany and may have been instrumental in persuading his student and friend Felix Weil to finance the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research, which might have been modeled on the "Fabian Research Department."<sup>16</sup>

Interestingly, the qualities that Korsch praised in the Fabians were to become distinctive features of his own work. He praised the Fabians for their "sharp critique of the existing society and will to reform the fu-

ture."<sup>17</sup> He also approved of their "utopian impatience," "knowledge of reality," and their "propensity toward the simple and the practical." He held the Fabians to be model democratic socialists and agreed with their educational goals, their efforts to create socialist consciousness, and their "propaganda by deed."<sup>18</sup> He believed that "The Fabian Society shares with German Marxism the conviction that economic and political socialism (the socialization of the means of production) will *come by itself* whether or not we as individuals endorse or oppose this development. They add to this theoretical insight, however, a very important *orientation of the will*. They wish to awaken the practical will to the position that with this unavoidable transformation of the human economy, a human culture, the ideal of humanity, will be demanded. And this ideal signifies the *higher development of the human race* ('Man and Superman')."<sup>19</sup> There is little doubt from a close reading of Korsch's early essays that he was heavily influenced by Fabian ideas. Although he was soon to turn from their reformism and idealism to Marxian revolutionary materialism, the Fabian spirit of practical political activism was to long remain a feature of Korsch's theory and practice.<sup>20</sup>

### *Korsch's Practical Socialism*

When World War I broke out in 1914, Korsch's ideals of pacifism, social and political idealism, internationalism, and rationalism came up against an increasingly brutal and barbaric reality. Korsch returned to Germany and enlisted in the army, but remained true to his pacifist convictions throughout the war, refusing to bear arms even in the heat of battle. He was twice demoted for his refusal to obey orders, was wounded, and won the respect of his fellow soldiers for his convictions and bravery.<sup>21</sup> "It is," he wrote, "as if this quantitative increase in suffering had forced us to correctly perceive, feel, and experience the simple *qualitative* reality for the first time."<sup>22</sup> Despite his new insights into the utter barbarism of capitalism, Korsch did not fall into nihilistic pessimism and refused to surrender his ideals of a humanistic social order: "The simple difference today from our earlier position is that we do not yet feel satisfied with the highest and deepest of our strivings."<sup>23</sup>

Korsch's hopes for radical social change were given a dual impetus by the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the German revolution in 1918. The surprising collapse of the German military and political order and the mass uprising of sailors, soldiers, and workers in the councils organizations, convinced Korsch and others that the transition to socialism was

on the historical agenda. Korsch's military unit was known as the "red company," and he participated in the founding of a "soldiers' council." The abdication of the Kaiser and the collapse of the old order signified for Korsch that "the presuppositions are created under which a new spirit can break into German politics that will make possible a fundamental transformation of the existing social order."<sup>24</sup>

In January 1919, Korsch was invited by Robert Wilbrandt to serve as an assistant in the socialist-dominated socialization commission, presided over by Karl Kautsky. Their task was to prepare recommendations for the socialization of the coal industry.<sup>25</sup> Korsch concentrated his energies at this time on working out a more general theory of socialization that would provide an adequate concept of socialism. In this situation, where it seemed that socialization was a real, indeed imminent, possibility in Germany, Korsch wrote a brochure, "What is Socialization?"<sup>26</sup> An immediate and practical urgency informs this essay, which was concerned with the burning question of the day: how can Germany be reconstituted on a socialist basis? Korsch was appalled at the lack of a socialist theory on these immensely practical and concrete questions: What is a socialist society? How does one organize the economy on socialist principles? What does socialization involve beyond nationalization of the means of production? Social Democrats, such as Kautsky and Bernstein, as well as the Spartacus League, had neglected such questions, thus manifesting, in Korsch's view, an "incomprehensible backwardness of socialist *theory* in regard to problems of practical realization."<sup>27</sup> Korsch intended his work to provide a "transitional program" which, through a system of "workers' councils," would begin the construction of socialism. Thus "What is Socialization?" was intended to fill a gap in socialist theory, and to address itself to the most important practical issue of the day. To those who think it was "utopian" or "idealistic" to expect a transition to socialism in Germany at the time, let us cite an account by E. H. Carr which indicates that socialist revolution was widely perceived to be a real possibility:

Never had the call to world revolution as the staple of Soviet foreign policy seemed more clearly justified by its fruits. While the final blow that laid Germany low had been struck by others, there was evidence—which no Bolshevik was likely to overlook or underestimate—of the part played by Bolshevik propaganda in demoralizing the German armies. The civil population was in revolt against the horrors and privations of the war; the monarchy had fallen without a blow amid general execration; workers' and soldiers' councils on the Soviet pattern had been formed all over Germany, and the



Berlin council had created the counterpart of a Council of People's Commissars; Germany had entered its "Kerensky period"; it seemed inconceivable that, under the stimulus of Russian example and Russian encouragement, the parallel of the Russian revolution would not be followed to the end. When Radek reached Berlin in December 1918 he had the impression that "nine-tenths of the workers were taking part in the struggle against the government"; other observers took much the same view. . . both then and for more than two years after, the imminence of proletarian revolution in Germany continued to haunt many who feared it as well as the Bolsheviks who hoped for it.<sup>28</sup>

In a series of articles in the early 1920's, Korsch grappled with the central problems of socialization and confronted issues that were ignored or suppressed by his Social Democratic contemporaries. The major problem in the construction of a socialist society is, he believed, that socialization involves two seemingly conflicting basic demands: first, in place of the anarchy of the "free market" (which Korsch sarcastically remarked is free mainly for capitalist exploiters), there will be a "planned administration of production and distribution through society."<sup>29</sup> Secondly, control from below (workers' control) and industrial democracy must be inaugurated to carry out the liberation of labor and to provide a life more worthy of human beings: "through the immediate introduction of this control from below the entire realm of production is transformed from a private affair of individual exploiters of production into the public affair of all the participants of production; hence the 'wage-slaves' of the old system will be transformed with a stroke into co-participating (*mitbestimmenden*) 'working-citizens' of a socialist state (*sozialen Rechtsstaat*)."<sup>30</sup>

In attempting to carry through these two basic demands of socialization, certain problems arise which I shall call the contradictions of Socialist socialization. On one hand, Korsch stressed that "control from above"—a central plan (requiring a central administration) to regulate the entire economy—is absolutely essential to implementing socialism.<sup>31</sup> On the other hand, control from below—workers' control and participation in decision-making procedures—is required to realize the radical demands for the liberation of labor. Korsch formulated this contradiction in "What is Socialization?" as the conflict between production and consumption: between the production plants with their interests and the consuming public with their interests. This is a genuine conflict of interests, for abolishing the capitalists' right to own, exploit, and control the production process simultaneously raises (1) the workers' demand for division

of profits among themselves and control of the labor process and (2) the consumers' demand for their share of the revenues of production and public control over the production process. The task and challenge of socialism is to achieve a harmony, a balance, between these conflicting demands and interests to make possible "the most far-reaching *autonomy* and the simultaneous insertion of all individual economic units into a *planned economy*."<sup>32</sup>

Korsch showed that syndicalist and consumer cooperative projects of organizing individual production and consumer units will come into conflict with the general public interest. Different syndicalist groups advocated that the workers take over and socialize the industries in which they worked so that coal miners would own and control the coal mines, railroad workers the train system, and so on. There was a wide-spread consumer cooperative movement in Germany, France, and England that set up alternative consumer units and businesses of all sorts.<sup>33</sup> Korsch perceived that giving total autonomy to syndicalist-controlled production units and consumer cooperative units would create a series of conflicts of interest and would reproduce certain contradictions and competition of capitalism. Hence all production and consumer units must be coordinated and regulated by public organs and a central plan.<sup>34</sup> However, Korsch opposed with special vehemence state socialism and social technologies that equate socialism with a nationalization of the economy carried through by the state and controlled from above, thus failing to create workers' democracy or industrial autonomy.<sup>35</sup>

Korsch believed that the way to overcome these conflicting demands and interests is through instituting a system of workers' councils: "socialism requires workers' councils not only because it is socialistic, but because it is also democratic, because it wants participation of all the people and wants the best (*Ansehe*) from everyone."<sup>36</sup> Only the councils, in Korsch's view, can fulfill Engels' demand for a total replacing of the capitalist economic order that rests on unfree labor by a "socially planned regulation of production according to the needs of the totality as well as every single individual."<sup>37</sup> The councils system would resolve the crucial problems in the construction of a socialist society: who can use the means of production and for what purpose? What and how much will be produced? How will production be organized? How will wages and profits be divided? How will commodities be distributed? Solving these problems requires what Korsch called "industrial autonomy" on the level of production, and consumers' associations representing the public as a whole that will help assess public demand and social needs. Hence a councils' system of production and consumer groups coordinated by a central plan

responsive to the people will maximize production for social and individual need and maximize industrial and individual autonomy.

There will be inevitable problems of coordination and conflicts of interest but the councils system will provide a system of checks and balances in which consumer groups representing society as a whole, and workers' councils representing the workers in a given plant or industry will be organized in assemblies, meetings, and discussion groups on various levels to struggle with the problems of socialist socialization. As the people develop socialist consciousness there will be increasing cooperation and harmony between the various councils and it will be seen that the central plan and industrial autonomy, control from above and control from below, consumers' associations and workers' councils provide complementary organs of a socialist democracy.

Korsch's councils' system concept therefore contains a critique of both "state socialism" that attempts to implement socialism from above, and syndicalism that wishes to make the individual production units the sole organ of power in which the workers will own, control, and appropriate the profits for themselves. For whereas the first concept—by which the state owns everything—would be a form of state capitalism, the program of syndicalism—"the mines to the miners," "the railroads to the railway workers,"—would be a form of production capitalism. Against these conceptions, Korsch urges "pure community property for the totality of producers and consumers" to be administered by a councils' system.

The weakness of Korsch's theory of socialization lies in the political question of how this program is to be practically implemented. The difficulties are readily apparent in the last section of "What is Socialization?" called, significantly, "What Should We Do—Educating for Socialism." The last page contains the only discussion of the political means through which socialization is to be carried out. Korsch projected: (1) "political action" through state legislation and municipal ordinances; (2) developing cooperatives, and (3) economic action of the working class through collective bargaining, co-participation in management and the transformation of individual ownership through class struggle. Korsch concluded: "The logical continuation of these latter means of struggle is, in times of revolutionary fervor, the struggle to remove the capitalist enterpriser from control over the production process and to place him under the control of the totality of plant participants; today this struggle is being fought out in many individual plants according to the program of the Spartacus League. This last means holds no terror for those who affirm the ideal of socialism. It is not a means of socialization to be condemned on the basis of some kind of moral precept; not any more than political revolu-

tion is a morally objectionable means of political emancipation."<sup>88</sup> A contradiction emerges here between the sort of political action through parliamentary decree and municipal ordinance urged by the reformist Social Democrats and the revolutionary struggles urged by the Spartacus League. Korsch was not able to smooth over the contradictions between legal and illegal action, reformist political measures and revolutionary syndicalist labor struggles, between the parliamentary program of the Social Democrats and the radical workers' councils concept put forth by the Spartacus League and other leftist groups. Korsch didn't really take a stand with one side or another in "What is Socialization?" and his other early writings on socialization, and thus could not at this point envisage any concrete and practical political or economic strategy which would bring about the socialization process he so brilliantly outlined.

It should be noted that Korsch's concept of socialization is formulated as a "transitional program," or what Marx called the first stage of socialism (Korsch uses the term "first phase" of social or communal economy in several places in "What is Socialization?").<sup>89</sup> Hence he recognizes that in the first phase of socialization "private self-interest" and even aspects of a "market economy" will be operative and thus proposes "differentiated compensation for varying achievement." There are, moreover, some remnants of Fabian elitism and perhaps a bourgeois production-profit syndrome in some sections which urge that socialization utilize private self-interest "as motivation for the most profitable and prolific production possible even on a still greater scale of production"; that speak of "resurrecting the capitalist spirit" as "worker capitalism" after its elimination as "owner capitalism"; and that quote from Bernard Shaw to the effect that "the talented intellectual worker will be the last exploiter (*Ausbeutler*) of society."<sup>90</sup> But Korsch quickly adds: "Only gradually in autonomous production, decontaminated by the cessation of the class struggle between the capitalist 'haves' and the proletarian 'have-nots,' will that sense of community develop which is the prerequisite for the establishment of the second and higher phase of social economy, in which the working power of every individual, just as the material means of production, will be community property, whereby every individual contributes to social production according to their ability and in turn participates in the profits of communal production according to need."<sup>91</sup>

Korsch concludes by stressing that the development of socialist consciousness requires "a series of cultural and political measures which can be summarized by the term 'socialization of education.'"<sup>92</sup> In a 1919 article, "Die Politik im neuen Deutschland," Korsch argues that "socialization of the economy and socialization of education are in fact only two

sides of the same process of transition from a private capitalist to a communal socialist economy. The transition itself is not important only and primarily for questions of production and consumption of material goods, but it is at the same time a cultural and spiritual affair of immense import."<sup>43</sup>

Korsch had been involved with educational reform both as a student and in England where he wrote several articles on education.<sup>44</sup> He now postulated a new socialist educational system grounded in an *Einheits-schule* where education (*Bildung*) "will be transferred from the privilege of a favored class into a communal good, social property of the totality."<sup>45</sup> Not only would education be extended to all classes in this conception, but the very nature and content of education would change to produce socialist consciousness: "The sort of school which wants to prepare the path for an evolving socialist community economy must already develop in itself the spirit of the new economic order." Above all, Korsch wanted "to combine education and material production to abolish the distinction between mental and material labor."<sup>46</sup> This in effect would abolish intellectuals as a separate class and would, as Gramsci envisioned, make every worker an intellectual in the sense that they would share in the general level of culture. Moreover, education would be more closely connected with industry and productivity: "on one hand, in all cases education of the older students in the higher classes would be connected with a limited amount of real material productive labor in industry and agriculture, while, on the other hand, even after one passed through school and college, there would still be accessible to the workers a continuing further education."<sup>47</sup>

Korsch also envisaged progressive education modeled on the "Freie Schulgemeinde" where his wife had once taught,<sup>48</sup> which would introduce co-education, non-hierarchical comradely relations between students and teachers, and would thus provide an organization of education parallel to the workers' councils' organization of industry: "the 'free schools' are aiming at autonomous education and must already be models in the present that realize in a pure form that which the 'free economic organizations' of a distant future can first universally become: places of work in which necessary labor serving the common good . . . will be performed out of love of the subject-matter and out of devotion to the community."<sup>49</sup>

The more immediate, pressing problem for intellectuals was, Korsch believed, to convince the people of the necessity now for socialism and to combat reactionary anti-socialist ideologies. Korsch postulated the need to develop a "new spirit of German politics" through rejecting the "hateful militarism" of the old Germany and cultivating a new spirit of free-

dom. This new all-pervasive freedom could only be created through a socialist reconstruction of the economy and education to increase the realm of autonomy in all areas of life. Korsch is taking the position here that he would reiterate in his 1930 reflections on *Marxism and Philosophy*: "*Socialism, both in its ends and in its means, is a struggle to realize freedom.*"<sup>50</sup> He saw the demand for socialism as a task for "practical idealism" and talked in Kantian terms of a "duty" to construct socialism: "The duty toward socialization, toward the realization of socialism, stands before all other duties in Germany. It is identical with the duty to love your neighbor, identical with the duty of self-preservation. The historical task of practical socialism is to inexorably demand its fulfillment, to marshal together all spiritual powers in resolute action."<sup>51</sup>

Korsch called his theory at this time "practical socialism," which he defined as a third way between a purely intellectual socialism conceived as a "pure science" and a reformist socialist politics that eschews theory.<sup>52</sup> Practical socialism combines theory and practice in a dialectical unity. Practical socialism rejects the view that socialism automatically proceeds from economic development as a necessary and inevitable process, and stresses "conscious human activity (Marx's 'revolutionary praxis')." It holds that the presupposition, indeed the making possible, of socialist construction cannot dispense with a faith that moves mountains, a will to transform the world and creative human activity."<sup>53</sup> Korsch is stressing here the necessity of cultivating the subjective factors of revolutionary consciousness to make possible socialist revolution—a theme to which he will often return. The practical socialist should recognize that "capitalism is impossible in the future and that socialism does not come about by itself. Thus the practical socialist will direct all of his consciousness and endeavor, and put into motion all the powers of his thought and all the passion of his will, to begin and carry through socialist construction before it is too late."<sup>54</sup> In this way the practical socialist will adhere to "a socialism in which science, faith, and readiness for socialist action will be molded together in an inextricable unity. And that is practical socialism."<sup>55</sup>

Korsch's writings on socialization represent a transitional phase between his earlier Social Democratic/Fabian reformism and his move to Marxian revolutionary materialism. Indeed, it appears that at the time of writing "What is Socialization?" Korsch had but a simplistic understanding of the Marxian critique of political economy. With characteristic energy and enthusiasm, Korsch delved into an intense study of Marx in the early 1920's and praised the "Faustian knowledge of Marx" whom he characterized as that "Copernicanlike founder of the science of politi-

cal economy."<sup>60</sup> Korsch had now truly begun his lifelong relationship with Marxism that would involve him in a series of fateful events.

As Korsch moved toward revolutionary Marxism, he developed a polemic against Social Democratic reformism which he believed had failed to perceive the primacy of production in the Marxian theory: that radical change must begin with the transformation of the *relations of production*, and that for Marx, "a fundamental restructuring of the social *relations of distribution* is simply impossible without a restructuring of the relations of production which are the foundation for all social relations."<sup>61</sup> Hence, "every serious social-political reform, every better and more just distribution of goods *within* a basically capitalistically organized economy is bound by *insurpassable limits*."<sup>62</sup> Moreover, Korsch came to believe that from a genuinely Marxist standpoint, socialization could not come about "through pure thought and the ideological will of talented social technicians," but rather only through revolutionary struggle; here he decisively moves away from his earlier Fabianism.<sup>63</sup> Later he criticized as "socialization opium" the projects of Hilferding, Kautsky, and others who wanted to leave socialization to functionaries of the Social Democratic government.<sup>64</sup> He concluded, "Only when from scientific knowledge we have deeply grasped the impossibility, the completely illusory character, of that seemingly so 'realistic' connection of a capitalistic production policy with a socialistic distribution policy can we become practical socialists."<sup>65</sup>

In the early 1920's, Korsch moved toward a revolutionary socialist position. This is clear in "Fundamentals of Socialization," translated in this anthology, which Rusconi describes as "the most important of this period," and "the first blueprint of Korsch's Marxism."<sup>66</sup> In this article, Korsch suggests that the working class movement has failed "to grasp the essentials of 'scientific socialism' in the specific sense layed down by Marx and Engels":<sup>67</sup> the primacy of revolutionary practice, "the identity of objectifying knowledge and activity," and the stress on revolutionary will, revolutionary phantasy, and revolutionary faith.<sup>68</sup> The deficiency of these subjective conditions of revolution and the lack of a decisive activist thrust in the working-class movement had momentous political implications. In explaining the failure to carry through a resolute and thoroughgoing transition to socialism in the November revolution, Korsch wrote: "It is by no means to be traced back to purely external coincidences that in the enormously fateful months after November, 1918, as the political power organization of the bourgeoisie collapsed and nothing external stood in the way of the transition from capitalism to

socialism, that great hour nonetheless had to slip by unseized because the *social-psychological* presuppositions for its utilization were sorely lacking: a decisive *belief* in the immediate capacity for realization of the socialistic economic system which could have carried the masses onward was nowhere to be found, nor was there a clear knowledge of the nature of the first steps to be carried out."<sup>69</sup>

The deficit in the subjective conditions of revolution is at least in part attributed to a "backwardness of socialist theory." For Korsch, an important and neglected component of Marxism is what he calls concepts of realization which anticipate a new reality and posit historical alternatives. The future-oriented and practice-oriented thrust of Korsch's conception is strikingly expressed in the following passage:

The concepts of realization arise out of a full knowledge of the economic and psychological totality and its perceivable tendencies of development. Through the concepts science anticipates the individual emerging social reality. Through their conscious anticipation of the coming these concepts also posit one of the realities through which the creative transformation from the old to the new forms of social and individual being can alone be accomplished. Scientific knowledge can of course take this particular form only in the creative fantasy of a revolutionary who has already previously carried out the transformation from the old to the new in his thought. And from the fact that Kautsky and all of those who stand close to him do not possess such creative, faithful revolutionary fantasy, we can explain their all too long denial of practical future-oriented thoughts. From this lack of revolutionary fantasy we may also explain the ghostliness of their programs of action and plans for socialization.<sup>70</sup>

In addition to Korsch's emphasis on the unity of revolutionary theory and practice and the importance of the subjective conditions of revolution, he stressed the need for revolutionary theory to concern itself with the "forms of socialist construction."<sup>71</sup> Korsch then discussed three concepts of socialization dominant at the time that were embedded in three complexes of "economic-historical realities" and actual socialization plans.<sup>72</sup> He argued that the superior concept of socialization is the one that posits the workers' councils as the authentic organ of socialism. Let us examine this position that equates socialization with the workers' councils—which defines the core of Korsch's political conception—in more detail.

### *Korsch and the Workers' Councils Movement*

Korsch's earlier somewhat idealist and moralistic concept of socialism was to give way to an increasingly tough-minded concept of practical socialism under the twofold impact of his participation in the rise and decline of the workers' councils movement and his intensive study of Marx. During World War I, workers' councils spontaneously emerged in Germany from shop stewards' committees and strike committees, much as the Soviets had emerged from militant labor political-economic activity in Russia in 1905 and 1917.<sup>69</sup> The German unions and political parties were hampered in their activities both by irresolute bureaucratic leaders and by special laws that declared a state of siege (*Belagerungszustand*) and thus prohibited militant activity.<sup>70</sup> Groups of workers' councils emerged as alternative organs of protest and action against the war, and against the deteriorating economic-political-social situation, thus creating new forms of political struggle. In Berlin in June, 1916, 55,000 workers struck to protest the war, led by strike committees that were the seeds of the workers' councils. These groups continued to develop and mushroom throughout Germany. In a general strike in April, 1917, 300,000 workers participated, and in a general strike in January and February, 1918 over 500,000 workers participated, mobilized by the councils.<sup>71</sup> Throughout 1918 the military and economic-political situation in Germany rapidly deteriorated and a series of strikes and military insurrections culminated in the November uprisings in Berlin that forced the Kaiser to abdicate.<sup>72</sup> These events awakened sharp hopes and fervent militancy for a socialist workers' republic.

In this fluid and explosive situation Korsch first supported attempts led by the Social Democrats to socialize key German Industries, and then was drawn irresistibly to the workers' councils movement. Indeed, Korsch was heavily influenced by the theorists of the councils movement and in turn contributed many articles to their journals.<sup>73</sup> It is interesting to note that the workers' councils theorist Ernst Däumig used the term "practical socialism" to describe the councils movement. The following passage from Däumig is extremely Korschian in its language and concepts and shows Korsch's deep kinship with the councils movement and its strong influence on his thought:

The councils concept is in its pure and consequential application *practical socialism*. It should provide the possibilities to translate through the proletariat the teaching of socialist science as propagated by socialist parties into reality. The councils organization must be

constructed and extended according to these goals and tasks, and must receive their structure and completion in a councils system. Since the *councils organization* is the child of revolutionary epochs, it will never enter fixed and complete (*fix und fertig*) into beautifully paraphrased phrases, but will take its external form and tactical tasks according to the process of revolutionary development and the demands of the current revolutionary situation to which it *must conform*.<sup>74</sup>

The councils movement was at first almost unanimous in calling for the construction of a socialist republic of workers' councils and the abolition of capitalism. This radicalism in fact distinguishes the workers' councils from previous working-class organizations. Two contemporary accounts stress this point: "here lies an essential distinction between the workers' councils and previous forms of workers' organization: while the old economic and political organizations tie themselves to the conditions of the capitalist environment and the class state, and receive the laws of their movement from these, the working class seeks in the workers' councils new forms of means with which it posits the fully conscious task of definitely overcoming the capitalist economy and class state and at the same time building the foundation for the construction of the new."<sup>75</sup> And: "One should *not forget the revolutionary origin* of the councils conception in order to correctly understand it. All attempts to construct a councils organization in the framework of *bourgeois* society and on the foundation of *capitalist* production will either yield a distorted concept or will be obliterated by the *forward striving tendencies* of councils thought. A councils organization can only be related to proletarian socialist struggle that is determined to eliminate capitalist production and the state erected on it—even when it has a republican facade—and to put in its place socialist production and a self-administering public community."<sup>76</sup>

Korsch later argued that the demand for workers' councils expressed "in the first phase of the revolutionary movement in Germany the still very unclear and confused, but nevertheless very resolute and strong, will for social revolution."<sup>77</sup> The tremendous appeal of the councils showed that "the workers finally wanted to carry through in action an open and total break with that objectively long surpassed bourgeois conception of legality that every place of work is the private property of whatever owner and that every working person is seen as an instrument of labor (*Betriebsmittel*) bought by the owner."<sup>78</sup> The workers' councils were thus revolutionary organs inalterably opposed to the capitalist system. They demanded a complete break with the old system and demanded a new socialist order.

The central political question confronting the SPD leaders who nominally had taken over the reigns of government, and the militant workers in the councils movement who were the most powerful political force, was whether a parliamentary system or a workers' councils system should be constructed in Germany, or whether these organs could co-exist as "dual power."<sup>59</sup> Korsch did not in 1919–20 take a clear cut stand on this issue, although he was a firm supporter of the councils system. Possibly he believed, along with many other independent socialists, that dual power was possible, that the workers' councils and parliament could share state power.<sup>60</sup> This was to be an illusion with grave consequences for the SPD political leaders relentlessly consolidated power in the central government which they shared with the parliament, the military, the previous state functionaries, and other members of the former ruling class. Moreover, the unsuccessful Spartacus revolt, resulting in the deaths of militant radicals such as Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, as well as the violent suppression of councils governments in Bavaria, Bremen, Gotha, Halle, Leipzig, and elsewhere by government troops and the proto-fascist *Freikorps*, greatly weakened the revolutionary forces who wanted a councils socialist Republic.<sup>61</sup> Further, congresses of the councils movement in December, 1918, and October, 1920, voted for the creation of a parliamentary system that would in many ways supplant the councils, and the Social Democrat-dominated parliament quickly moved to weaken the power of the councils.<sup>62</sup> The parliamentary National Assembly in February, 1920 limited the power of the councils to an extreme degree and in effect destroyed the growth and impetus of the movement.

It seems that not only did the radical demands of the workers' councils movement threaten the domination of the former ruling class, but it also threatened the control of the labor movement by the parties and unions. Moreover, many of the members of the councils were party or union members (or leaders) themselves. This caused factionalism within the councils movement by the unions and parties and created divided loyalties that weakened the movement from within. Nonetheless, the concept of workers' councils as authentic organs of socialism was not to die and Korsch remained loyal to this concept throughout his life.

Korsch continually reflected on the intoxicating rise and depressing fall of the workers' councils movement and offered an analysis of the failure of the movement to achieve its goal of constructing a socialist republic.<sup>63</sup> While summarizing the recent history of the workers' councils movement, Korsch discerned three reasons for its failures: (1) the councils were coopted and controlled by the parties and the unions, rather than being autonomous organs of the workers, elected and controlled by the

workers themselves for themselves; (2) the councils for the most part failed to exert real power and hence to replace or "control" the pre-revolutionary court and legal system, the military, the old governing bureaucracy, and other agents and institutions of the bourgeois system; thus the councils failed to become independent and dominant organs of people's power. Finally (3) the councils failed to assume both political and economic power and were confused as to their own function. Because it was not clear whether the councils were primarily political or economic organs, the parliamentary bureaucracy of the SPD could attempt to limit the councils to economic activity, while the old union bureaucracy could claim the councils had primarily political functions. In this way, "the government, the bourgeoisie, the SPD, the unions, and other open and hidden opponents of the councils system were able to play off against each other the economic and political tasks of the workers' councils."<sup>64</sup> The tragic failure of the workers' councils movement was thus in a sense rooted in a theoretical deficit: "there was little clarity over the essential tasks of the council dictatorship itself in the most well-known representatives of the revolutionary councils conception in Germany in the days after the November upheaval."<sup>65</sup> The law in the 1921 Weimar constitution that limited the councils to purely economic activity, and that was ratified by the councils congress itself, spelled for Korsch the end of the councils system as an instrument of revolution in Germany. Korsch sadly concluded: "Today there is no longer an independent councils movement in Germany . . . Parliamentism, the party, and the union system have externally gained a full victory over the revolutionary 'councils system.' Hence, only subterraneously in the consciousness of the suffering masses, beside the thoughts of revolution, smolders on the thought of the revolutionary councils system, smelted together in inseparable unity with the thought of revolution. On the day of revolutionary action, the councils will again rise like the phoenix from its ashes."<sup>66</sup>

Korsch was to return to the concept of workers' councils as the authentic organs of socialism throughout his life. He was one of the first to develop a neo-Marxist theory of revolutionary and democratic socialism, and thus provided a critique of the sort of state socialism, centralized bureaucracy, and new forms of domination that would develop in the Soviet Union. A problem in the Marxist theories of socialism dominant at the time was, Korsch believed, an over-evaluation of the role of the state in constructing socialism and de-emphasis on developing institutions that would put real power in the hands of the people. "State socialism," Korsch wrote, "will not be socialism at all."<sup>67</sup> The liberation of labor should proceed through the implementation of workers' control, and

should be the work of the people themselves (and not the state, the party, or any other body). Hence, "only after the overcoming of the last remains of a formal-democratic *state-ideology* can the necessity of the workers' councils (*Räte*) for the construction of a classless and stateless socialist society be grasped in its innermost essence."<sup>88</sup>

The following passage well summarizes Korsch's position and shows why his concept of socialism is still of utmost relevance today:

Socialization can first be achieved in a sense adequate to the actively working and productive class when the workers have become fully authorized participants in production on the way to direct socialization. None of the earlier socialist teachings that solely focus on the "political means" of liberating the working class from capitalist exploitation can bring us *the* socialism that working people desire. The striving of the masses for some sort of psychic equilibrium (*seelischen Ausgleich*) against the immense unfreedom of individual workers in large factories under the modern relations of production in large industries cannot be satisfied through a mere change of the employer; the single productive class of active workers will not as such be freer, their ways of life and labor will not be more worthy of a human being, through replacing the bosses installed by the owners of private capital by officials installed by the state government or a community administration. Thus in the consciousness of a large circle of workers the earlier socialist teaching is being put aside which began with the slogan, seize the "political power" in the state and then decree the "transition of the means of production to the whole public" through legal means—thus essentially in the forms of nationalization and communalization—this model is being replaced by a completely different conception of what is essential to the "socialization" demanded by modern socialism. One can say that today no socialist plan, no matter how it looks, will be acknowledged as a satisfactory fulfillment of the idea of socialization that does not carry, in one form or another, the notion of a broadly conceived "industrial democracy": the concept of the direct control and administration of every branch of industry, in which every single business is managed by the community of participating workers, and through organs determined by themselves. When "socialization" is demanded today, the word no longer merely invokes the universal and abstract demand for the transfer of the means of production into the possession of the whole public. Rather the demand for socialization today has solidified into the more concrete demand that

the transfer of the means of production into public property takes place in such a way that everywhere the masses of workers themselves will receive the administration of their places of work, or at least will receive the decisive part of the control of this administration.<sup>89</sup>

The subsequent rise of state socialism, both in the Soviet bloc and in those countries where Social Democrats won state power, showed the problems involved in the construction of a party-bureaucratic apparatus which produced new forms of domination and failed to contribute to the liberation of the working class. Korsch offers as an alternative to these models of socialism an attractive democratic libertarian model, hence the great interest in Korsch's ideas today.

In view of Korsch's early position on the primacy of workers' councils in the construction of socialism and his critique of state socialism, it may appear highly surprising that his turn toward Marxism and revolutionary socialism took the form of an enthusiastic embrace of Leninism and the Soviet Union as the model of socialism. Actually Korsch's orthodox Communist interlude would be a relatively brief one (1921–1926) and he would emerge from his period of fervent Leninism as one of the leading left-oppositionalists who again championed the workers' councils as the authentic organs of socialism, criticizing the Leninist concepts of the party and state which he had temporarily defended.

On the basis of Korsch's concept of socialization rooted in workers' councils, his courageous opposition to Stalinism, and his brilliant critique of Leninism and Marxism, there has arisen a legend that Korsch was the paradigm of the left-oppositionalist libertarian socialist. It has been alleged—falsely as we shall see—that Korsch had deep reservations about entering the Communist party and that from the beginning of his involvement in the Communist movement, Korsch opposed the dominant policies of the German and Soviet Communists from a left-oppositionalist position; that Korsch engaged in oppositionist activity against the Communist International (Comintern) by participating in a left offensive against Bolshevism at the Comintern World Congress in 1924; and, finally, that Korsch began in the early 1920's developing a heretical theoretical current which opposed a critical, dialectical Hegelian or Western Marxism to Communist (Marxist-Leninist) orthodoxy.

The true story of Karl Korsch's adventures with communism is far more complicated and convoluted than the Korsch legend would have it. In the following pages I would like to clear away the many myths which have surrounded and occluded Korsch's theory and practice. I shall show, first,

why Korsch became a Leninist and unstintingly defended the Bolshevization of the German Communist party in his writings 1920–1925. We shall then see how the myth arose that during this period Korsch was an anti-Bolshevizer, and shall see that Korsch's special version of the philosophy of praxis which I call his "revolutionary historicism" underlies both his support of Leninism and the Soviet Union, and his later critical, oppositionalist position. I shall then show how and why Korsch became a left-oppositionalist and will reconstruct the progress through which he became an anti-Leninist. In my view, Korsch's contribution to radical social theory does not lie simply in being a left-oppositionalist who provides a model of negation and critical theory, nor does his critique of Leninism consist in an abstract rejection of Leninist theory and practice. Rather, Korsch reveals the limits of Leninism, and its failure as a model of revolution for the West, by living through the Leninist experience and painfully criticizing it from within, before he could "cut the umbilical cord of Leninism," and evolve his oppositionalist position. For Korsch identified with Leninism from the early 1920's to 1927, involved himself deeply in Leninist theory and practice, and then developed a critique of Leninist theory from experience of the failure of Leninist practice in Germany and the Soviet Union. Let us now examine the strange and tragic story of Korsch's involvement with the Communist movement in the 1920's.

### Notes

1. The most detailed account of Korsch's life and thought is found in Michael Buckmiller's "Marxismus als Realität," in Pozzoli, *Über Karl Korsch* (hereafter "Marxismus"), and his dissertation, *Karl Korsch und das Problem der materialistischen Dialektik* (Hannover: Soak-Verlag, 1976) (hereafter *Karl Korsch*). My Korsch interpretation is much indebted to Buckmiller's work and to discussion with him in Hannover in the summer of 1975. Some interesting biographical material is found in the interview with Hedda Korsch, "Memories of Karl Korsch," *New Left Review* 76 (November–December 1972): 34–35.

2. Hedda Korsch, "Memories," pp. 35–36.

3. Buckmiller, *Karl Korsch*, pp. 6ff.

4. *Ibid.*, pp. 6–7. All translations from the German are my own.

5. Buckmiller deals in detail with "the political and social changes at the turn of the century and the formation of the German Free Students movement" in *ibid.*, pp. 7–19.

6. Korsch's student articles, which deal with the free student organization, women's liberation, and proposals for university and law school reform, are discussed in detail by Buckmiller in *ibid.*, pp. 19–59.

7. Hedda Korsch, "Memories," p. 37.

8. Karl Korsch, "Die Stellung der Arbeiterinnen im Erwerbsleben," in *Jenaer Hochschulzeitung*, December 15, 1908.

9. Karl Korsch, "Japanische Arbeitsverhältnisse," in *Jenaer Hochschulzeitung*, January 20, 1909.

10. *Ibid.*

11. Buckmiller attempts to show how both the content and form of argumentation in the young Korsch were influenced by Kant in *Karl Korsch*.

12. Hedda Korsch, "Memories," p. 38.

13. Korsch published around twenty-one articles and reviews in *Die Tat* from 1912 to 1920. For a discussion of *Die Tat* and its publisher, Eugene Diederichs, see George Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1971), pp. 52ff. Hedda Korsch discusses the Diederichs circle with whom the Korsch were acquainted in Jena in "Memories," p. 38.

14. Karl Korsch, "Die sozialistische Formel für die Organization der Volkswirtschaft," *Die Tat* 4, no. 9 (December 1912); reprinted in Karl Korsch, *Politische Texte* (Frankfurt: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1974), p. 17.

15. Korsch, *Politische Texte*, pp. 20–21.

16. It has been claimed that, "originally, Weil had wanted his teacher, Karl Korsch, to be the head of the Institute." G. L. Ulmen, "Wittfogel's Science of Society," *Telos* 24 (Summer 1975):85. I discuss Korsch's influence on Weil and his probable role in the founding of the Institute for Social Research in "The Frankfurt School Revisited," *New German Critique* 4 (Winter 1975).

17. Karl Korsch, "Die Fabian Society," *Die Tat* 4, no. 8 (November 1912): 423.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 425.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 426.

20. A more detailed discussion of Korsch's Fabianism is found in Buckmiller's *Karl Korsch*, pp. 60ff. The Fabians were earlier an influence on Edward Bernstein when he lived in England, and in a sense the father of Social Democratic revisionism never escaped from Fabian reformism. Engels criticized Bernstein's "Fabian Schwärmerei" and sarcastically characterized the Fabians in a letter to Sorge as "a band of do-gooders who have enough sense to perceive the unavoidability of social revolution, but who cannot entrust this gigantic task to the crude proletariat alone, and therefore have the custom of putting themselves at the top; anxiety before revolution is their basic principle. They are the 'cultivated ones' (*Gebildeten*) par excellence." *Marx-Engels Werke* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1968), 39:8.

21. Hedda Korsch's account of this period is fascinating; see "Memories," pp. 39–40.



22. Karl Korsch, "Akademisch-Soziale Monatschrift," *Die Tat* 9, no. 11 (February 1918): 974.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 975.

24. Karl Korsch, "Die Politik im neuen Deutschland," in Korsch, ed., *Der Geist der neuen Volksgemeinschaft* (Berlin: Zentrale für Heimatdienst, 1919), p. 63.

25. Nothing came out of their work and the commission was dissolved in April. Korsch made no contribution to the proceedings. Wilbrandt was a university socialist who influenced Korsch's concept of socialization and his initial reading of Marxism. See Karl Korsch, "Robert Wilbrandts 'Sozialismus,'" *Die Tat* 11, no. 10 (January 1920): 782-787.

26. Karl Korsch, *Was ist Sozialisierung?* (Hannover: Freies Deutschland Verlag, 1919), translated by Frankie Denton and Douglas Kellner as "What Is Socialization?" *New German Critique* 6 (Fall 1975): 60-81.

27. Karl Korsch, "Grundsätzliches über Sozialisierung," *Der Arbeiterrat* 2, no. 3 (January 1919): 900-911; translated in this anthology as "Fundamentals of Socialization," by Roy Jameson and Douglas Kellner.

28. E. H. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution, 1917-1923* (London: Penguin, 1971), 3:105-106.

29. Karl Korsch, "Die Sozialisierungsfrage vor und nach der Revolution," *Der Arbeiterrat* 1, no. 19 (1919), reprinted in *Schriften zur Sozialisierung* (Frankfurt: Europäische Verlag, 1969), p. 53.

30. *Ibid.*, pp. 53-54.

31. *Ibid.*

32. Karl Korsch, "Fundamentals of Socialization."

33. The cooperative movement in Europe is discussed in detail by Bernstein in *Evolutionary Socialism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1961), pp. 109-135 and 186-189. Bernstein approves of the cooperative movement as a genuine step toward socialization, but notes Marx and Engels' ambivalence toward consumer cooperatives.

34. See Korsch's essay "Das sozialistische und das syndikalistische Sozialisierungsprogramm," *Der Sozialist*, June 28, 1915, pp. 402-405, reprinted in *Schriften zur Sozialisierung*, where he criticizes those anarchistic tendencies that want to do away immediately with the state and all forms of social control and authority.

35. Korsch, "Fundamentals of Socialization."

36. *Ibid.*

37. *Ibid.*

38. Korsch, "What Is Socialization?"

39. *Ibid.*

40. *Ibid.*

41. *Ibid.*

42. *Ibid.*

43. Korsch, "Die Politik im neuen Deutschland," p. 65.

44. Paul Breines makes the interesting suggestion that there is a connection between interest in radical education and a certain kind of leftist politics: "Not a few German so-called 'ultra-lefts' had backgrounds and/or professional experience in childhood education, for example, Alice Rühle, the wife of Otto Rühle. In the 1930's and after, Karl Korsch and Hedda Korsch were associated with ultra-left or council Communist groups. The basis for such connections is probably the idea of education for revolution as distinct from the idea of management of revolution," in "Korsch's Road to Marx," *Telos* 26 (Winter 1975-1976): 44. I might add that Hedda Korsch published several essays on child education and socialization in the *International* in 1924-1925 when Karl was editor. Both Karl and Hedda were active in councils schools in Jena in the early 1920's and later in the Karl Marx Schule in Berlin. Hedda Korsch continued working on educational reform during their years in exile in the United States and taught education courses at Wheaton College in Massachusetts. One might also refer here to Gramsci's work on education, culture, and the intellectuals, and Lukács' early emphasis on *Bildung*; on the latter theme, see James Schmidt, "Lukács' Concept of Proletarian Bildung," in *Telos* 24 (Spring 1975): 2-40. A comparison of the theories of education, culture, and the task of intellectuals in Gramsci, Korsch, and Lukács would make an interesting project.

45. Korsch, "Die Politik im neuen Deutschland," p. 70.

46. *Ibid.*

47. Korsch, "What Is Socialization?"

48. See Buckmiller, *Karl Korsch*, pp. 144-145.

49. Korsch, "Die Politik im neuen Deutschland," p. 71.

50. Karl Korsch, *Marxism and Philosophy*, Introduction by Fred Halliday (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971) p. 144.

51. Karl Korsch, "Praktischer Sozialismus," *Die Tat* 11, no. 10 (January 1920). Reprinted in Karl Korsch, *Kommentare zur Deutschen 'Revolution' und ihrer Niederlage* (The Netherlands: Rotdruck, 1972), p. 26 (page references to reprint).

52. *Ibid.*, p. 20.

53. *Ibid.*, p. 21.

54. *Ibid.*, p. 26.

55. *Ibid.*, p. 24.

56. Korsch, "Fundamentals of Socialization."

57. Karl Korsch, "Sozialismus und soziale Reform," *Der Arbeiterrat* 2, no. 3 (January 1920): 7-9, reprinted in *Schriften zur Sozialisierung*, p. 40.

58. *Ibid.*

59. Korsch, "Fundamentals of Socialization."

60. Karl Korsch, "Der 18 Brumaire des Hugo Stinnes," reprinted in *Kommentare zur Deutschen 'Revolution.'*

61. Korsch, "Praktischer Sozialismus," p. 24.
62. Gian Rusconi, "Introduction to 'What Is Socialization?'" *New German Critique* 6 (Fall 1975): 55-57.
63. Korsch, "Fundamentals of Socialization."
64. *Ibid.*
65. *Ibid.*
66. *Ibid.*
67. *Ibid.*
68. *Ibid.*
69. For an account of the development of the Soviets in Russia, see Oscar Anweiler, *The Soviets, 1905-1921* (New York: Pantheon, 1975), and Peter Racheloff, "Soviets and Factory Committees in the Russian Revolution," *Radical America* 8, no. 6 (November-December 1974).
70. For an account of the German Revolution and workers' councils' movement see Richard Müller, *Vom Kaiserreich zur Republik* (Berlin: Malik, 1924-1925). Documents describing the councils' ideas and action are found in Dieter Schneider and Rudolf Kuda, *Arbeiterräte in der Novemberrevolution* (Frankfurt: Suhrkavip, 1973), and Charles Burdick and Ralph Lutz, *The Political Institutions of the German Revolution* (New York: Praeger, 1966). Peter von Oertzen, *Betriebsräte in der Novemberrevolution* (Dusseldorf: Droste, 1963), gives a good account of the councils' movement and Korsch's participation in it. Brian Peterson reviews a large number of recent German books on the workers' council movement, in "Workers' Councils in Germany, 1918-1919," *New German Critique* 4 (Winter 1975): 113-124.
71. Schneider and Kuda, *Arbeiterräte*, pp. 16ff., and Burdick and Lutz, *Political Institutions*, pp. 1ff.
72. Schneider and Kuda, *Arbeiterräte*, pp. 21ff. Burdick and Lutz publish fascinating documents that portray the German government's reaction to the events that forced the Kaiser to abdicate, *Political Institutions*, pp. 17ff.
73. Many of Korsch's articles appeared in the councils' journal *Der Arbeiterrat*.
74. Ernst Däumig, "Der Rätegedanke und seine Verwirklichung," in Schneider and Kuda, *Arbeiterräte*, pp. 69-70.
75. Richard Seidel, "Die Gewerkschaftsbewegung und das Räte-system," in Schneider and Kuda, *Arbeiterräte*, p. 25.
76. Däumig, "Der Rätegedanke," p. 69.
77. Karl Korsch, *Arbeitsrecht für Betriebsräte* (Frankfurt: Europäische Verlag, 1968), p. 108.
78. *Ibid.*, p. 109.
79. For a discussion of the political situation, see Ruth Fisher, *Stalin and German Communism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 1948, pp. 63-73; and Peterson, "Workers' Councils."
80. This seems to be the position Korsch takes in "What Is Socialization?"

although he also supports the "direct action" advocated by the Spartacus group in certain situations.

81. Fisher, *German Communism*, pp. 88-116.
82. Documents recording discussions and resolutions made at the Councils Congresses are collected in Burdick and Lutz, *Political Institutions*.
83. Karl Korsch, "Wandlungen des Problems der politischen Arbeiterräte in Deutschland," reprinted in *Politische Texte*.
84. *Ibid.*, p. 26.
85. *Ibid.*
86. *Ibid.*, p. 32.
87. Korsch, "Fundamentals of Socialization."
88. *Ibid.*
89. This passage is reproduced word for word in both "Die Sozialisierungsfrage vor und nach der Revolution" and "Das sozialistische und das syndikalistische Sozialisierungsprogramm," and thus can be taken to be a favored programmatic summary of Korsch's position. Both are reprinted in *Schriften zur Sozialisierung*, pp. 52-53 and 55-56.

## 2. Korsch and Communism

In the summer of 1919, Korsch left Berlin for Jena where he was active in the workers' councils movement and then the communist movement. He completed his *Habilitationschrift* and became a professor in the law faculty of the University of Jena.<sup>1</sup> He also contributed articles to leftist journals and newspapers, helped form a councils school, and gave many lectures to workers, students, and citizen groups.<sup>2</sup> After the attempt of counterrevolutionaries to seize state power in the Kapp putsch in March 1920—which was averted by a remarkable general strike that forced the reactionaries to capitulate<sup>3</sup>—Korsch saw the real dangers of counter-revolution and the need for a more resolute and militant left.

Korsch joined the USPD in autumn, 1919, when it was clear that the Social Democrats had no intention of radicalizing or carrying through the November Revolution.<sup>4</sup> The USPD—the Independent Socialist party—had split from the Social Democratic party (SPD) in 1917 as a socialist anti-war coalition, and included people from all political wings of the SPD: from Rosa Luxemburg (left) to Karl Kautsky (center) to Edward Bernstein (right). With such a diverse ideological spectrum the USPD was incapable of developing a unified politics due to the incompatible factions in its membership. Nonetheless, its numbers grew rapidly as a result of disgust with the "Kaiser socialism" of the SPD, and the USPD became an increasingly important political force.<sup>5</sup>

Korsch became increasingly active in the USPD and quickly radicalized his political position. In a party discussion on December 9, 1919, he criticized the Social Democrats' call for a national assembly and new constitution, which would in no way satisfy the demands of the workers and would, Korsch argued, serve to restore the old bourgeois order. He compared this parliamentary procedure with the Russian revolution.<sup>6</sup> His increased radicalization was evident in a new emphasis on the general strike as the supreme revolutionary tactic, and on resolute revolutionary struggle. In a speech three days before the Kapp putsch Korsch approvingly cited Bebel's motto: "'As long as I breathe and speak and write . . . I shall remain the deadly foe of this bourgeois society and state, so as to undermine the conditions of its existence, and if I can to destroy it.'"<sup>7</sup>

After the Kapp putsch, the USPD and Communist party (KPD) both

refused to participate in a workers' government and urged the formation of a workers' council republic. Korsch supported this position, placing primary emphasis now on "direct action of the masses, thus economic struggle," and called for "the organization of armed proletarian struggle."<sup>8</sup> Korsch's revolutionism was now thoroughgoing. However, the wide-spread radicalization process that briefly exploded after the Kapp putsch had been again exploited by the SPD and coopted by their parliamentary, reformist politics. Thus there was a debate within the USPD whether they should now fuse with the Communist party and join the Third International. The German historian of the USPD, Krause, sums up the debate as follows: "Since the objective conditions for revolution were 'mature,' then there must be a new, more radical organization found. Here the Soviets in Russia offered an example that appeared to be successful and by the very fact that it still existed, attracted many people."<sup>9</sup> Korsch adopted this position and urged a merger of the USPD with the KPD to form a new, stronger revolutionary organization on the Bolshevik model. Thus at the USPD convention in Halle on October, 1920, Korsch supported the majority decision to join the German Communist party and to accept the "twenty-one conditions" for entering the Communist International recently set forth by the Comintern.<sup>10</sup> This merger was to link disastrously together the fate of the German and Soviet parties and would result in the eventual control of the German Communist party by the Russians.

There are many legends concerning Korsch's attitude toward joining the KPD and his activities within the party which require clarification to help dispel the Korsch myth. Korsch's former student and later German editor, Erich Gerlach, erroneously claimed that "Korsch was originally an opponent of the uniting of the USPD with the KPD because of the '21 conditions' demanded by Moscow (for joining the Communist International), which called for a conspiratorial organization-apparatus beside the party. He saw an opening here for the fall of party democracy."<sup>11</sup> The claim is repeated by the German editor of another Korsch anthology and by two of Korsch's American editors.<sup>12</sup> Korsch's wife Hedda ratifies the myth: "He attended the USPD conference in 1920 when the party split and the majority opted for fusion with the Communists. Korsch went with the majority although he had great reservations about the 21 points that the Comintern had laid down. But it was the same as when we discussed his going back to Germany from London: he did not want to be a member of a small sect, but thought he should be where the masses were and he believed that the German workers were going Communist.

His main reservation about the 21 points concerned the centralized discipline from Moscow, the degree of dependence on the Russian party that they implied."<sup>13</sup>

As we shall see, Korsch did not have great reservations about accepting the twenty-one conditions or joining the Communist party. Rather, Gerlach, Hedda Korsch, and others were projecting Korsch's later critique of the domination of the German Communist party by the Soviet Union onto an earlier phase when there was, first, no evidence that the Soviets had the intention of exerting a repressive hegemony over their German comrades, who had enjoyed almost total autonomy in party affairs; nor, secondly, is there any evidence in Korsch's writings at the time that he feared this occurrence. Indeed, it can be shown that Korsch was at the time, and was to remain until 1925, an unambiguous champion of the Soviet Union, Leninism, and the Bolshevization of the KPD; in a series of 1920 articles Korsch supported "the immediate and unconditional acceptance and the speedy carrying through of the entrance conditions to the Third International."<sup>14</sup> In these articles, mostly published in the Thuringen communist newspaper *Neue Zeitung*, Korsch argued that "the Bolshevik movement is of decisive importance for the world revolution," and took a consistently positive position toward the Soviet Union, while criticizing the USPD leadership for its negative or mistrustful attitude toward the Soviet Revolution.<sup>15</sup> Korsch cited Rosa Luxemburg's idea that the "fatherland of the proletariat is the socialist international," and argued that it was imperative to join the Third International and defend in every way the Soviet Revolution, for "if Russia loses the revolution, then all is also lost in Germany."<sup>16</sup> Moreover, Korsch did not see entry into the KPD and the twenty-one conditions as a threat to party democracy. He believed that one must place the twenty-one conditions "in the context of the basic propositions [of the Comintern Second World Congress] and then one's hesitations will disappear. . . . democracy within the organization which the Third International has affirmed remains thoroughly preserved. . . . In the stages of intensified civil war the illegal organization must have the possibility to eliminate traitors without further ado."<sup>17</sup> Against the objection that joining the Communist party would splinter the USPD, Korsch argued that there were too many positions from left to right in the USPD, and that the splintering would bring forth a clearer revolutionary line that would make for a more efficacious organization and politics. Further, Korsch feared that if the USPD did not merge with the KPD that the left in the USPD would merge with the ultra-leftist KAPD—a move that he did believe would

harmfully splinter the left.<sup>18</sup> In a caucus choosing delegates to the party convention in Halle that would decide on merging with the KPD, Korsch's entry resolution won. Hence at the USPD conference, Korsch supported completely the resolution to join with the Communist party and join the Third International.

Korsch's basic reason for joining the Communist party was his belief that Germany was in a revolutionary situation, and that it was imperative to create a revolutionary organization along the lines of the centralized, highly disciplined Bolshevik party: "When we have this conception, then we can only place ourselves on the side of the Bolsheviks."<sup>19</sup> Korsch believed that the Bolsheviks had created an efficacious revolutionary organization which had proved itself successful in the Russian Revolution, while the German parties had failed to carry through a socialist revolution because they lacked the proper revolutionary organization, theory and strategy. With these convictions Korsch entered into his Leninist period in which he was to emerge as one of the leaders of the German Communist party and one of the most articulate defenders of its policies and the Russian Revolution.

### *Korsch's Revolutionary Historicism*

Korsch immersed himself in a study of the basic texts of Marx, Engels, and Lenin, and became one of the foremost Marx experts in Germany. His reading and interpretation of Marx was closely connected with his political work, and his essays were intended to present the basic ideas of Marxism to workers and party militants in a clear and compelling form.<sup>20</sup> He also lectured on Hegel at the law school in Jena, concluding that the Hegelian dialectical method was the theoretical core of Marxism. Although Korsch saw the Hegelian dialectic as providing the *form* of the Marxist theory, its *content* derived from the actual working-class struggles.<sup>21</sup> Korsch continually referred to Marx's dictum in the *Communist Manifesto* that "Communism, for us, is not a state of things to be established nor an ideal to which reality must adapt itself; we call communism the actual movement which transforms existing conditions."<sup>22</sup> In "15 Theses on Scientific Socialism," Korsch writes: "1. Scientific socialism (socialism as science) is the theoretical expression of the proletarian movement. This signifies: a) It is not a thing for itself (bourgeois 'pre-suppositionless' or 'pure' science or philosophy) but is a *component* of a real process, a 'movement,' or more precisely: an 'action,' the action of

the 'oppressed class,' the 'proletariat' . . . b) It is a particular component of this movement, something special within this whole: the theoretical expression, science."<sup>23</sup>

Korsch was developing a radically historicist version of Marxism that derived both the content and form of ideology and theory from its "material and economic foundation."<sup>24</sup> In *Marxism and Philosophy* he approvingly cites Hegel's dictum that "philosophy can be nothing but *its own epoch comprehended in thought*,"<sup>25</sup> and then proceeds to dialectically relate both Hegel's and Marx's philosophy to the revolutionary struggles of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, respectively, which were, in Korsch's view, reflected in the philosophies of the two masters of nineteenth century thought. Korsch's position here is what I call *revolutionary historicism* which roots revolutionary theory in the revolutionary movement and its class struggles.<sup>26</sup> He wished to demonstrate "the connections between the 'intellectual movement' of the period and the 'revolutionary movement' that was contemporary with it."<sup>27</sup> Hegel was read as the philosopher of the revolutionary bourgeoisie and his philosophy was connected with its revolutionary struggles:

Hegel wrote that in the philosophic systems of this fundamentally revolutionary epoch, "revolution was lodged and expressed as if in the very form of their thought." Hegel's accompanying statements make it quite clear that he was not talking of what contemporary bourgeois historians of philosophy like to call a revolution in thought—a nice, quiet process that takes place in the pure realm of the study and far away from the crude realm of real struggles. The greatest thinker produced by bourgeois society in its revolutionary period regarded a "revolution in the form of thought" as an objective component of the total social process of a real revolution.<sup>28</sup>

Korsch was convinced that there was an inner connection between German idealism and Marxism on the grounds that both were expressions of the same revolutionary process:

Since the Marxist system is the theoretical expression of the revolutionary movement of the proletariat, and German idealist philosophy is the theoretical expression of the revolutionary movement of the bourgeoisie, they must stand intellectually and historically (i.e. ideologically) in the same relation to each other as the revolutionary movement of the proletariat as a class stands to the revolutionary movement of the bourgeoisie, in the realm of social and political practice. There is one unified historical process of his-

torical development in which an "autonomous" proletarian class movement emerges from the revolutionary movement of the third estate, and the new materialist theory of Marxism "autonomously" confronts bourgeois idealist philosophy. All these processes affect each other reciprocally. The emergence of Marxist theory is, in Hegelian-Marxist terms, only the "other side" of the emergence of the real proletarian movement; it is both sides together that comprise the concrete totality of this historical process. This dialectical approach enables us to grasp the four different trends we have mentioned—the revolutionary movement of the bourgeoisie, idealist philosophy from Kant to Hegel, the revolutionary class movement of the proletariat, and the materialist philosophy of Marxism—as four moments of a single historical process.<sup>29</sup>

Korsch's defense of the importance of philosophy and his claim that understanding the relation between Marxism and philosophy requires grasping the Hegelian roots of Marxism has given rise to the interpretation of *Marxism and Philosophy* as a classic of "Hegelian Marxism," and has led to the picture of Korsch as one of the creators of a current that was in opposition to the dominant Marxist orthodoxy.<sup>30</sup> What has not been perceived is the extent to which Korsch believed he was merely restoring Marxist orthodoxy. Further, he saw himself as part of a philosophical front with Lenin and Luxemburg, representing a position of revolutionary socialism against the reformist Marxism of the Second International. The publication of Lukács' *History and Class Consciousness*, which attempts to synthesize Lenin and Luxemburg into a dialectical and revolutionary Marxist theory, could only strengthen Korsch's conviction that they—himself, Lukács, Lenin, and Luxemburg—represented genuine Marxism and constituted a theoretical-political front against Social Democratic revisionism.

*Marxism and Philosophy* begins with a quote from Lenin's 1922 essay "On the Significance of Militant Materialism": "We must organize a systematic study of the Hegelian dialectic from a materialist standpoint."<sup>31</sup> Korsch thus sees himself and Lenin as "materialist dialecticians" who both appreciate the dialectical nature of genuine Marxism and perceive its Hegelian roots. Korsch then provides an interpretation of the relation between Hegel and Marx and Marxism and Philosophy and concludes by noting

the peculiar parallelism between the two problems of Marxism and Philosophy and Marxism and State. It is well known that the latter, as Lenin says in *State and Revolution*, "hardly concerned the

major theoreticians and publicists of the Second International.' This raises the question: if there is a definite connection between the abolition of the State and the abolition of the philosophy, is there also a connection between the neglect of these two problems by the Marxists of the Second International? The problem can be posed more exactly. Lenin's bitter criticism of the debasement of Marxism by opportunism connects the neglect of the problem of the State by the Marxists of the Second International to a more general context. Is this context also operative in the case of Marxism and philosophy? In other words, is the neglect of the problem of philosophy by the Marxists of the Second International also related to the fact that 'problems of revolution in general hardly concerned them?'"<sup>82</sup>

The italicized quotation is from Lenin's *State and Revolution*; this is, of course, Lenin's constantly reiterated critique of the Second International which Korsch takes up here and radicalizes.

Korsch next works out his famous periodization of Marxism into (1) the creative works of Marx and Engels; (2) the degeneration of Marxism in the Second International; and (3) the restoration of genuine Marxism by Luxemburg and Lenin:

What theoreticians like Rosa Luxemburg in Germany and Lenin in Russia have done, and are doing, in the field of Marxist theory is to liberate it from the inhibiting traditions of the Social Democracy of the second period. They thereby answer the practical needs of the new revolutionary stage of proletarian class struggle, for these traditions weighed "like a nightmare" on the brain of the working masses whose objectively revolutionary socioeconomic position no longer corresponded to these revolutionary doctrines. The apparent revival of original Marxist theory in the Third International is simply a result of the fact that in a new revolutionary period not only the workers' movement itself, but the theoretical conceptions of communists which express it, must assume an explicitly revolutionary form. This is why large sections of the Marxist system, which seemed virtually forgotten in the final decades of the nineteenth century, have now come to life again. It also explains why the leader of the Russian Revolution could write a book a few months before October in which he stated that his aim was "in the first place to restore the correct Marxist theory of the State." Events themselves placed the question of the dictatorship of the proletariat on the agenda as a practical problem. When Lenin placed the same

question theoretically on the agenda at a decisive moment, this was an early indication that the internal connection of theory and practice within revolutionary Marxism had been consciously re-established.<sup>83</sup>

*Marxism and Philosophy* was intended to provide a restoration of the philosophical dimension of Marxism and the importance of ideological struggle for revolutionary practice, much as Lenin has restored the political dimension of Marxism and the importance of revolutionary political struggle. Marxist theories had fallen victim, Korsch believed, to a "transcendental underestimation of ideology," and had failed to perceive the need for a critique of ideology and change of consciousness. For Korsch, "no really dialectical materialist conception of history (certainly not that of Marx and Engels) could cease to regard philosophical ideology, or ideology in general, as a material component of general sociohistorical reality—that is, a real part which had to be grasped in materialist theory and overthrown by materialist practice."<sup>84</sup> Ideology for Korsch is not only conceived as a theory that expresses the ideas of the ruling class but is to be grasped as a constituent of consciousness. Consciousness arises from the social life-process and in turn is a real component of that process. Hence a theory of revolution must take seriously the critique of ideology and change of consciousness. Korsch wanted to develop a theory of total revolution that "would restore the correct and full sense of Marx's theory. . . . a theory of social revolution that comprises all areas of society as a totality."<sup>85</sup> This project required a restoration of the philosophical dimension of Marxism and stress on the importance of ideological struggle as a component of revolution, as well as renewed reflection on Hegel and dialectics.

I have stressed the generally underestimated role that Lenin played in Korsch's problematic and the extent to which he believed his project is continuous with the positions of Leninism. We have noted that Korsch believed that the restoration of genuine Marxism began with Lenin and have shown the parallel which Korsch perceived between Lenin's and his own project. The brilliant section of *Marxism and Philosophy* where Korsch developed his dialectical theory of social revolution, and his concept of ideology critique and struggle, can also be read as a project totally consistent with Leninism, in the sense that Lenin also stressed the importance of ideological struggle in his theory of hegemony and in countless speeches and essays where he characterized Marxism as a weapon in the struggle against bourgeois ideology. In a way, Korsch conceived the relationship between Marx and Lenin in a parallel manner to the relation

between Marx and Hegel—Lenin, like Marx, expressing a further stage of revolutionary struggle in his work. But here Korsch was operating with an idealized concept of Lenin which had little in common with either the historical Lenin or the Lenin who was being deified and re-tooled by the apologists for Soviet Marxism in Moscow.<sup>36</sup> Most of Lenin's works were not yet available in Europe and Korsch was no doubt unfamiliar with Lenin's *Materialism and Empirio-criticism*, which contained a crude and dogmatic philosophical materialism, copy theory of knowledge and perception, and correspondence theory of truth which had little in common with Korsch's dialectical conception of Marxism.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, Korsch was unaware that at the very moment he was penning *Marxism and Philosophy*, Soviet ideologists were concocting an ideological brew which they would label Marxism-Leninism and would relentlessly oppose to the Lukács-Korsch brand of Marxism.<sup>38</sup> But these events constitute the next chapter of our story and at this point Korsch's Lenin is the successful politician of the Bolshevik revolution and the revolutionary theorist whose theories were an integral component of the revolutionary process in Russia, which achieved the coveted unity of theory and practice that was the mark of genuine revolutionary theory for Korsch.

Korsch's interpretation of the relation between Marx and Hegel, his appraisal of the importance of philosophy and ideological struggle for socialist revolution, his periodization of Marxism which applies the historical materialist method to the history of Marxism, and his commitment to Leninism can all best be grasped in the context of his revolutionary historicism. Korsch stresses the historical rootedness of all ideas, consciousness, ideology, and revolutionary theory in a specific socioeconomic environment (this principle was later generalized by Korsch into the principle of historical specificity, which is akin to Gramsci's "absolute historicism"). The task of theory is in this view to conceptualize the interconnectedness of all ideas, institutions, and socioeconomic realities within the social totality and to describe the mediations which connect, for example, a philosophy to its socio-historical conditions. Here it should be noted that Korsch is not as sophisticated or brilliant a dialectician as Lukács, the members of the Frankfurt school, or even Gramsci.<sup>39</sup> In fact, Korsch is much more interested in the political consequences of theoretical activity than in the strictly philosophical components of his theory. Korsch is indeed much more of a political theorist with a strong activist bent than a philosopher. He is above all interested in developing a revolutionary theory and in defining the relationship of revolutionary theory to political practice and the historical reality in which both are rooted. For Korsch the task of revolutionary theory is to grasp conceptually

ally the historical situation and to construct a political theory from this situation which will then provide an instrument of revolutionary change. A genuinely revolutionary theory is rooted in a revolutionary movement whose struggles, needs, and goals produce the theory, which in turn demonstrates its truth or efficacy in practice. A revolutionary theory is therefore to be judged according to its ability to mediate practice, to serve as an instrument of radical change, to serve the interests of the liberation of the working class. At the time Korsch believed that Marxism was the authentic expression of proletarian struggle from the time of the 1848 revolutions up to the present day, and that Leninism was the currently actual form of Marxism that expressed contemporary revolutionary struggles. Interestingly, this historicist position which sees theory as the consciousness of historical reality—this demand for an identity between theory and reality, and theory and practice—would provide the basis for his later critique of Leninism and Marxism itself.

Korsch was attempting to grasp and develop the revolutionary core of the Marxist teaching and to defend Marxism against revisionist distortions. One series of articles, including "The Marxist Dialectic" and "On Materialist Dialectic," translated in this anthology, contain crystal-clear distillations of the Marxist theory and show Korsch's ability to grasp the essence of the subject matter at issue—a characteristic that was to distinguish Korsch's theoretical practice. Another series of articles attempts to demolish leading bourgeois falsifications of Marxism and to critique competing communist interpretations.<sup>40</sup> These articles reveal a sharp critical acumen, as well as a sarcastic polemical bent.

In addition to his work in Marxist theory, Korsch was also busy lecturing on law in the University of Jena and was attempting to develop a Marxist legal theory, grounded in a theory of workers' rights and the legal structure of factory committees.<sup>41</sup> The main fruit of these labors was *Arbeitsrecht für Betriebsräte* published in 1922.<sup>42</sup> Korsch saw the workers' struggle for labor laws and legal rights and protection as an integral part of the process of radical social change that had been neglected by previous Marxist theoreticians. He wished to institutionalize the workers' councils as organs of participatory democracy which could be used as instruments of workers' power in the transition to socialism. The activist component of his thought comes out in his concept of "legal action" (*juristische Aktion*)—an example of the sort of "intellectual action" (*geistige Aktion*) which in *Marxism and Philosophy* he defended as an integral part of revolutionary practice.<sup>43</sup> Korsch was developing a dialectical theory of revolution in which ideological struggle required socialist theories of ideology, law, and philosophy, as well as

political and economic theories. The problem was that "In an epoch where in all realms of social life two classes confront each other antagonistically . . . in the sphere of law neither the old purely bourgeois standpoint of private law can be legitimately maintained unchanged (i.e., that which conceives the labor relation as a private affair of those concerned which rests on a free contract), nor can the new purely proletarian standpoint of social law (that sees the labor relation as a purely communal relation that grounds social working-together)."<sup>44</sup> To resolve this problem, Korsch wanted to develop a clear distinction between bourgeois and socialist legal theories, and to begin introducing socialist conceptions in the present society as part of the revolutionary process. Korsch warns, however, that "legal action" should not be seen as a substitute for class struggle, but rather as a complement to economic action such as strikes and political action.<sup>45</sup> Events were in fact to soon give him a chance to participate in a series of political actions that would plunge him into the center of the Communist movement.

### *Korsch and the Comintern*

At the time when Korsch was working on the problems of Marxism and philosophy he was also heavily involved in Communist politics. He lived in the house where the local Thuringian Communist newspaper, the *Neue Zeitung*, was published and frequently participated in party meetings. He continuously reflected on the political-economic developments in Germany and wrote many articles on the subject. In 1923-24 Korsch analyzed the stabilization of monopoly capitalism in Germany through the policies of Hugo Stinnes. Stinnes and his robber baron colleagues were attempting to consolidate their economic power through concentration and monopolization of key German industries, and were using the state to protect and further their interests.<sup>46</sup> Korsch supported the Communist position that in view of the capitalist offensive against the workers, a united front policy was needed that would aim at "seizing material goods" and "constituting a workers' government."<sup>47</sup> He attended the Eighth Party Congress of the KPD in Leipzig in January 1923 and sided with Brandler and the "right-center" majority who sought a united front with the Social Democrats to fight the growing counterrevolution. At this conference Korsch criticized as "undialectical" the left position of Fisher and Maslow who rejected the united front policy and urged putting mass-supported armed struggle, and the slogan of the "dictatorship of the proletariat," on the top of the agenda.<sup>48</sup> Again, we see the fallacy

of simply labelling Korsch a left-oppositionalist and see the need for a careful study of a complex period. We shall see that up until the middle of 1925 Korsch—far from being a left-oppositionalist—followed the mainstream policy and tactics of the KPD and Comintern which he both accepted and defended.

In 1923 the German economic situation grew progressively worse as inflation raged and food strikes broke out all over the land. The Weimar government appeared incapable of dealing with the massive economic crisis and growing political unrest. To add to the explosiveness of the situation both the right and left were arming their supporters to prepare for combat. Korsch was in charge of drilling local members of the KPD to form a proletarian army (*Hundertschaften*). It appeared that any day new revolutionary uprisings would emerge and after much debate the Russian leaders of the Comintern ordered the KPD to prepare for civil war.<sup>49</sup> The opportunity for armed confrontation with the ruling powers soon arrived. On October 10, 1923, the SPD and KPD formed a coalition government in Saxony and three days later they united in Thuringen to form a workers' government. Korsch was named justice minister in Thuringen and began an active political career that was to place him at the center of German politics for the next several years. The new coalition government demanded arms for the workers to protect the government from the danger of invasion by fascist troops from Bavaria. They put out a program calling for, among other things, the nationalization of heavy industry, the regulation of foreign commerce, setting up control commissions and new laws to protect workers, control of the police, and exclusion of reactionaries from public posts. The bourgeoisie panicked.<sup>50</sup>

Although the workers' governments in Saxony and Thuringen were legal constitutional governments formed according to Weimar parliamentary law, the Weimar Reichs government, with the complicity of the SPD, sent the Reichs army into central Germany and threatened to dissolve the Saxony government on the pretext that they refused to abolish their red armies.<sup>51</sup> Korsch called the workers to assemble for armed struggle to protect their government as they had done against the Kapp putsch.<sup>52</sup> He and others called for a general strike and barricades against the advancing government troops. The SPD leaders refused to take this course of action, however, and Brandler and other right-center leaders of the KPD hesitated to recommend any decisive action. As a result, when the Reichswehr arrived, the workers' governments in Saxony and Thuringen collapsed and Reichs troops occupied the region. Korsch was forced to go underground and could only safely emerge when an amnesty was granted. The period of active revolutionary struggle in Germany



was now over and the counterrevolutionary forces were to increase their hegemony and prepare the way for the triumph of fascism.

The debacle of workers' government marked the end of a working-class offensive and began a period of capitalist stabilization. Korsch, as always, drew theoretical-political conclusions from these events. He and the majority of militants in the KPD decided that coalitions with the hopelessly reformist Social Democrats were impossible and decided that a Leninist-type party and tactics were needed to create an efficacious revolutionary movement in Germany. Korsch began a period of thoroughly dogmatic Leninism in which he tried to apply the Leninist theory and practice in every way possible to the situation in Germany. Korsch now sided with the new "left" leadership of Maslow and Fisher, who at the Frankfurt Party Day in April, 1924, urged developing a Leninist line for struggle for state power and urged as the goal the dictatorship of the proletariat under KPD leadership.<sup>55</sup> Ironically, Korsch and his left colleagues' enthusiastic embrace of Leninism and the Bolshevizing of the KPD was to result in the domination of the German movement by the Soviet Union and in the purging of the very left forces who spearheaded the Bolshevization process.

The need for a Leninist party and tactics was believed to be justified by the defeat of the coalition governments and the rise of a new fascist threat. Korsch had concluded in February, 1924, that "fascism" had triumphed over the November Revolution. He describes "fascism" as "the consciously planned counterrevolution of the bourgeoisie that in some lands today is carried along predominantly by lower middle-class groups, while in other lands, like ours, it is led by the upper bourgeoisie themselves and their paid agents . . . this counterrevolution in all its forms we call by the new word fascism, and what we have experienced in the last months was the progressive and consequent attempt to shift this counterrevolution into the saddle . . . and to stabilize it."<sup>56</sup> Korsch subscribed to the "social fascism" thesis that saw the Social Democrats as "nothing but a fraction of German fascism with socialist phraseology" and labeled the whole Social Democratic movement as a species of fascism.<sup>55</sup>

Korsch's acceptance of the "social fascist" thesis, which was to have such disastrous results, was motivated by extreme bitterness over Social Democratic opportunism since November, 1918, and the refusal of the Social Democrats to support any militant revolutionary action. Indeed, in the view of Korsch and others, Social Democratic opportunism and treachery were responsible, at least in part, for a whole string of working-class defeats, from the collapse of the workers' councils movement up to the recent refusal to support any militant action in the October, 1923,

crisis which had resulted in the crushing of the workers' movement in central Germany and the outlawing of the Communist party (after a few months it was again declared legal).<sup>56</sup> In this heated atmosphere it was understandable that Korsch and others would label the Social Democrats as "social fascists." Korsch concluded: "The fateful failure of our politics in the year 1923 consisted entirely in the fact that although we theoretically recognize the identically 'fascistic' nature of Social Democracy and all other bourgeois 'democrats' with Hitler's fascism in virtue of its class content, we failed to draw from this knowledge correct consequences in our practical action with adequate decisiveness."<sup>57</sup> Korsch's agreement with the Comintern fascist theory and concept of social fascism is another sign of his orthodoxy and adherence to the dominant Communist policies and theories at the time.

Korsch saw the Dawes plan in 1924—which would regulate German reparation payments from World War I and would loan foreign capital (mostly American) to German industry—as a tactic to stabilize capitalism and the counterrevolution in Germany. He believed this plan signified increased suffering and exploitation for the German proletariat, who would have to submit to intensified rationalization of labor (speed-ups, technological unemployment, increased domination, etc.) and longer working hours.<sup>58</sup> He agreed with the KPD notion of a "revolutionary total perspective" that portrayed the present as a brief period of calm between "two waves of revolution."<sup>59</sup> The task at hand was thus to prepare for new working-class offensives.

Korsch was rewarded for his defense of Leninism and the Bolshevization of the Communist International with the editorship of the *Internationale*—the major German communist theoretical journal—and a position on the KPD central committee. Hermann Weber writes that in the months after the Frankfurt Party Day (April 7–10, 1924), Korsch was one of the leaders of the KPD and was in charge of ideological affairs: "The actual leaders of the KPD were: for politics Ruth Fisher and (from prison) Maslow, for organization Scholem directed, for foreign politics Rosenberg was responsible, and for the ideological line Korsch, the chief editor of the *Internationale* and Sommer, in charge of Agriprop, was responsible."<sup>60</sup> The period of 1924–27 was a fateful one for the communist movement in which the destinies of the German and Russian Communist parties were ever more closely linked. After the death of Lenin a brutal power struggle was going on in the Soviet Union, while in Germany the old antagonisms between the Communists and Social Democrats, and the left and the right, were intensifying and creating a confusing, complex situation.

Under these difficult conditions, Korsch and others had high hopes that the Communist International would be able to unite the demoralized revolutionary forces. In June and July of 1924, Korsch was a delegate to the Fifth World Congress of the Communist International in Moscow, which posed for itself the task of developing Leninism as a unitary ideological foundation for all parties in the International. Korsch shared the Comintern's aim of carrying out social revolution in Europe "in the spirit of Lenin." His contribution to the Congress, "Lenin and the Comintern," portrays Leninism as the "restored and fulfilled method of revolutionary Marxist science that is essentially the theoretical consciousness of the revolutionary action of the Proletariat class."<sup>61</sup> Korsch attacks the right-center ideologue Thalheimer (who was in charge of ideology under the previous Brandler KPD leadership and whom Korsch thus replaced as chief KPD ideologue) for reducing Marxism to a "purely historical empirical science and practice"—implicitly arguing against Thalheimer that Leninism can also be applied to Germany, that it is not bound to the specific conditions of the Soviet Union (as many German Marxists were arguing), but expresses real historical tendencies of proletarian revolution that also exist in Germany.<sup>62</sup> Korsch also defends the Leninist theory of the party and attacks Rosa Luxemburg for "onesidedness" in ascribing a painful excess of subjectivism to Leninism.<sup>63</sup> Korsch's Leninist orthodoxy here is thoroughgoing.

But the Korsch legend paints another picture. E. H. Carr in his influential history of the Russian revolution falsely claims that Korsch's article, "Lenin and the Comintern," "under the guise of an orthodox attack from the Left on Brandler and the Right, by implication denounced the whole united front policy and the current comintern line as a surrender of the Marxist dialectic of revolution to pragmatism and expediency."<sup>64</sup> According to Carr, the article is part of "the extension of the ultra-left campaign in the KPD against the policies of the Comintern and especially against the tactic of the United Front."<sup>65</sup> Carr's claims are bizarre, for there is no denunciation of the Comintern at all in the article, and in fact, as Carr's own account indicates,<sup>66</sup> the KPD and the Comintern itself sharply turned to the left at the Fifth World Congress and denounced the previous United Front policy—a position Korsch shared. Nor is there any evidence at all to categorize Korsch as part of the ultra-left at the time, as Carr and others are prone to do.<sup>67</sup> On the contrary, a careful reading of "Lenin and the Comintern" should show that far from denouncing the current Comintern line, Korsch is pledging his allegiance to Leninism and the Comintern.

In fact, after the World Congress, Korsch identified the Communist

International and the interests of the world's working classes, with the "proletarian state of Soviet Russia," just as he identified Leninism with the world proletarian struggles (i.e., as their theoretical consciousness): "All measures and actions of Soviet Russia will be dictated by interests of the Communist movement for the liberation of the world proletariat. There is in Russia no dualism between state and proletarian class interests."<sup>68</sup> Moreover, throughout 1924, Korsch continually defended Leninist orthodoxy and attacked the ideological currents which were the main threat to the dominant line. He called for "erecting a protective wall against the revising flood of Communist revisionism," and attacked the "right" revisionism of Thalheimer, as well as the "left" deviations of Trotsky and Luxemburg.<sup>69</sup> In an essay, "Leninism and Trotskysm," Korsch wrote, "along with Luxemburgism, we must exterminate any Trotskysm in us."<sup>70</sup> Thus it is not correct, as Breines claims, that at the time of the Fifth World Congress Korsch "openly sought to articulate and give coherence to the idea of an oppositional theoretical current within the communist movement," and that "Korsch openly defined himself as the propagator of this dissident theoretical current."<sup>71</sup> For there is no evidence that Korsch attempted in his writings, speeches, or political activity to contrast an "oppositional" or "dissident theoretical current" to Leninism, nor had he yet declared himself in opposition to the policies of the Comintern or the KPD leadership.<sup>72</sup> From 1920 to 1925, Korsch consistently defended the Soviet Union as the "bulwark of the revolution," and defended the NEP, the doctrine of socialism in one country, and the identification of the destiny of the Soviet Union with the world revolution.<sup>73</sup> How, then, did the legend arise that already Korsch was in 1923–24 a left-oppositionalist who represented a heretical current at the Fifth World Congress of the Comintern?

First, it is clear in retrospect that *Marxism and Philosophy* and Korsch's theoretical writings present a dialectical version of Marxism that was to conflict in various ways with the developing Soviet orthodoxy, especially in areas of methodology, epistemology, and metaphysics, where the Korsch-Lukács positions contained a critique of the crude Soviet attempts to create an objectivistic "scientific socialism," metaphysical materialism, copy theory of knowledge, and correspondence theory of truth. It is on these grounds that Zinoviev carries out his infamous "critique" of Korsch at the Fifth Congress, which no doubt contributed much to the myth of Korsch as ultra-leftist and creator of an oppositionalist current.<sup>74</sup>

Zinoviev, who headed the Comintern, was allied with Stalin against Trotsky (although he would later change sides). He gave an address at the Congress on "The Struggle against the Ultralefts and Theoretical

Revisionism."<sup>78</sup> This speech represents an attempt by the Bolsheviks to exert ideological hegemony over the world communist movement through a critique of "revisionism" and "deviationism." Zinoviev's "critique" consists mainly of anti-intellectual denunciations of the "professors" (Korsch, Lukács, and others) and the application of derogatory labels like "idealist deviation" to Korsch and Lukács (there was supposed to be some kind of profound connection between "idealist deviations" and "ultra-leftism": Hegel would have smiled). What was happening under the cloak of a "philosophical dispute" was the beginning of the Bolsheviks' heavy-handed attempt to bully all sections of the International into submission to all Bolshevik theories and policies. Korsch and Lukács were two of the first major targets of this strategy which, in a certain sense, both were to submit to out of considerations of party discipline.

As the Congress went on, Zinoviev stepped up his bullying tactics. He offered Korsch, as editor of the *Internationale*, the "friendly advice" "to study Marxism and Leninism," and even went so far as to suggest that the KPD put its journal "in the hands of Marxists," rather than "those who still need to study Marxism."<sup>79</sup> The Bolsheviks were angered that Korsch had allowed an article by Boris (Roninger) to be published which dared to criticize Bukharin and the theory of the labor aristocracy. Bukharin himself took the issue up with Korsch who mildly replied that he had only brought the issue up for discussion. Bukharin curtly replied, "Comrades, we cannot put every piece of garbage up for discussion."<sup>80</sup>

Out of Korsch's confrontation with Bukharin and Zinoviev, no doubt, emerged the left-oppositionalist myth. The myth was fueled by (unsubstantiated) rumors that Korsch cried out from the floor "Soviet imperialism" during a speech at the Congress.<sup>81</sup> Fred Halliday contributes a story that "the Comintern Congress revealed Korsch's growing break with the Fisher-Maslow group. They later allied themselves with the Russian leadership while Korsch formed an opposition bloc with the Italian left faction led by Bordiga."<sup>82</sup> This is nonsense, for not only was Korsch supporting the Fisher-Maslow leadership at the time, he was part of the leadership. Although Korsch met Bordiga at the Congress there is no evidence that they thought of forming an international opposition bloc, nor did they actually do so later.<sup>83</sup> The facts are that Korsch actually sided with the Soviets and the KPD leadership on all major political issues at the time, and suppressed his theoretical differences with the newly emerging Bolshevik orthodoxy.

One might wonder from what theoretical position Korsch could support Leninism and the Bolshevization of the Communist International. Surely in 1924 he could perceive the detrimental features of the domin-

ation of the German Communist movement by the Soviet Union that he was later to attack. Hedda Korsch writes:

He was growing increasingly concerned about developments in Russia and especially so after the death of Lenin. He had always had doubts, of course. But in Thuringia the KPD was strong and large, and the local comrades were very good people, willing to sacrifice personal comfort, money, time, jobs, for the class struggle. There were lots of meetings and commissions and all that. Then directives began to come more and more from Moscow, saying what was to be discussed at meetings and what resolutions were to be put to them. Whereas during the early 1920's, the rank-and-file felt that they themselves forged their actions, the international leadership now began to interfere and direct everything. But Karl still thought that the KPD was the only party that still tried to *fight* in any way. There was no question of the Social Democrats doing that. So he stayed in the party.<sup>84</sup>

If the negative effects of Bolshevization were so manifest, why did Korsch so assiduously toe the party line throughout 1924 and much of 1925?

The answer lies in the form of revolutionary historicism that underlies Korsch's theoretical position. We have seen that revolutionary theory for Korsch is an expression of revolutionary struggle. Leninism, Korsch believed, was the expression of revolutionary struggle in the age of imperialism and was embodied in the most revolutionary tendencies in the Soviet Union, Germany and elsewhere in the world. Since Leninism was the expression of the actuality of the revolution it was a real existent material force: revolutionary reality. Korsch's version of revolutionary historicism drove him to identify with and support those tendencies which represented real forces of revolution. It should be noted that this is far from being a left-oppositionalist position which puts theory above history and reality, and criticizes a situation because it fails to meet the demands of theory. Rather, theory is judged through its power in advancing the interests of the working class, in overcoming capitalism, and its ability to translate itself into socialist reality. Leninism, Korsch believed, had provided the correct theory and strategy that made possible the Russian Revolution and had become reality in the Soviet Union. This historicist position led Korsch to affirm Leninism as revolutionary theory and the Soviet Union—the embodiment of Leninism—as revolutionary reality. Moreover, Korsch's theory of Marxism as the expression of the historical forces of revolution should indicate that Korsch's Leninist period

was no mere accident or tactical maneuver to advance himself in the party, but was a logical consequence of his theory of history, of Marxism, and of revolution in an era in which the current forces of revolution identified themselves as Leninist. The limits of both this theory and Leninism itself were soon forced upon Korsch by the ruthless Stalinization of the Soviet and German Communist movements.

### *Korsch in the Left Opposition*

Both the German and Soviet Communist parties became engaged in bitter, internecine party struggles in 1925. The German party had refused coalitions with the Social Democrats and in the 1925 election ran their own candidate "Teddy" Thälmann.<sup>82</sup> Since no candidate had received the requisite majority there was to be a run-off election. The right chose the reactionary General Hindenberg as their candidate, and the Communists had to decide whether to join in a coalition with the Social Democrats to oppose the "monarchist danger" or to continue their rejection of united fronts and run their own candidate again. The party was bitterly divided on this issue and after acrimonious debates decided, with the Comintern's prodding, to support the Social Democrat candidate. But the Social Democrats had decided to support a center party candidate, and this was too much for the Communists, who decided to run Thälmann again.

In a close vote, Hindenberg won the election and the SPD accused the Communists of having helped Hindenberg gain power by their failure to support the left-center candidate.<sup>83</sup> The "left" leaders Fisher and Maslow supported by the Comintern now urged the KPD to enter a new united front under the slogan of the "monarchist danger."<sup>84</sup> Korsch was elected to the Reichstag in July 1924, and continued as editor of the *Internationale*. At this point, the Soviet Union intensified their Machiavellian machinations to control the KPD through purging independent, non-submissive members. Their tactic was to first support the "left" leadership of Fisher and Maslow, who were pushing the "new Line" (capitalist stabilization, monarchist danger, united front) that was outraging the ultra-left. They were then able to isolate and purge the extreme left, and when the process was underway they abandoned Maslow and Fisher who were included in the left purges!<sup>85</sup>

Although Korsch did not join the first wave of left oppositionists who opposed the "new line," the Comintern leaders began attacking Korsch

and demanded his removal from the *Internationale*. Bela Kun, in charge of the Agitprop division of the Comintern, wrote the KPD Central Committee a letter ordering them to tighten controls over the journal, particularly in regard to the "Russian question."<sup>86</sup> Korsch offered to resign but his comrades unanimously urged him to stay on: evidence that Korsch had not fallen out with the KPD leadership and that the attacks against him were initiated by the Comintern. Evidently the Stalinists felt they could deal more easily with table-pounding prolos like Thälmann than with intelligent, honorable intellectuals like Korsch. Under continued attack from Kun and other Stalinist hatchetmen, Korsch finally resigned with a parting shot at Kun, who, "from whatever grounds, accuses those out of favor Party comrades as being pigs who are enemies of the Party and who treats their works as crap."<sup>87</sup>

After being removed from the *Internationale* and the KPD Central Committee, Korsch began developing a critique that would eventually get him expelled from the party and push him into the forefront of the left-opposition. In a subtle but forceful critique of the united front policy, he wrote an article, "Karl Marx on Republic and Monarchy," which argued that for Marx the natural ally of the proletariat is not necessarily the "republican" strata of the bourgeoisie in the struggle against monarchy.<sup>88</sup> He cited Marx's point that the workers must learn that "the slightest improvement of its situation remains a *utopia within* the bourgeois republic—a utopia that becomes a crime as soon as it wants to realize itself."<sup>89</sup> The real choice, Korsch suggested, was not between republic and monarchy, but between the rule of the bourgeoisie or their overthrow in creating the dictatorship of the proletariat, understood as a "red councils republic."<sup>90</sup> Hence for Korsch the real choice was between Lenin or Hindenberg.

In a discussion group in Weimar in June, 1925, Korsch rejected the thesis—pushed by the Comintern and their KPD allies—that there was a distinctive difference between the purportedly feudal land-owning class and industrial capitalist class in Germany, and that the proletariat should side with the more progressive capitalists to destroy the last remnants of feudalism. Korsch argued that there was no more feudalism in Germany and that both capitalist classes carried out their quest for profit on the basis of capitalist relations of production; thus, he maintained, the real class struggle in Germany was between the proletariat and bourgeoisie. Implicit in this analysis was the claim that the united front policy based on the need to unite with the progressive bourgeoisie to fight the monarchist and feudal elements was a surrender of the revolutionary per-

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spective and was based on a false analysis of the situation in Germany. Buckmiller claims that at this conference Korsch for the first time can be characterized as "ultra-left."<sup>91</sup>

Before discussing the series of purges that was to eliminate Korsch from Communist politics and practically destroy the German Communist movement, let us pause a moment to pose the question of when Korsch first openly joined the left opposition. I have argued against the "Korsch myth" that he was a member of a left opposition from the moment he joined the Communist party in 1920 by examining his essays and speeches and newspaper articles which indicate he was an enthusiastic advocate of the union of the USPD with the KPD in 1920, totally supported the Soviet Union, and became a convinced Leninist who supported the Bolshevikization of the KPD. I have attempted to show that there is no evidence that Korsch took a left oppositionalist position at the Fifth World Comintern Congress, nor is there evidence that he was developing an "oppositional theoretical current." None of his writings from 1920-1925 contain any critique of the Soviet Union and all adhere faithfully to Leninism. I have been able to find no evidence that Korsch openly opposed the political position or the leadership of the Soviet Union, Comintern, or KPD until September, 1925. Although he no doubt opposed the "new course" of the KPD ratified at the party Congress in July 1925 that urged a united front against the "monarchist danger," he did not join the left opposition at that time (represented by Scholem, Katz, Rosenberg, and others) and thus did not openly oppose the policy.<sup>92</sup> Hence Halliday is wrong to state that "In February 1925 he was dismissed from the editorship of *Die Internationale* and from then onwards was in declared opposition to the Party leadership."<sup>93</sup> And Bathrick's assertion that "Beginning in 1924, first as editor of the KPD's central organ *Die Internationale*, and finally as a member of various splinter groups outside the Party itself, Korsch waged an unending battle against Russian domination of the German Communist movement" is also unfounded.<sup>94</sup> The facts are that it was not until the publication of the so-called open letter of the Executive Committee of the Comintern to the KPD in late August, 1925, that Korsch openly joined the left opposition and waged his "unending battle" against Stalinists.

Herrmann Weber describes the publication of the "open letter" as the third decisive turning point in the history of the KPD (after the union with the USPD in 1920 and the dissolution of the "right" Brandler leadership after the defeats in 1923).<sup>95</sup> The letter from the Soviet Union to their German "comrades" contained a detailed critique of the German left-leadership (Fisher, Maslow, etc.) and in effect demanded a new

leadership and closer conformity to Russian policies. This letter hit the German movement like a bombshell and drove Korsch and others who had their doubts about openly attacking the Soviet leaders into resolute opposition. The open letter had the effect of shattering the German movement into various factions and thus contributed to the attempt of the Russian Communists to totally dominate the German party.

Korsch aggressively came out as a left oppositionalist for the first time at a party conference in Frankfurt on September 6, 1925, a few days after the publication of the open letter. He energetically attacked the line of the new KPD leadership (the Thälmann-Dengler group) that in the case of a conflict of interests between the Soviet Union and the Communist International, the revolutionary politics of the KPD must be dampened to accord with Soviet interests. Korsch reportedly described this policy as "red imperialism" and was promptly attacked by the Communist newspapers as a traitor "whose views coincide completely with the inflammatory articles of the Social Democratic and imperialist press."<sup>96</sup> Korsch denied that he was "anti-Bolshevik" and argued that his position was misrepresented; he even repeated his belief that the Soviet Union was the "bulwark of the revolution."<sup>97</sup> He continued, however, to be slandered in the vilest terms by the Stalinist hacks. The party newspaper *Die Rote Fabrik* characterized him successively as "a victim of Social Democratic propaganda" (September 19, 1925); an enemy of the Soviet Union (September 22); a traitor who was part of an "anti-Bolshevik" bloc (September 23), and so on until Korsch was made a symbol of the enemy of communism and driven out of the party.

Korsch was one of the first victims of the new Stalinist smear and purge tactics that were to eliminate many of the most dedicated Marxists from the Russian and German revolutionary movement. In a remarkable display of power politics Stalin and his allies in the KPD were to eliminate all opposition and to splinter the Communist movement into a comico-tragic battleground of warring factions and sects.<sup>98</sup> In February, 1925, Stalin personally intervened in German affairs for the first time. He gave an interview to a German Communist, Herzog, and attacked Ruth Fisher, who was progressively losing the leadership position she had held since 1923-24. Stalin also sent a letter to her left comrade, Maslow, who was still in prison in Berlin, lecturing Comrade Maslow on party affairs.<sup>99</sup> Fisher and Maslow refused to submit to Stalin's heavy-handed power plays and the inner circle of Soviet leaders pressured the Germans in summer, 1925, to form a new "Leninist central committee" with representatives from all tendencies under the leadership of the "honorable proletarian Thälmann." They urged that proletarian workers

and loyal party members be given the top leadership posts and that intellectuals, literati, and bohemians be excluded! At this time the inquisitions and purges that were to so horrendously stain the Communist cause began. Further, the Stalinist bag of dirty tricks was developing. Ruth Fisher was called to Moscow for "consultation" and "invited" to stay for ten months during the period Stalin wanted to install his favorites in the leadership of the KPD. Strange secret diplomacy was taking place between the Stalinist clique and German imperialists that would produce in 1925 the Soviet-German friendship treaty (and ultimately the Stalin-Hitler pact in 1939). Opponents or enemies of Stalin were sent to foreign embassies or to Siberia, and the secret police began to step up their activities; the Gulag archipelago was in business. The Stalinist apparatus of spies, police, and bureaucratic entrenchment was being developed, allowing generations of anti-Communists to gleefully identify communism with totalitarian dictatorship. The "Stalinization" of the German Communist party, parallel to the process in the Soviet Union, constituted a decisive change from a party organization that had been from the beginning relatively democratic, independent of the Soviet Union, open, and full of all tendencies from "left" to "right."<sup>100</sup> Now a "monolithic party of a new sort" was being constructed that became in effect a tool of the Stalinist leadership and the Soviet Union.<sup>101</sup>

Korsch was meanwhile becoming a nonentity in Communist circles. The party newspapers attacked him constantly and refused to print his articles. He was heckled by goon squads when he tried to speak out at Communist rallies, or was not allowed to participate in party discussions. Either by choice or interdiction he did not participate in the November 1, 1925, Party Congress that officially voted the Thälmann leadership in and the Fisher-Maslow out.<sup>102</sup> At about this time Korsch made contact with various left-oppositionalists and attended an ultra-left conference in Hanover in January, 1926. Weber reports: "At this conference there were distinctive differences of opinion; Scholem, Rosenberg, and their followers turned away from the sharp demands that were raised above all by Korsch and Schwartz who not only directed heavy attacks against the Soviet Union and the Comintern, but also called for unconditional work with Katz in order to preserve the unity of the ultra-left. Scholem and Rosenberg believed that such a position would lead to the split of the KPD and were therefore against it. After a sharp exchange of words, Scholem, Rosenberg, and their followers left the conference."<sup>103</sup> Korsch and his remaining friends formed a group called the "decisive left" (*die Entschiedene Linke*).

Korsch did not want to splinter the left opposition. Of the left opposition, he was one of the least sectarian and tried to continuously work for the unity of the left, first inside and then outside of the party. When Katz and two hundred supporters stormed the printing office of the Communist newspaper in Hanover after they refused to publish his views, and was subsequently kicked out of the party—the first ultra-leftist to be purged—Korsch tried to work with Katz and his newly formed Spartacusbund, although at the same time he signed a document with other leftists on the Katz question which affirmed the slogan: "No step against the Party! Unconditional recognition of party discipline. . . . All for the unity of the Party!"<sup>104</sup> Korsch even agreed to work with the Fisher-Maslow group against the wishes of Schwartz and others. To provide an organ for their views, Korsch and his fellow leftists began to publish a journal, *Kommunistische Politik*, in March, 1926, which was largely edited and financed by Korsch.<sup>105</sup> On April 2, 1926, the "decisive left" met to discuss oppositional strategy and the KPD central committee "concentrated their struggle against the Korsch-Schwartz group," directing their main artillery against Korsch.<sup>106</sup>

The left and the Stalinists struggled throughout Germany for control of local party organizations and there were even street battles between the followers of the Thälmann central committee and left-oppositionalists.<sup>107</sup> It is difficult to estimate how large the left opposition was. The Katz/Spartacusbund oppositionist Pfemfert estimated that "the KPD opposition represented about half of the Party."<sup>108</sup> Ruth Fisher said she had never received such enthusiastic response from party members than when she openly joined the opposition and started attacking the Stalinists.<sup>109</sup> Stalin numbered the German left opposition at around 12,000 in the summer of 1927 (about 10 percent of the KPD membership).<sup>110</sup> The German party had splintered at the time into about ten factions, and the left opposition was splintering itself into countless warring sects. Nonetheless, there were enough left oppositionalists to pose a serious threat to the hegemony of the Stalinists. Now at the center of the left opposition, Korsch was to develop the most penetrating critique of the "theories" that the Stalinists were using to legitimize their activities, and was to focus on the degeneration of the revolution in the Soviet Union under the Stalinists. The Bolsheviks in turn began to wage an all-out campaign against Professor Korsch, whom Zinoviev now described as a "wild gewordene Kleinbürger" (a petty bourgeois gone mad).<sup>111</sup>

The platform of the Korsch-Schwartz group published in April, 1926, began by attacking the "relative stabilization of capitalism" thesis which

the Stalinists used to justify their "right" united front policy. Korsch's group discerned tendencies toward destabilization and crisis which indicated to them that "all objective elements for a concrete revolutionary politics" are on hand.<sup>112</sup> They urged intensified struggle to gain "revolutionary control of production" and attacked the "parliamentary cretinism" of the KPD, urging the workers to struggle for the control of production "supported by revolutionary workers' councils."<sup>113</sup> Korsch and his colleagues were returning to the workers' councils concept that they had previously relegated to a secondary position in their commitment to the party and participation in party politics. Actually Korsch had never abandoned the workers' councils concept, which he was to defend as the authentic organ of socialism until the end of his life.

Although the platform designated the winning of the majority of the most advanced sections of the working class as their goal, Korsch's group also hoped to mobilize the millions of unemployed and other oppressed classes.<sup>114</sup> They took a broad internationalist perspective and called for the support and unity of "all exploited groups, the poor farmers in Russia, the oppressed people of India and Africa, all parts of the middle classes in Europe and America."<sup>115</sup> *Kommunistische Politik* devoted several articles to revolution in China and what is today called the Third World; Korsch was to consistently maintain a broad internationalist revolutionary perspective.<sup>116</sup> In August, 1926, Korsch and his friends were to call for a "new Zimmerwald" conference that would unite into an international left opposition movement all opponents of Stalinism under Lenin's motto, "Against the Stream." Korsch, in fact, continuously worked toward the unity of the left opposition and he must have been bitterly disappointed at the continual factionalism and splintering.

In short, the *Kommunistische Politik* group wanted to "restore" authentic Marxist theory and practice, both of which they believed were being perverted by the Soviet and German Stalinists. They argued that the KPD and Comintern were taking Social Democratic positions on the most important questions, and were engaged in the same reformist practice and falling prey to the same dislocation between theory and practice that had vitiated the Social Democrats. Moreover, the lack of "party democracy" and freedom of discussion were further destroying the very fiber of the communist movement. Above all, the submission of the KPD to the hegemony of the Soviet Union was destroying the German party by involving it in the bizarre interparty struggles going on in the Soviet Union. These criticisms were not received with equanimity by the Stalinists.

### *The Expulsion from the Party*

In February, 1926, the Comintern set up a "German Commission" to study the "German question" and called a conference to answer Korsch and the left opposition's critique of the Soviet Union. Bukharin and Stalin spoke. Bukharin made Korsch his target. He claimed Korsch's thesis of a "State necessity" that sacrificed the interests of the world proletariat to the Soviet Union's interests was a "phantom of the brain" and "had nothing in common with communism."<sup>117</sup> He claimed that the alleged turn to the right was "absolutely slanderous and untrue." The ideas of the left opposition were, in left disguise, "a really half Social Democratic, half bourgeois ideology" and must therefore "be exterminated root and branch."<sup>118</sup> Stalin, in his first appearance before the Comintern, said he wanted to register his "complete solidarity" with the "excellent speech" of Comrade Bukharin and warned the comrades against the ideas of the "Speisbürgerlichen Philosophen Korsch" (the petty bourgeois philosopher).<sup>119</sup> Stalin defended the Central Committee of the KPD as a "truly Leninist committee" and said that the fact it was lacking in theoreticians was "no great unhappiness." Intellectuals who stir up trouble should be "thrown to the devil"! All "ultra-left sickness" must be rooted out and the party must be restored to (proletarian) health.<sup>120</sup> This was a typical Stalinist use of anti-intellectualism and invective to bully one's opponents into submission.

Korsch stepped up his attack on the Soviet Union and the process of Stalinization which he perceived was at the root of the degeneration of the Communist movement. He was invited to present his views at a conference in Berlin on April 16-17, 1926. He was literally fighting for his political life, as Thälmann had announced to his face in public that "The patience of the party is exhausted. We shall find ways and means to totally liquidate you."<sup>121</sup> In the remarkable speech, "The Way of the Comintern," which Korsch gave to a hostile audience under tense conditions, he began by saying that he was going to pose "the basic questions of revolution" and to avoid the pseudo-questions that had muddled previous debates. He wished to make clear his "oppositional position" that had been so badly distorted and slandered in the party press. He challenged his audience that they could have a "pogrom or discussion" and if they wanted a discussion they should focus on the issues he was raising.<sup>122</sup>

Korsch argued that the main issue was a decisive turn in the policy of the Comintern that required posing the "Russian question," which the Stalinists had attempted to veil over and suppress. The problem was



a degeneration of the revolution in the Soviet Union itself. Every attempt had been made, Korsch claimed, to cover over the "struggle between two tendencies": "a peasant-oriented, opportunist tendency," supported by Stalin and Bukharin, and "a worker-oriented revolutionary counter-tendency," supported by the Leningrad workers' group and Zinoviev. The great danger was that "within our Soviet brother party, opportunism has already gained the upper hand."<sup>123</sup> Stalin's thesis of "socialism in one country" and his opportunist politics were condemned as a "falsification of true Leninist theory."<sup>124</sup> To combat this degeneration, Korsch agreed with Bordiga that "the European parties are the best guardians against the opportunist danger in Russia."<sup>125</sup> In Korsch's view, it was the duty of the KPD to discuss the "Russian question" which the Bolsheviks had ordered them to suppress.

Korsch argued that the roots of Soviet opportunism were a "degeneration of Leninist theory" that could be compared to the revisionism of Bernstein and Kautsky after the war: "One can best characterize the essence of this new phase of development of the Marxist-Leninist theory" of Stalin and Bukharin as "Bernsteinism" and "Kautskyism" after the seizure of power."<sup>126</sup> In a devastating display of the similarity of Stalinism to Social Democratic theory and practice, Korsch read from an article in the leading German Communist newspaper that praised the Austrian Social Democrat Otto Bauer's recent work as "a great 'victory' for our Communist-Leninist standpoint"<sup>127</sup>—as if Bauer had converted to the Communist standpoint. Through a careful dissection of Bauer's article, Korsch showed the incorrigibly Social Democratic reformist nature of Bauer's position and unmasked the theoretical corruption of Communist "theoreticians" who could publish this and praise it as compatible with a genuine Marxist-Leninist point of view.<sup>128</sup> This degeneration of Communist theory expressed itself above all in a suppression of "The question of the final goal of Communism and the revolutionary way to this goal."<sup>129</sup> Korsch concluded, "All good Communists must in this period take the clear and decisive position: No Kautskyst glossing over of antitheses, but serious struggle aiming at the complete defeat and annihilation of the opportunist and reformist tendency that is currently advancing."<sup>130</sup>

The party leadership responded to this stinging critique with the demand that Korsch give up his seat in the Reichstag. Korsch refused, saying that he must first discuss the matter with his friends.<sup>131</sup> This was taken as a provocation and "open faction-building," and Korsch was thrown out of the meeting. The "resolute left" was holding a meeting the same day with other left oppositional groups and the Communists

discussed expelling all the "ultra-lefts" from the party. The oppositionalists were labeled "anti-Bolsheviks" and Korsch's attempt to work together with other leftists in the Comintern, such as the Norwegian, Hansen, and Bordiga, was condemned as particularly damnable. The Stalinists concluded: "It must be demanded that this plague of boils (*Pestbeule*) be cut out."<sup>132</sup>

At the end of April, 1926, the central committee of the KPD undertook a campaign to throw Korsch out of the party and to make him a symbol of the enemy of communism.<sup>133</sup> The party demanded again that Korsch give up his Reichstag seat and Korsch refused, responding, "I am convinced that the present leadership of the KPD is leading the party to the right and is following a line that is increasingly opportunist and that is an uncommunist and unleninist politics. It is at the same time a suppression through a regime of ideological terror and police methods of all the remains of party democracy that were present up to now, to the degree that the struggle for the resurrection of a Communist politics within the party is almost no longer possible at all."<sup>134</sup> The German party leadership swiftly voted Korsch out in May when he refused to go along with the party in supporting the Soviet-German friendship treaty. The decision was confirmed by the Comintern on June 26, 1926. Korsch was now totally outside the party that he had worked for with such dedication since 1920.

Korsch sharpened his attack against the Soviet Union and the Stalinist leadership. The Soviet Union was no longer a "proletarian dictatorship," but a "dictatorship against the proletariat, a dictatorship of Kulaks." The Comintern was termed a "czarist, bonapartist apparatus" of violence with "prussian-wilhelmish" features. The true anti-bolsheviks are the leaders of the Soviet Union, the Comintern, and the KPD who have betrayed true Leninist-Bolshevist principles and are thus traitors to the proletariat.<sup>135</sup> In a Reichstag speech against the German-Russian treaty, Korsch evoked Rosa Luxemburg's warning against the "most terrible and uncanny specter" imaginable: "a treaty of the Bolsheviks with the Germans," suggesting that the Soviet pact with German imperialism was a total sell-out of the revolutionary perspective and "paved the way for an August, 1914, for the Third International."<sup>136</sup> In a speech in the Reichstag on June 25, 1927, Korsch took up the plight of the persecuted workers' opposition in the Soviet Union and criticized Stalin's "red terror": "With all principled affirmation of revolutionary red terror as the last, most extreme means of struggle of a threatened revolution against an immediate, present, dangerous attack of counterrevolution (which Rosa Luxemburg also approved of); nonetheless, every insightful

worker-revolutionary must know how double-edged this terror-weapon is. In general the revolutionary class is always only the object of terror, although in exceptional cases utilizes terror when there remains no other way for the revolution. But the revolutionary worker's class has no reason whatsoever to sing the hymn of terror"<sup>137</sup> (as the Stalinists were doing). After condemning the red terror, Korsch argued that the Stalinist justification of red terror on the grounds that a "United Front from Chamberlin to Trotsky" existed which was threatening the existence of the Soviet Union was total "nonsense" (*Wahnsinn*).<sup>138</sup>

In a detailed and penetrating examination of "Ten Years of Class Struggle in the Soviet Union," Korsch turned his historical materialist method to the Soviet Union. The essay is a model of critical reflection and provides a sharp criticism of the degeneration of the revolution under Stalin. It is important to note that Korsch did not ever undialectically reject the Russian Revolution. Rather, his focus was on the class struggles that he saw going on in the Soviet Union from the beginning and which took, after Lenin's death, the form of a struggle between opportunistic, counterrevolutionary forces (represented by Stalin and his various allies) and genuine, proletarian revolutionary forces (represented at different times by the workers' opposition, Zinoviev, and Trotsky).<sup>139</sup> Like Marx in his analysis of class struggle in France, Korsch did not want to reduce political conflict to "personal power struggles between ambitious cliques of leaders."<sup>140</sup> Rather, he wanted to reveal the "*hidden material interests and social classes and class factions which represented and fought for these interests*."<sup>141</sup> For Korsch, the "ten years of Soviet Russia" should be seen as "*a period of new and a new kind of class struggle*."<sup>142</sup> From the beginning, the revolutionary proletarian forces had to struggle against those who wanted a "bourgeois agrarian revolution in Russia." From the beginning, the "dictatorship of the proletariat" had to exercise "state repression" against the previously ruling local bourgeoisie and an external defensive war against the capitalist powers, thus introducing "new forms of class struggle."<sup>143</sup> This process of defending the "Soviet fatherland" gave rise to a new contradiction that would fatefully plague the subsequent development of the Soviet Union and would have dire consequences for the entire international revolutionary movement: the contradiction between "revolutionary state necessity" and "proletarian class necessity."<sup>144</sup> This "objective contradiction" was to force/allow Lenin in the early 1920's to reject the demands of the workers' opposition and Trotsky to use the Red Army to crush workers' revolts. It then served to justify an increasingly centralized dictatorship of the party and diminution of the Soviets when the NEP replaced the previous "war commu-

nism." Then Stalin's version of the slogan "socialism in one country" was used to justify the suppression and purging of the revolutionary opposition and the construction of a counterrevolutionary state apparatus and party politics on both a national and international scale. Hence Korsch concluded that the revolutionary working class had suffered "an almost unbroken chain of defeats, including the Brest-Litovsk treaty, the 1920/1 suppression of the Leningrad workers opposition, the crushing of the Kronstadt uprising, the purging of the Trotskyists in 1923/4, the purging of the left opposition in 1925/6, and Stalin's recent victory over the Trotsky-Zinoviev left-oppositionalist bloc."<sup>145</sup> This meant that the counterrevolution had triumphed in the Soviet Union and had "sacrificed the proletarian revolution of Red October" through the erection of a "new capitalistic class state."<sup>146</sup> Or, to put it differently, the interests of the large farmers (the kulaks), the remnants of the bourgeoisie, and the Stalinist elements in the party-state apparatus had triumphed over the revolutionary working-class forces.

The triumph of the "bourgeois counterrevolution" in Russia was seen by Korsch as part of a world-wide resurrection of bourgeois power and the capitalist economy after its near collapse in World War I, from which had arisen a series of revolutionary struggles in Russia, Germany, Hungary, and other countries that took a bitter and intense form. Although at times the class struggles seemed to signal the triumph of socialist revolution on a world scale, the high tide of revolution (1917-1920) receded, and starting around 1921 the forces of counterrevolution began their world-wide offensive on the basis of a "*changing of the economic situation itself and the power relationships conditioned by it*."<sup>147</sup> With the restoration of capitalism in Europe and return to power of the bourgeoisie "*there was a wide-ranging transformation in the fundamental conditions under which all the international proletariat, as well as the Russian proletariat, had to fight their struggles in the newly beginning period*."<sup>148</sup> Hence the defeat of the Russian proletariat was part of a series of defeats suffered by the proletariat on a world-wide scale. Further, the counterrevolution in Russia was part of an international counterrevolution which on the basis of a relatively stabilized capitalism had reinforced bourgeois domination.<sup>149</sup> The task was now to gather from defeat the remaining revolutionary forces "to win new powers for future struggles so as to transform the current defeat into a final victory."<sup>150</sup>

### *The Rejection of Leninism*

Korsch's critique of the Soviet Union—up to this point—was carried out from a Leninist perspective. Stalinism was seen as a degeneration of Leninism, a perversion of Leninist revolutionary practice. As Buckmiller points out, "Korsch continued to deeply identify with the theory and practice of Lenin."<sup>152</sup> Korsch's call for a "new Zimmerwald" that would gather together all genuinely revolutionary forces to fight the degeneration taking place on the left was parallel to Lenin's Zimmerwald position in 1915–16 when he called for a restoration of genuine proletarian internationalism. Korsch, like Lenin, attempted to gather all left-oppositionalist forces. Unfortunately, Korsch's call for work with "all left groups within or outside the KPD, including the KAP," and his solidarity with Zinoviev and the left-opposition in the Soviet Union only served to splinter the left opposition in Germany which maintained more "purist," sectarian positions. In fact one of the left-oppositionalist groups split with Korsch's group because they claimed Korsch wanted to be a new Lenin!<sup>153</sup>

Korsch's identification with Leninism at the time was not based on belief in the unshakable "truth" of the Leninist theory but rather arose from solidarity with the Leninist forces: those workers and groups who in the name of Leninism carried out actual revolutionary struggles. He saw a struggle taking place in Europe from about 1921–1928 between Leninist revolutionary forces and counterrevolutionary forces, and supported the revolutionary forces and thus Leninism. His critique of Stalinism as a counterrevolutionary opportunistic tendency was thus carried out from the standpoint of a Leninism rooted in the left-oppositionalist forces to Stalin in the Soviet Union and in the world Communist movement. It was only after the definite defeat of the left-revolutionary forces in the Soviet Union and Europe, who proclaimed themselves the true heirs of Leninism, that Korsch began to put Leninism itself in question. He concluded that Leninism had become an ideology utilized for counter-revolutionary purposes (by the Stalinists) and that therefore the time had come to "cut the umbilical cord to Leninism."

Korsch began the process of detaching himself from Leninism in a remarkable essay, "The Second Party," his most detailed analysis of the crisis in the Soviet Union and its import for the world revolutionary movement.<sup>154</sup> He begins by noting how the Fifteenth Party Day of the Communist party in the Soviet Union (December 2–19, 1927) had revealed an open split between Stalin and the left opposition (Trotsky, Zinoviev, the Sapronov group, etc.).<sup>154</sup> Korsch carefully examines the

programs of the various Soviet opposition groups ("the second party") and indicates how their demands that the working class receive better working conditions, higher wages, more education and training, more meaningful work, and so forth might seem merely "reformist."<sup>155</sup> But in Korsch's view: "What appears in its abstract content as inadequate and 'reformist' demands of the oppositional 'workers' program loses immediately its seemingly reformist character as soon as one considers it just a little marxistically; that is, historically, concretely, and in the context of the real struggles of the Russian working class."<sup>156</sup> In the context of the struggle against Stalinism and the degeneration of Socialism in the Soviet Union, the demands of the left opposition are genuinely revolutionary because "the objective content of the demands which they raise must break through in the end the dominating party and state ideology."<sup>157</sup> Here for the first time since the early 1920's, Korsch juxtaposes revolutionary workers' struggles to a non-revolutionary state and party ideology, thus beginning to question the Leninist theory of the party and state. He argues that the opposition has "*the function of representing the real class interest of the Russian proletariat against the Soviet State ruled by the Communist party.*"<sup>158</sup> But if this "second party" wants to solve the immense problems it faces, it must "break the umbilical cord through which its leaders—even the clearest and most consequent among them—have been chained up until this day to the 'Leninist' theory of the past."<sup>159</sup> Korsch is now—and not before now—the thoroughgoing oppositionalist of the Korsch legend. Leninism is now rejected as an ideology of the past, a chain and fetter on the working class movement, an umbilical cord that must be snapped to move forward into a new era of revolutionary struggle. Before breaking the cord, Korsch pays last homage to the old master, praising Lenin's "powerful historical achievement" and explaining that "all the Russian proletariat and with them the entire class conscious revolutionary vanguard of the international proletariat had to be Leninist in the past."<sup>160</sup> But the past is the past and Leninism has degenerated into a "Leninist ideology" full of "illusions" and "deceptive images" (*Trugbildern*). Thus, as Korsch put it in his 1930 reflections on Marxism and philosophy, "the Leninist theory is not theoretically capable of answering the practical needs of the international class struggle in the present period."<sup>161</sup>

A bitter irony in the whole situation is that those who call themselves Leninists in the Soviet Union have forgotten, or suppressed, Lenin's two fundamental propositions on the situation in the Soviet Union: "1. the theoretical proposition that as a concrete task in Russia only the bourgeois revolution stands for the time being on the day's agenda; and 2. the

*tactical principle* that the task of the Russian proletariat and its revolutionary party can only consist of carrying through the bourgeois revolution under these historical circumstances."<sup>162</sup> Korsch argues that both the Stalinists and the oppositionalists who stress the proletarian character of the October revolution are creating a "socialism legend."

Korsch now argued that Leninism was first used to hasten the development of capitalism and industrialization in Russia and to create the myth that the Soviet Union was socialist. Then after Lenin's death, Leninism degenerated further into a "legitimizing tool" of the Stalinist leadership that functioned to occlude the real situation in the Soviet Union and to enslave the working class. This being the case, the demand to "restore the pure teaching of Lenin" (against Stalin's and Bukharin's falsification) "is completely useless and in its results is a reactionary effort."<sup>163</sup> For the "Leninist" ideology of the still existing 'revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat' and the always 'stormily' progressing 'construction of socialism in Soviet Russia' has long become a legend, and at the same time has become a consciously utilized means of holding back the workers, not only in their conscious struggles for their independent class goals that have not been satisfied by the bourgeois transformation, but also in their struggle for their most immediate life-interests. For these reasons a break with this 'Leninist' ideology, which has developed at last into a fetter on the proletarian class struggle, is an immediate and pressing necessity."<sup>164</sup> Hence Korsch urges the Soviet opposition—and all other oppositionalists—to carry out "an *immediate and total break* with Leninism which—whatever its character in the past—has today in its content and function become a seemingly classless but in reality *bourgeois and anti-proletarian state ideology*."<sup>165</sup>

Korsch had now broken completely with Leninism. He was and would remain the great left-oppositionalist revered by the anti-Leninists. Korsch's break must have been difficult and painful and was performed in a moment of defeat and not raging glory. At the moment he was urging the left opposition to break with Leninism, the left opposition in the Soviet Union was defeated by Stalin and the German left opposition was hopelessly fragmented. Korsch sardonically recorded this fact with the cynical Stalinist announcement that "such a second party already is present in Russia but only in the prisons . . . in Siberia, in illegality, and in emigration."<sup>166</sup>

Korsch concluded "The Second Party" with the plea that the working class should no longer wage their struggles within the Communist party but should develop a truly communist politics outside the party: "Our task consists in destroying that dead 'communism' that lives on as a de-

pressing and often idiotic specter in today's proletarian workers' movement; sending it to its death and carrying on with double energy today's *contemporary and real struggles of the working class* that are already beginning with perceptible new power."<sup>167</sup> Heroic and fine sounding words, but who was to carry on these new struggles, where were the new powers that were to carry out the struggles outside the communist party? "Here is Rhodes, leap here," Korsch concluded; "There is Marxism and Leninism and there is real *communist politics* under today's given conditions."<sup>168</sup> Tragically, Korsch could not really envisage a "second party" and real Communist politics in Germany outside of the KPD because of the disarray of the left opposition in Germany. The best he could do was to call upon "the Russian class-conscious proletariat and the entire class-conscious vanguard of the proletariat of the entire world to be summoned today anew to the old, powerful Marxist solution: 'PROLETARIAT OF THE WORLD UNITE.'"<sup>169</sup>

Korsch was standing at the end of a historical era looking back at the struggles and hopes of the previous ten years, looking for a new beginning. His tragedy was the tragedy of the European working-class movement whose string of defeats was so demoralizing after their hopeful advances in 1917-1921—a period which had seemed to put socialist revolution on the historical agenda. "The Second Party" was the last dying gasp of the German left opposition before the nightmare of fascism. The spectre of communism that had haunted Europe would be replaced by the reality of fascism. Those of the left opposition who did not die in Stalin's death camps would find refuge in Hitler's concentration camps or would be forced into exile.

## Notes

An earlier version of this section appeared as "Korsch's Revolutionary Historicism" in *Telos* 26 (Winter 1975-1976). I wish to thank Paul Piccone for permission to reprint this material.

1. Buckmiller, *Karl Korsch*, pp. 168ff.
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 171ff. and p. 376, where he lists Korsch's proposed courses.
3. For two accounts of the Kapp putsch, see Albert S. Lindemann, *The "Red Years"* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), and Werner T. Angress, *Stillborn Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963).
4. See the recent history of the USPD by Hartfried Krause, *USPD, Zur Geschichte der Unabhängigen Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1975).

5. In March, 1919, the USPD had around 300,000 members and grew to around 750,000 members by September. Krause, *USPD*, Supplement 3.
6. There is a report on Korsch's speech in *Neue Zeitung*, December 12, 1919; cited in Buckmiller, *Karl Korsch*, pp. 169-170.
7. Korsch citing Bebel in *Neue Zeitung*, March 3, 1920. Bebel made the speech at an SPD party congress in 1903.
8. Karl Korsch, "Was kann jeder Mann und jede Frau für die Befreiung des Proletariats tun?" in *Neue Zeitung*, May 1, 1920.
9. Krause, *USPD*, p. 147.
10. For an account of the 1920 USPD convention see Lindemann, *The "Red Years,"* pp. 249-256. The two standard German texts on the activities of the German Communist party are Ossip K. Flechtheim, *Die KPD in der Weimarer Republik* (Frankfurt: Europäische Verlag, 1969), and Hermann Weber, *Die Wandlung des deutschen Kommunismus* (Frankfurt: Europäische Verlag, 1969). Fisher, *German Communism* offers a fascinating insider's account of the relation between the German and Soviet Communists, but her book is full of inaccuracies and Fisher very often self-servingly distorts her own role in the events which she so vividly re-creates. Fisher lists the twenty-one conditions on pp. 141-142.
11. See Gerlach's introduction to *Marxismus und Philosophie* (Frankfurt: Europäische Verlag, 1966), p. 18, n. 15. Gerlach first made Korsch's acquaintance in the late 1920's when Korsch was already an oppositionalist and sharp critic of the Communist parties, and no doubt Gerlach is reading Korsch's later position into an earlier period. Gerlach bases his claim on a reference to Korsch's 1941 essay "Revolution for What" in which Korsch analyzes the 1920's events from his later perspective but does not make the claim Gerlach is putting forth.
12. See the editor's comment in Karl Korsch, *Kommentare zur Deutschen Revolution*, p. 45; Halliday, "Introduction," *Marxism and Philosophy*, p. 8; and Paul Breines' introduction to Karl Korsch, *Three Essays on Marxism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972), p. 5. All these sources repeat and paraphrase Gerlach's claim.
13. Hedda Korsch, "Memories," p. 40.
14. Karl Korsch, *Neue Zeitung*, October 5, 1920.
15. *Ibid.*, September 19, 1920.
16. *Ibid.*, October 6, 1920.
17. *Ibid.*
18. See Buckmiller's discussion in *Karl Korsch*, pp. 180-181.
19. Karl Korsch, *Neue Zeitung*, October 6, 1920.
20. See "Quintessenz des Marxismus," "Kernpunkte der materialistischen Geschichtsauffassung," "15 Theses über wissenschaftlichen Sozialismus," etc. I discuss these essays in the introduction to section one, "Marxism and Socialization."
21. Karl Korsch, "Die Marxsche Dialektik," *Imprekorr*, March 10, 1923, pp. 330-331; translated in this anthology as "The Marxist Dialectic," by Karl-Heinz Otto, and *Marxism and Philosophy*, pp. 47-48.
22. Karl Marx, cited by Korsch in *Marxism and Philosophy*, pp. 45-46; the quotation is the motto to Korsch's essay, "The Marxist Ideology in Russia," and is cited in many essays.
23. Karl Korsch, "15 Theses on Scientific Socialism," in *Politische Texte*, p. 51.
24. Korsch, *Marxism and Philosophy*, p. 36.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 43.
26. Here I might note that by "historicism" I am not referring to the distorted notion operative in the work of Karl Popper, whose use varies considerably from the use of the concept in the continental tradition in the sense I am using it. See Maurice Mandelbaum's essay on "Historicism" in the *Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* (New York: MacMillan, 1967), 4:22-25, where he discusses various conceptions of historicism which he then defines: "Historicism is the belief that an adequate understanding of the nature of anything and an adequate assessment of its value are to be gained by considering it in terms of the place it occupied and the role it played within a process of development." Korsch, by the way, saw Popper's work as the "newest attack of Positivism against Marxism" which he found "very loathsome." See his letter to J. A. Dawson in this anthology.
27. Korsch, *Marxism and Philosophy*, p. 40.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 41. A remarkably similar interpretation of Hegel is found in Herbert Marcuse's *Reason and Revolution* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), pp. 3ff. Marcuse favorably discusses *Marxism and Philosophy* in a 1931 article, "Das Problem der geschichtlichen Wirklichkeit: Wilhelm Dilthey," *Die Gesellschaft* 8 (1931): 359-367.
29. Korsch, *Marxism and Philosophy*, p. 45.
30. See, for example, Merleau-Ponty, *Adventures of the Dialectic* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), and Iring Fettscher, "The Relationship of Marxism to Hegel," *Marx and Marxism* (New York: Seabury Press, 1971). Most of the new left in Europe and America has followed this interpretation.
31. Korsch, *Marxism and Philosophy*, p. 29.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 52.
33. *Ibid.*, pp. 67-68.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 77.
35. *Ibid.*, pp. 70-71.
36. See Antonio Carlo, "Lenin on the Party," *Telos* 17 (Fall 1973), for a discussion of the various phases of Lenin's work and the contradictory positions he often took in different political contexts. Korsch is unaware of, or glosses over, these contradictions and ambiguities in Lenin's theory and practice, hence his historicized version of Lenin is paradoxically ahistorical.
37. For a discussion of Lenin's *Materialism and Empirio-criticism* and an

all out attack on the scholasticized orthodoxy of Soviet Marxism grounded in this work, see Paul Piccone, "Towards an Understanding of Lenin's Philosophy," *Radical America* 4, no. 6 (September-October 1970), and "Phenomenological Marxism," *Telos* 9 (Fall 1971).

38. In his 1930 retrospective on *Marxism and Philosophy*, Korsch looks back on Zinoviev's attack on his book in the "philosophical dispute" of 1924, and records his amazement that his work was seen as an "idealist deviation" in its "repeated dialectical rejection of 'naive realism,'" and its critique of "so called common sense, the worst metaphysician, and the normal 'positivist science' of the bourgeois society" (*Marxism and Philosophy*, p. 122). Korsch makes it perfectly clear that he did not intend his dialectical conception of the interaction of consciousness and reality as a critique of Leninism or Soviet Marxism, nor did he see himself as developing an oppositional theoretical current: "Because I then believed that this view was self-evident to any materialist dialectician or revolutionary Marxist, I assumed rather than spelt out this critique of a primitive, pre-dialectical and even pre-transcendental conception of the relation between consciousness and being. But without realizing it [emphasis added] I had hit on the very key to the 'philosophical' outlook which was then due to be dispensed from Moscow to the whole of the Western Communist world" (*Marxism and Philosophy*, pp. 122-123).

39. Buckmiller convincingly argues that Korsch lacks an adequate concept of mediation. See *Karl Korsch*, pp. 328ff.

40. Karl Korsch, "Eine Antikritik" and "Allerhand Marxkritiker," published in 1922 in the *Internationale* and reprinted in *Kommentare zur Deutschen 'Revolution'*.

41. The German journal *Kritische Justiz* has published Korsch's previously unpublished 1923 introductory lecture in the law faculty at Jena, "Jus belli ac pacis im Arbeitsrecht," accompanied by an introduction by Jürgen Seifert, discussing Korsch's contribution to the sciences of law; *Kritische Justiz* 2 (April-June 1972). A rather critical, even hostile, evaluation of Korsch's legal theory is found in Michael Wolff, "Karl Korsch und die Widersprüche des Sozialrechts," in Pozzoli, *Über Karl Korsch*. A sharp critique of Wolff and fine discussion of Korsch's legal theory is found in Buckmiller's *Karl Korsch*, pp. 264ff.

42. Karl Korsch, *Arbeitsrecht für Betriebsräte* (Frankfurt: Europäische Verlag, 1968).

43. Korsch, *Marxism and Philosophy*, p. 97.

44. Korsch, *Arbeitsrecht für Betriebsräte*, pp. 149-150.

45. *Ibid.*

46. Korsch, "Der 18 Brumaire des Hugo Stinnes" and "Die tote USPD und der lebendige Stinnes," in *Politische Texte*.

47. Korsch, *Politische Texte*, pp. 35 and 47.

48. Korsch, "Um die Arbeiterregierung," *Politische Texte*.

49. Fisher, *German Communism*, pp. 252-383, for a detailed account of

the unrest and chaos in Germany, and a description of the Byzantine machinations of the German and Russian communists to exploit the situation.

50. Flechtheim (*Die KPD*, pp. 182ff.) ironically comments that "the experiment of a socialist-communist government was only to shake the world for ten days," and suggests that their major accomplishment was the distribution of free carp to the unemployed.

51. The most detailed account of the complicated political maneuvering behind the scenes by the Weimar government in deciding how to deal with the revolutionary threat is found in Angress, *Stillborn Revolution*, pp. 426ff. See also, Weber, *Die Wandlung*, pp. 48ff. and the SED Autorenkollektiv, *Geschichte der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1967), 7:21ff.

52. Buckmiller, "Marxismus," pp. 55ff.

53. For an account of the rise to power of the left Fisher-Maslow leadership, see Fisher, *German Communism*, pp. 387-455, and Weber, *Die Wandlung*, pp. 53ff.

54. Stenographic report on the meeting of the Third Landtag in Thuringen, vol. 1 (Weimar: Thuringen Landtag, 1924); cited in Buckmiller, *Marxismus*, p. 56.

55. Cited in Buckmiller, *Marxismus*, pp. 56-57. The "social fascist" thesis was launched by Zinoviev who declared, "German Social Democracy is a fascist Social Democracy." See Zinoviev's speech to the central committee of the Communist International, January, 1924; printed in *Imprekorr*, no. 37 (March 1924), pp. 426ff. Stalin chimed in that "Social Democracy is objectively the moderate version of fascism," and that the fascists and Social Democrats were "twin brothers" who "complemented each other." Stalin, *Werke* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1952) 6: 253. For a historical account of the "social fascist" concept, see Siegfried Bahne, "Sozialfaschismus in Deutschland," *International Review of Social History* 10, part 2 (1965): 211ff.

56. For a summary of a number of books which blame the defeat of the workers' councils movement and the November Revolution on Social Democratic opportunism, see Peterson, "Workers' Councils."

57. Karl Korsch, cited in Buckmiller, *Marxismus*, p. 57.

58. Karl Korsch, "Das Wortlaut des Dawes und McKenna Berichts" and "Die Durchführung des Dawes-Gutachtens und den Kampf um den Achtstundestag," in *Kommentare zur Deutschen 'Revolution'*.

59. *Die Rote Fabne*, January 13, 1925.

60. Weber, *Die Wandlung*, pp. 74-75.

61. Karl Korsch, "Lenin und die Comintern," *Internationale* 10/11 (1924); translated in this anthology as "Lenin and the Comintern," by Roy Jameson.

62. *Ibid.*

63. *Ibid.*

64. E. H. Carr, *Socialism in One Country, 1924-6* (London: Penguin, 1971), 3(1):110.

65. *Ibid.*
66. *Ibid.*, pp. 70ff, especially p. 74.
67. *Ibid.*, pp. 78 and 110.
68. Karl Korsch, *Neue Zeitung*, August 11, 1924.
69. Korsch, "Lenin and the Comintern."
70. Karl Korsch, "Leninismus und Trotzkismus," *Neue Zeitung*, February 1925. See also Korsch's "Trotsky als Geschichtsschreiber" in *Neue Zeitung*, December 4-5, 1924. Korsch's changing attitude toward Rosa Luxemburg can be taken as a key to his evolving positions. Whereas in *Marxism and Philosophy* Luxemburg is along with Lenin one of the great restorers of genuine Marxism, she is now a "deviationist" whom he frequently attacks. As soon as he moves into the left opposition he again refers favorably to Luxemburg. Later he was to remark in a letter to Paul Mattick, "One's position towards Rosa always appears to me to still be the best proof-stone for revolutionaries," in *Jahrbuch Arbeiterbewegung* 2 (Frankfurt: Fisher 1974), p. 199.
71. Paul Breines, "Praxis and Its Theorists," *Telos* 11 (Spring 1972): 90.
72. Korsch's orthodoxy is crystal clear in his enthusiastic review of Lukács' celebration of Lenin and his rapturous praise of Stalin's book *Lenin and Leninism*. Both articles are reprinted in Karl Korsch, *Die materialistische Geschichtsauffassung und andere Schriften* (Frankfurt: Europäische Verlag, 1971). Korsch has nothing but kind words for Stalin and the Bolshevization process at this point: "Bolshevization is now practically and theoretically spreading itself below and is for the first time encompassing the inner structure of the Party's body down below to its individual cell. . . . The task is not only to formally appropriate and externally imitate and parrot Leninism but to learn it in a special sense: to truly understand the organization, construction, method, and content of the Leninist work and thus to concretely carry through Leninism: this task places on all European parties the highest demand not only from a practical-organizational view, but also from a theoretical one" (Korsch, *Die materialistische Geschichtsauffassung*, pp. 152-154). Korsch even repeats Stalin's view that "Marxism is Leninism as the 'theory of revolution' in the epoch of imperialism," and that we can dispense with studying the texts of Marx and learn Marxism in its "completed form" from Lenin (*ibid.*, pp. 154-155).
73. See Korsch's articles in *Neue Zeitung*, April 2-4 1924; July 7, 1924; August 11, 1924; and December 5, 1924.
74. See Breines' account of Zinoviev's attack on Korsch, in "Praxis and its Theorists," pp. 82-92. Fisher offers some fascinating insights into Zinoviev, *German Communism*, p. 594, *passim*. For Carr's portrait, see *Socialism in One Country*, 1:152ff.
75. The full text of Zinoviev's speech appears in Georg Lukács, *Schriften zur Ideologie und Politik*, ed. Peter Ludz. (Neuwied and Berlin: Luchterhand, 1967), pp. 719-726.
76. Cited in Weber, *Die Wandlung*, p. 83.
77. *Ibid.*
78. The source for this story is a former Nazi diplomat, Gustav Hilger, *The Incompatible Allies* (New York: MacMillan, 1953), p. 108. Carr repeats the story, notes that the remark does not appear in the German edition of Hilger's book, and states, "but the fact is well attested." I have yet to discover any evidence for this story and suspect it is part of the Korsch legend.
79. Halliday, "Introduction," *Marxism and Philosophy*, p. 19.
80. Correspondence between Korsch and Bordiga after Korsch was expelled from the KPD indicates that there were insurmountable obstacles to forming an international opposition bloc. See Bordiga's letter to Korsch, and Christian Riechers' commentary in Pozzoli, *Über Karl Korsch*, pp. 243-265.
81. Hedda Korsch, "Memories," p. 42.
82. For portraits of Thälmann, who was to be the leading Communist politician in Germany during the Stalinist era, see Weber, *Die Wandlung*, pp. 186ff; Fisher, *German Communism*, pp. 423ff; and the SED Autorenkollektiv, *Geschichte der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung*, *passim*.
83. See Weber, *Die Wandlung*, pp. 101ff, and Fisher, *German Communism*, pp. 412ff., for an account of this period.
84. Zinoviev wrote the KPD a letter urging them to "openly recognize the stabilization of capitalism in Germany at the time" and the "monarchist danger"; printed in *Die Rote Fahne*, July 9, 1925.
85. See Fisher, *German Communism*, pp. 432ff. Fisher downplays her role in pushing the united front policy that was to so alienate the left of the party, implying it was Maslow's policy. Weber provides a correction, *Die Wandlung*, pp. 107ff.
86. Kun's letter attacking Korsch and the *Internationale*—a classic piece of Bolshevik stupidity—is reproduced in *Kommentare zur Deutschen Revolution*, pp. 131-136. Kun criticizes issues 6-22 of the *Internationale*, which Korsch had edited. He found discussions of the Dawes Plan and the Fifth World Congress good but found 95 percent of the material blameworthy: "The *Internationale* shows no consequent revolutionary-Marxist (Leninist) line." For example, next to "a good article" of Maslow (that criticizes Trotsky) there is a "bad article that is grist to Trotsky's mill." Kun demands, "What is the opinion of the editorial staff?" "Further examples" of bad articles "are offered by the reviews of Comrade Lukács which represent true paradigms of dead abstract critique that rests on purely verbal Marxism (*Wortmarxismus*)." Kun is referring to Lukács' brilliant article, "The New Edition of Lassalle's Letters," and to "Bernstein's Triumph" (dismissed by Kun as "a purely formalistic critique of Kautsky"). Kun continues, "One cannot at the same time be for Stalin's book 'Lenin and Leninism' and on the other hand for such unmarxist things as Korsch's 'Quintessenz des Marxismus' and Lukács' work. One must decide."
87. Karl Korsch, *Neue Zeitung*, March 21, 1925.
88. Karl Korsch, *Neue Zeitung*, April 27, 1925.

89. Karl Marx, "Class Struggle in France 1848-50," cited in *ibid.*
90. Karl Korsch, "Republik Hindenburg," *Neue Zeitung*, April 27, 1925.
91. Buckmiller, "Marxismus," p. 66.
92. Weber, *Die Wandlung*, pp. 112ff. Korsch either did not attend the conference or did not intervene.
93. Halliday, "Introduction," *Marxism and Philosophy*, p. 19.
94. David Bathrick, "Introduction to Korsch," *New German Critique* 3 (Fall 1974): 4.
95. See Weber's discussion of this masterpiece of Stalinist byzantinism, *Die Wandlung*, pp. 120-133. Fisher describes the power politics behind the document in the Soviet Union as a struggle between Stalin and Zinoviev, and claims she signed the document to support Zinoviev against Stalin, even though it contained her own political death warrant, *German Communism*, pp. 444ff.
96. *Die Rote Fabne*, no. 218, September 1925; reproduced in Karl Korsch, *Politische Texte*, pp. 70-71.
97. *Die Rote Fabne*, September 27, 1925.
98. See Weber, *Die Wandlung*, pp. 133ff; Fisher, *German Communism*, pp. 432ff; and Sigfried Bahne, "Zwischen 'Luxemburgismus' und 'Stalinismus': Die 'ultralinke' Opposition in der KPD," *Vierteljahresschrift für Zeitgeschichte* 9 (1961): 359-383.
99. Fisher reproduces this letter in *German Communism*, p. 435.
100. The German historians Flechtheim and Weber stress this, as does Fisher. Angress in *Stillborn Revolution* sees the fall of party democracy in the KPD as a move from their Luxemburgian orientation to Leninism that took place in the early 1920's.
101. The SED celebrates this new party organization in *Geschichte der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung*, 8:88ff.
102. Weber, *Die Wandlung*, pp. 122ff.
103. *Ibid.*, p. 150.
104. Printed in *ibid.*, pp. 416-417. On the program of Katz's attempt to resurrect the Spartacus League, see Bahne, "Sozialfaschismus," pp. 366ff.
105. See Hedda Korsch, "Memories," p. 43.
106. Weber, *Die Wandlung*, p. 151.
107. *Ibid.*, p. 152.
108. Bahne, "Sozialfaschismus," p. 363.
109. Fisher, *German Communism*, p. 453.
110. Stalin, cited in Bahne, "Sozialfaschismus," p. 363.
111. Cited in *ibid.*, p. 363.
112. Karl Korsch, "Platform of the Left," in *Politische Texte*, p. 105.
113. *Ibid.*, pp. 105ff.
114. *Ibid.*, p. 107.
115. *Kommunistische Politik* 1(2):19.
116. See the article on China, "Die Chinesische Revolution," republished in *Politische Texte*, pp. 160ff. Hedda Korsch writes that "he also went deeply

- into the problems of what today would be called the Third World. He studied the development of the various colonial countries because he thought that the liberation of the colonies was perhaps imminent and could change world politics completely" ("Memories," p. 43).
117. Bukharin, *Die Rote Fabne*, April 11, 1926; in Weber, *Die Wandlung*, p. 144.
118. *Ibid.*
119. Stalin, *Werke*, 8:102.
120. *Ibid.*
121. Thälmann, *Die Rote Fabne*, April 23, 1926; cited in Korsch, *Politische Texte*, p. 70.
122. Korsch, "The Way of the Comintern," in *Politische Texte*, pp. 73ff.
123. *Ibid.*, pp. 74-75.
124. *Ibid.*, p. 83.
125. *Ibid.*, pp. 83-84.
126. *Ibid.*, p. 86.
127. *Ibid.*, pp. 87-88.
128. *Ibid.*
129. *Ibid.*, p. 99.
130. *Ibid.*, p. 102.
131. Weber, *Die Wandlung*, p. 151.
132. *Ibid.*
133. *Ibid.*, pp. 152ff.
134. Korsch, cited in *ibid.*, p. 153.
135. This analysis was developed in *Kommunistische Politik*, 2(2):18-19. Discussed in Bahne, "Sozialfaschismus," p. 375.
136. Korsch, in *Politische Texte*, pp. 119-120.
137. *Kommunistische Politik*, June 30, 1926.
138. *Ibid.*
139. Korsch, "Ten Years of Class Struggle in the Soviet Union," in *Politische Texte*, pp. 187ff.
140. *Ibid.*, p. 182.
141. *Ibid.*
142. *Ibid.*, p. 184.
143. *Ibid.*, pp. 184-185.
144. *Ibid.*, pp. 185-186.
145. *Ibid.*, pp. 189-191.
146. *Ibid.*, p. 191.
147. *Ibid.*, p. 193.
148. *Ibid.*
149. In a series of essays in the 1930's, Korsch develops this theory of counterrevolution. See "Ten Years of Class Struggle in the Soviet Union," this anthology.
150. Korsch, *ibid.*



151. Buckmiller, "Marxismus," p. 71.  
 152. Bahne, "Sozialfaschismus," p. 380.  
 153. Korsch, "The Second Party," in *Politische Texte*, pp. 195ff.  
 154. Korsch had secret ties with the Saprnow Group who kept him informed of the activities of the left opposition in the Soviet Union. See Hedda Korsch, "Memories," p. 42.  
 155. Korsch, "The Second Party," pp. 197ff.  
 156. *Ibid.*, p. 206.  
 157. *Ibid.*  
 158. *Ibid.*, p. 207.  
 159. *Ibid.*  
 160. *Ibid.*, p. 208.  
 161. Korsch, *Marxism and Philosophy*, p. 130.  
 162. Korsch, "The Second Party," pp. 209-210.  
 163. *Ibid.*, p. 207.  
 164. *Ibid.*, pp. 213-214.  
 165. *Ibid.*, p. 214.  
 166. *Ibid.*  
 167. *Ibid.*, p. 219.  
 168. *Ibid.*  
 169. Korsch, "Ten Years of Class Struggle in the Soviet Union."

### 3. The Crisis of Marxism

In 1928 the left opposition was hopelessly fragmented by sectarian splintering and had clearly failed to establish a living alternative to the Communist and Social Democratic parties. Korsch began working with independent leftist trade unions and gave lectures on economics, labor law, and Marxism. Since the parties had failed to materially advance the liberation of the working class, Korsch focused his energies on the activities of revolutionary unions and their struggles.<sup>1</sup> The results of over a decade of class struggle in Europe and the Soviet Union were, he bitterly concluded, an even greater enslavement of the workers—progress in domination.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the Stalinization process in the Soviet Union and advent of fascism in Europe indicated the possibility of even greater suffering for the workers in the future. The failure of the focal working-class organizations forced Korsch to seek both new revolutionary possibilities, and the reasons for the shipwreck of the working-class advance which had seemed to put socialist revolution on the historical agenda. Korsch's tragedy was that he grasped the reasons for the failure of the working-class movement, anticipated the triumph of fascism and counterrevolution, but could envision no forces, groups, or strategies which could withstand the counterrevolutionary offensive. This state of affairs forced Korsch to put Marxism and his own theoretical position into radical question.

Let us reflect here a moment on the strange political-theoretical odyssey of Karl Korsch. He traversed the full spectrum of German left parties, moving from the SPD and Fabian socialism to the Independent Socialist Party (USPD) after the war, and then to the KPD in 1920. Further, Korsch was one of the first to be expelled from the KPD and the Communist International, and became one of the leading figures of the left opposition in 1926. Korsch—better than any Western Marxist—reflects the waves of revolution and counterrevolution that inundated Europe in the 1920's. Korsch's theorizing was rooted in the tumultuous class struggles of the Weimar republic, and he developed and modified his theory in relation to the ever-changing historical situation. The praxis philosopher Korsch was above all concerned to obtain a unity of theory and practice,<sup>3</sup> that is, to derive his theory from the requirements and possibilities of the historical situation, and then to translate the theory into



Kautsky's "orthodoxy" were nugatory.<sup>8</sup> Although Kautsky claimed his theory is "pure science," Korsch interpreted it as the "ideological expression of a determinate historical movement." More precisely, Kautskyism is the "ideology of German Social Democracy which in its latest phase presents the transition from a concealed to an open revisionism."<sup>9</sup> Korsch carries through a brilliant demonstration of Kautsky's falsification of Marx that at once suppressed the revolutionary content of Marxism and "cryptically veiled" Kautsky's own "hidden revisionist content."<sup>10</sup> Korsch shows how Kautsky's theory of history borrows much from the Marxian concept but at crucial points departs from and distorts the Marxian theory. Through an analysis of Kautsky's notions of "Dialectic and Development," "Nature and Society," "the State," "Class and Class Struggle," and the "Historical Significance of Kautskyism," Korsch argues that Kautsky completely suppresses the revolutionary components of Marxism by reifying Marx's historical materialism into an objectivistic set of categories and laws that passively reflects historical development, excluding activist, praxis-oriented, revolutionary features of Marxism. He shows further how Kautsky continually falls behind the level of Marxian theory to earlier bourgeois theories and ideas. Korsch concludes that Kautskyism has become a fetter on today's working class which limits its struggles to "the ideals and goals of the once revolutionary bourgeoisie" that sacrifices the revolutionary content of Marxism.<sup>9</sup>

In a 1930 addition to a new edition of *Marxism and Philosophy*, Korsch includes Lenin and Soviet Marxism in the current Marxist "orthodoxy" which in his view falsifies revolutionary Marxism. He marvels that Social Democratic and Communist critics both denounced *Marxism and Philosophy* on identical grounds.<sup>10</sup> Both maintained a dogmatic, scientific-positivist conception of Marxism that suppressed its dialectical, historically specific, and critical components. Both maintained a "materialist outlook that is colored by the natural sciences,"<sup>11</sup> which in effect reflects the dominant bourgeois attitude of scientific positivism. Thus in Korsch's view, Lenin and his followers never abandoned the "spiritual legacy" of the Marxism of the Second International, "in spite of some things they said in the heat of battle."<sup>12</sup> The problem, Korsch believed, was that the Marxist orthodoxies really never adopted the whole of the Marxian theory. Rather, all they adopted were "some isolated economic, political and social theories, extracted from the general content of revolutionary Marxism."<sup>13</sup> This altered the meaning of Marxism and truncated and falsified its content.

The conclusions of Korsch's researches into the failure of Marxism to provide a satisfactory theory and practice of revolution are a major theme

of his later work. "The Passing of Marxian Orthodoxy" provides a swan song to the hopes of an earlier epoch of revolutionary struggle. Korsch suggests that Bernstein's revisionism-reformism alone expressed the reality of the working-class movement which was engaged in reformist practice. In Korsch's view, the revolutionary rhetoric of the "orthodox" Marxists was a mere "ideological dissemblance" which had nothing to do with the practice and reality of the working class movement. Moreover, even the "left" Marxists Lenin and Luxemburg failed to penetrate to the core of the problem and focused on Bernstein's theory, whose power to seduce and mislead the workers they saw as the problem. Luxemburg, Korsch suggests, was guilty of an "ideological bedazzlement" in claiming that "Bernstein's theory was the first and at the same time the last attempt to give a theoretical base to opportunism" within a supposedly still revolutionary Social Democratic movement.<sup>14</sup> As it turns out, she was historically refuted in arguing against Bernstein (who claimed that the movement was everything and the final goal nothing) that the "final goal was everything," for it "revealed itself in subsequent actual history as in fact that *nothing* which Bernstein, the sober observer of reality, had already termed it."<sup>15</sup> Hence Luxemburg failed to see that the problem was not Bernstein's theory, but reformist practice which Bernstein merely—honestly and accurately—expressed.

Lenin too, Korsch argued, although "subjectively a deadly enemy of the 'renegade' Bernstein," tacitly and silently conceded Bernstein's main point about the reformism of the working-class movement by rooting the "revolutionary character" of the labor movement not in actual class struggles or the movement itself, but rather "only in the leadership of *this struggle by way of the revolutionary PARTY guided by a correct Marxist theory.*"<sup>16</sup> Korsch intensifies his critique of Lenin in "The History of the Marxist Ideology in Russia," where he suggests that Lenin transformed Marxism into "an ideological form assumed by the material struggle for putting across the capitalist development in a pre-capitalist country."<sup>17</sup> Ironically, Korsch is suggesting that Marxism played the same role in Russia as bourgeois ideology in Europe by serving to accelerate capitalist development. Whereas the populist Narodnik ideology stressed that capitalism was impossible in Russia, Lenin from the beginning represented the Marxist viewpoint that Russia must proceed through the stages of industrialization and capitalism to be able to ultimately construct a socialist society. Korsch shows how Marx, Engels, and Lenin all were willing to adopt their theory to the conditions in Russia and how from the beginning Marxism served as "an ideological cloak for a development which in its actual tendency is capitalistic." Hence, in

Korsch's view, Marxism in Russia was but a "revolutionary myth" which ideologically proclaimed that what was in fact capitalist development was revolutionary socialist development. Both Stalin and Trotsky—and official Soviet Marxists—followed the "new Marxist myth of the inherently socialist character of the Soviet State and of the thereby basically guaranteed possibility of a complete realization of socialist society in an isolated Soviet Russia."<sup>18</sup> Korsch sadly concludes, "This degeneration of the Marxian doctrine to a mere ideological justification of what in its actual tendency is a capitalist State and thus, inevitably, a State based on the suppression of the progressive revolutionary movement of the proletariat class, closes the first phase of the history of the Marxist ideology in Russia."<sup>19</sup>

Hence Korsch believed that both Soviet Marxism and Social Democratic revisionism had become ideologies that legitimated a reformist practice which in fact strengthened the capitalist system. Both were thus divorced from the reality of those genuinely revolutionary forces and struggles which sought the overthrow of capitalism and construction of socialism. Marxism had become an ideology vitiated by a split between theory and revolutionary practice, which both legitimated reformist practice and served as an instrument of domination (in particularly the Soviet Union). Whereas earlier Korsch had blamed the failure of the working-class movement on its neglect/suppression of the revolutionary core of Marxism and urged a restoration of revolutionary Marxism, he now began to assess the extent to which Marxism itself was responsible for the debacles of the working-class movement: "It is deceptive and even false to see the theoretical origins of the present crisis as resulting either from a perversion or an oversimplification of Marx's and Engels' revolutionary theory at the hands of their successors. It is equally misleading to juxtapose this degenerated, falsified Marxism to the 'pure theory' of Marx and Engels themselves. In the final analysis, today's crisis is the crisis of Marx's and Engels' theory as well."<sup>20</sup>

The crisis of Marxism, Korsch wrote, reveals itself both as a collapse of the dominant position Marxism held in the revolutionary movement, and in the transformation of Marxian theory and practice into a state orthodoxy and reformist practice. Marxism is a product of an earlier era of class struggle and "consequently lacks any real relation to contemporary class struggles emerging as a result of wholly new conditions."<sup>21</sup> Marx and Engels had carried out a full scale critique of "all aspects of the existing class society (economic base and superstructure) from the newly acquired perspective of the proletariat" and conceptualized both the "real developmental laws of the existing capitalist society and hence,

at the same time, *the real conditions of revolutionary class actions.*"<sup>22</sup> But the current Marxist orthodoxy had "developed into a purely abstract and passive theory dealing with the objective course of social development as determined by external laws." Korsch was objecting to both a theoretical stagnation of Marx's theory which had failed to keep up with the vicissitudes of capitalist development, and to the reification of Marxism into a set of objectivistic laws that supposedly described the objective course of capitalist development (and crisis/collapse). These laws were formulated in a system of "scientific socialism" that allowed its adepts to predict the course of economic-political development. This scientization of Marxism fell prey, Korsch believed, to an "objectivistic fetishism" that reified economic laws into a deterministic system, and which excluded elements of class struggle and "the subjective action of the working class."

Korsch took up this theme in an essay "On Some Fundamental Pre-suppositions for a Materialistic Discussion of Crisis Theory." He criticized "objectivistic" theories of capitalist crisis which postulate the inevitable fall of capitalism, according to laws of "iron logic." Such a theory is based upon "insufficient deduction" and is therefore pseudo-scientific. Further it also is not the best sort of theory for producing revolutionary consciousness and action, since it induces fatalism and a passive waiting for the collapse. It can also contribute to mystifying the workers by their learned "theoreticians" who supposedly hold the key to historical development. Equally dubious from both a scientific and political point of view are those theories of capitalist stability maintained by Bernstein, Hilferding and the like, which claim that capitalism is now crisis-free and can overcome any temporary dislocations. This thesis flies in the face of a series of acute crises, Korsch believed, and reduces socialism to a moral demand or reformist practice. Hence the Marxist crisis theory resembles a "revolutionary myth" in Sorel's sense. No really scientific prediction can be made as to the avoidability or inevitability of capitalist crises. This does not mean, however, as Sorel seemed to believe, that revolutionary theory solely consists of myths that move the workers to action. "The materialist stance," Korsch wrote, "believes that certain, if only always very limited, prognostic statements sufficient for practical action can be made on the basis of always more exact and thorough empirical investigations of the present capitalist mode of production and its recognizable immanent tendencies of development. The materialist, therefore, investigates thoroughly the given situation of capitalist production including the contradictions found therein, among which are also the situation, the level of consciousness, the degree of organization, and the

readiness for struggle of the working class and all the various levels of the working class in order to determine its action."<sup>23</sup>

Korsch appraised various Marxian theories by their consequences for political action, as well as their general validity. From both a theoretical and practical point of view, he dissected and put in radical question the leading Marxian theories. He concluded that none of the current trends in Marxism stood as an adequate theoretical expression for the continued practical needs of the proletarian class struggle. In fact, in the past decades, he argued, "the most important living theory of proletarian class struggle came from three different directions, each of which consciously and unconsciously stood opposed to orthodox Marxist theory. These three were: *unionist reformism*, *revolutionary syndicalism*, and *Leninist Bolshevism*."<sup>24</sup> Each of these tendencies is rooted in living class struggles and sought "to make the subjective action of the working class rather than the objective development of capitalism the main focus of socialist theory."<sup>25</sup> Korsch begins here his attempt to break the hegemony of Marxism over revolutionary struggles and to assess alternative theories, strategies, and movements which might aid the struggles of the working class in their liberation from capitalism.

In the search for new revolutionary theories, possibilities, and openings, Korsch applied a critical historical materialist method to analyze the significance of the Paris commune, the Russian Soviets, the German councils system, revolutionary syndicalism and anarchism, the workers' collectives in Spain, and struggles in "the marginal areas of the international capitalist system,"<sup>26</sup> or what is today called the Third World. He also called for a re-evaluation of the theories of the "utopian socialists from Thomas More to the present day," and of such rivals of Marx as Blanqui, and even his "sworn enemies" such as Proudhon and Bakunin.<sup>27</sup> The assessment of the significance of alternative theories and practice of revolution to Marxism would require putting elements of the Marxian theory in radical question. The remainder of my essay will discuss: (1) Korsch's critique of the Marxian theory of revolution; (2) his search for new possibilities for revolution; (3) his analysis of new obstacles to revolution in the emerging world-wide counterrevolution; and (4) Korsch's appraisal of what is living and dead in Marxism.

### *Critique of the Marxian Theory of Revolution*

Two articles on the Paris Commune, translated in this anthology, enabled Korsch to assess the importance of the Paris Commune in the context of

an emerging critique of the Marxian theory of revolution. Korsch applied here his historical materialist method, and criticized the leading Marxists' lavish praise of the commune as the model of revolutionary practice and the "dictatorship of the proletariat," by interpreting the significance of the commune in the context of the history of class struggle in Europe. The Paris Commune for Korsch presented a task of "revolutionary self-criticism," and a demystification of the Marxian interpretation of it. Korsch showed that there is a contradiction in Marx's appraisal of the commune, where he at once esteemed it as the "finally discovered political form for the liberation of the proletariat," and then claimed that the commune is valuable because of its openness, its indeterminateness, and its potentialities for further development.<sup>28</sup> For Korsch, this contradiction disclosed a deeper contradiction at the heart of the Marxian political theory. For on one hand, Marx enthusiastically affirmed the commune—which was a decentralized people's government on the Proudhonian federalist model—and yet Marx himself was an admirer of centralized state power. This, according to Korsch, revealed a contradiction in Marx's attitude toward the state which at once is to be a "dictatorship of the proletariat," and is supposed to "wither away." In fact, Korsch believed that serious problems resulted from the Marxian failure to resolve the antinomy between a decentralized-federalist political model and the highly centralized dictatorship of the proletariat model.

Korsch himself was becoming increasingly critical of the Marxian political theory and theory of the state which were full, he believed, of unresolved problems. He was becoming increasingly distrustful of the Marxian notion of the centralized state and was becoming more sympathetic to decentralized/federalist concepts.<sup>29</sup> He thought the Marxian theory of the "two stages" from socialism to communism<sup>30</sup> provided a legitimation to indefinitely postpone the construction of the higher stage of socialism. He believed this problem was evident in the actual development of the Soviet Union where Stalin justified his counterrevolutionary politics by claiming that the Soviet Union was but in the first stage of transition, and that realizing the more radical demands of socialism must be postponed to the future.

Korsch also began to believe that the Marxian theory of revolution was tied to its own historical circumstances of development, and was infected with Blanquist-Jacobian features.<sup>31</sup> That is, Marx formulated his political theory in response to his study and experience of the French Revolution and class struggles in France. He remained highly impressed with the Jacobian dictatorship—a strong centralized state used as the instrument of revolution—and the Blanquist strategy of winning state

power through the insurrection of a revolutionary elite. But the French revolution was after all a bourgeois revolution, Korsch reasoned in his relentless logic, and perhaps Marx's understanding of revolution was too closely connected to the historical development of the bourgeoisie, which might be inappropriate for today's working-class struggles under changed historical conditions.

As Korsch put it in "Theses on Hegel and Revolution," "The theory of proletarian revolution was not developed as such from its own foundation, but on the contrary arose from the bourgeois revolution and thus in every relation to content and method is still tainted with the birthmarks of Jacobinism, that is the bourgeois theory of revolution."<sup>52</sup> In Korsch's "Marx's Position on the European Revolution of 1848," he suggests that "Marx has remained dominated by the traditional conception" of revolution produced out of the French Revolution.<sup>53</sup> In this article, Korsch shows that the demands Marx put forth in his activities during the German Revolution of 1848-49 did not overstep those of the "democratic revolution" and concludes: "Marx rejects positing a future socialist utopia against the reality of the bourgeois revolution. But he continuously sought to force upon the new revolutionary movement of his time past actions which were hardly connected with the forms of its present conditions. He sought to lift the democratic revolution of his time to a higher level and failed to see that this 'higher level' in reality is but a historical level that was already once reached by the total revolutionary movement of a past epoch" [i.e., the bourgeois revolution].<sup>54</sup>

Further, Korsch argued in "Marxism and the Present Tasks of the Proletarian Class Struggle" that there is something odd about "the ideological character of this wholesale identification of an established doctrine with the revolutionary struggle of the working class."<sup>55</sup> That is, he found it peculiar that the doctrines of nineteenth-century bourgeois theorists such as Marx and Engels should be taken as the authentic expression and guide for contemporary proletarian class struggles and be expected to continue to lead the way in the future. Here Korsch broke with his earlier identification of Marxism and Leninism with the revolutionary movement. He now noted that "the identity of a bourgeois bred doctrine with all present and future truly revolutionary struggles of the proletarian class assumed the character of a veritable miracle."<sup>56</sup> He believed that the identification of Marxism with both the course of capitalist development and proletarian class struggles took on a quasi-mystical character and in effect denied both that capitalism might well develop (or collapse) in quite different ways than Marx envisioned. Further, the working class might well develop a quite different strategy and goals for their libera-

tion. Hence Korsch rejected the "preestablished harmony between the Marxist doctrine and the actual proletarian movement itself" and urged looking at existing class struggles and the historical situation anew to discern possibilities for liberation and working class advancement.

Moreover Korsch discerned an exaggeration of the importance of politics and the state in both Marx and Lenin. The political thrust of much of Korsch's later work was to emphasize the importance of trade union struggles and the social and economic dimension for the liberation of the working class. He thought that a Marxian theory of revolution, which urged seizing state power and smashing the bourgeois state as the primary revolutionary task, exaggerated the fundamentality of the political dimension and underestimated the importance of economic and social struggles. The "true secret of the revolutionary commune," he argued, "lies precisely in its *social content*"—in the fact that the workers themselves took control of their everyday life in all its facets—and not in discovering some universally valid "political form."<sup>57</sup> Indeed, the political form of the commune, Korsch slyly and irreverently pointed out, is bourgeois to the core, and has its origins in the middle ages in early municipal political forms which the bourgeoisie developed, even before its centralized state, as a weapon against the former feudal ruling classes. The proletariat can learn important lessons from the Paris Commune and might be able to use some of its features in constructing a future society, Korsch believed, but it is a mistake to make a fetish of the commune and hold it up as the model for all revolutionary struggles now and forevermore. Korsch's conclusion to his study of the Paris commune contains an implicit critique of the Marxian concept of the "dictatorship of the proletariat," and instead urges as a Marxist concept of the state the earlier notion of a "free association": "The authentic end-goal of proletarian class struggle is not some 'more democratic,' 'more communal' or even 'more soviet-like' state, but the classless and stateless Communist society whose encompassing form is no longer political force but that 'association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all' (Communist Manifesto)."<sup>58</sup>

### *New Forms of Revolutionary Struggle in Spain*

Korsch's attempt to at once discern new possibilities and models of revolution, and to criticize a too narrow Marxian concept of revolution, was given decisive impetus by the Spanish Civil War, which was creating new forms of revolutionary struggle and new models of socioeconomic organi-

zation in the Spanish collectives.<sup>40</sup> Korsch hoped that Spain would provide possibilities for the development of a truly revolutionary movement that would be independent of the hegemony of the Soviet Union and Communist party and would thus avoid the pitfalls of Stalinism. In 1931 he visited Spain as a guest of the Spanish syndicalists, the CNT, in their congress at Madrid. He wrote a sober and realistic account of "The Spanish Revolution," published in September, 1931, as well as two later reports on Spain, "Economics and Politics in Revolutionary Spain" and "Collectivization in Spain"—the first two of which are collected in this volume. In an unpublished draft, "The Prehistory of the Spanish Revolution," Korsch showed how different waves of revolution and reaction in Spain in the last half-century paralleled European development. He pointed out that the "main tendency in the workers' movement in Spain was decisively *anti-statist, anarchist, and syndicalist*."<sup>41</sup> The Social Democratic party in Spain, on the other hand, showed, even before its European counterparts, the reformist "state-preservative" position which would characterize European Social Democrats.<sup>42</sup>

In "The Spanish Revolution" Korsch carefully analyzed the situation that led the King to flee from Spain and opened the door to potential revolutionary change. He discussed the different leftist forces struggling for power and the tasks, problems, and obstacles they faced. He was especially sympathetic to the attempt of the revolutionary syndicalist CNT to throw off the yoke of oppression and "to build a truly free and autonomous workers' life."<sup>43</sup> He favorably discussed the detailed program set forth at the June, 1931, congress in Madrid which he visited, and he indicated the political and economic problems remaining to be solved. He also analyzed the dangers of counterrevolution posed by the old reactionary powers, which were in fact later to fuse together in a fascist crucible and overthrow the revolution.

In "Economics and Politics in Revolutionary Spain," written seven years later when Korsch was in exile in America, he summed up the achievements and lessons to be learned from experiences in Spain. Korsch was especially interested in the fact that the state power collapsed almost completely, enabling the workers to construct their own form of socio-economic self-government in the Spanish collectives. The achievements of the Spanish collectives showed what the workers could do in every industry and realm of life to reorganize their activity when they had the power to control their own lives and working conditions. The collectivization of industry took place on a regional and local level in both small and large scale industries and revealed the power of the people to administer and govern their own life.

The failure to maintain the collectives against the counterrevolutionary powers resulted at least in part, Korsch believed, from the "traditional attitude of non-concernedness in all matters political and not strictly economic and social" of the Spanish syndicalists and anarchists.<sup>44</sup> Hence in Korsch's view the lesson to be learned from the ultimate failure of the revolution in Spain was "the vital connection between the economic and political action in every phase of the proletarian class struggle."<sup>45</sup> Here it might be noted that Korsch never subscribed to the anarchist position on the unimportance of the state and political struggles. Although Korsch mistrusted Marxian over-emphases on the state and politics, he believed that the anarchists are just as one-sided in their neglect of the problem of the state and politics. Korsch himself urged a position that saw the vital importance of all economic, political and social struggles for liberation and the overthrow of capitalism.

Moreover, Korsch warned against judging the events in Spain (or anywhere else) from the standpoint of some ideal theory of revolution and then condemning a group or situation for failing to follow the model of the theory (as some Marxists were criticizing the Spanish for failing to follow the example of the Bolsheviks). Although one can, Korsch concluded, learn important lessons from revolutionary struggles of the past, one should be aware of the historical uniqueness of the specific conditions and not impose an abstract theory of revolution on conditions to which it may not be appropriate (this is a political consequence of Korsch's principle of historical specificity).<sup>46</sup> Korsch was concerned to break the hegemony of Marxism on revolutionary theory and to observe how specific revolutionary conditions produce a variety of forms of struggle and theory.

Korsch concretized his study of Spain further in an essay, "Collectivization in Spain," in which he discussed an anthology dealing with the details of the actual workers' struggles that let "the Spanish revolutionaries speak for themselves" so as to provide "the real content of the present struggles in revolutionary Spain."<sup>47</sup> The experiments with the collectivization of industry and agriculture provided, Korsch believed, "a new type of transition from capitalist to communist method of production that has been achieved, though incompletely, in an imposing variety of forms."<sup>48</sup> Korsch indicated some examples of the "new type of community production" and "new life of libertarian communism." The success achieved by the Spanish workers at reorganizing their life and work, despite incredible obstacles, testified to the initiative, endurance, and capacity for action in a working class unfettered by bourgeois domination. Especially praised is "the emerging of the anti-State attitude of the revolutionary Spanish

proletariat, unhampered by self-created organizational or ideological obstacles."<sup>48</sup> The collectivization process was extended to not only capitalist firms and large farms, but also took place in municipal and state organizations, encompassing even barbershops and prostitution! This far-ranging process of socialization eloquently testifies "to the peculiar creative power of the revolution" that was attempting to transform all realms of everyday life.<sup>49</sup>

Franco and his fascist cohorts, supported by the minions of Hitler and Mussolini, were to end this inspiring experiment in libertarian self-management socialism, but the final defeat and liquidation did not, in Korsch's view, obliterate its importance as an example of working class struggle. Korsch was not in the least blind, however, to the menacing danger the working class faced from the monstrous expansion of fascism and counterrevolution on a world-wide scale. We recall that early in the 1920's Korsch focused on the fascist phenomenon in Germany and continued to analyze and struggle against the growth of fascism in the 1930's. The result is his theory of counterrevolution.

### *Korsch Analyzes the Counterrevolution*

In 1931-32 as part of his educational work in Berlin, Korsch formulated "Theses Toward a Critique of the Fascist Concept of the State."<sup>50</sup> Fascism was not in his view primarily a regression to a pre-bourgeois type of state, but was rather a "modern state form" that was a negation of the liberal concept of the state. Although the fascists maintained "a completely irrational state mythology," they "carried out through the 'elite' a sober, illusion-free rational goal-directed state praxis." Korsch took the orthodox Marxian position that the fascist state arose from the foundation of monopoly capitalism, and exercised a monopoly of state power that represented the interests of monopoly capital, and that the fascist state took the explicit form of a class state exercised by the bourgeoisie. Hence, as opposed to Bolshevism, fascism attempted to preserve the previous relations of production and failed to "unleash new forces of production." Finally, the tendency of the fascist state was toward totalitarian control of the entirety of society and fascism threatened to spread throughout the capitalist world and to become an international counterrevolutionary menace.

Indeed this is exactly what happened. Hitler's national socialism triumphed in Germany and forced Korsch and other radicals to emigrate. Korsch went underground and attempted to organize resistance after the

Reichstag fire gave the Nazis an excuse to exterminate the left. Resistance was hopeless, however, and Korsch was forced to emigrate to England and later America.<sup>51</sup>

Korsch continued to analyze the fascist phenomenon and concluded after the triumph of fascism in Italy and Germany, after Franco's victory in Spain, and in light of the Stalinist crimes in the Soviet Union, that the counterrevolution had triumphed on a world-wide scale. The dimensions of the counterrevolution, the threat it posed to the working class, and possible actions to be taken against it were analyzed in "State and Counterrevolution," "The Fascist Counterrevolution," and "The Workers' Fight against Fascism"—all of which are published in this anthology. In "State and Counterrevolution," Korsch begins by exclaiming, "More than any preceding period of recent history and on a much vaster scale, our period is a time not of revolution but of counterrevolution."<sup>52</sup> The counterrevolution prevailed, he claimed, as a conscious attempt both to destroy an actual revolutionary process and to prevent a future one from taking place. The counterrevolution represented a decisive defeat for the working class, and the politics of European and Soviet leaders aimed at "the creation of conditions which will make impossible any independent movement of the European working class for a long time."<sup>53</sup>

Korsch analyzed the new role of the state in creating a "fascist state capitalism" that more consciously than ever before uses the state as an instrument of suppression. Further, "The imperialist war and its aftermath have greatly accelerated and intensified both the transformation of monopoly capitalism into state-monopoly capitalism and the monstrous oppression of the laboring masses by the state which becomes increasingly intertwined with the all-powerful capitalist combines."<sup>54</sup> In this context, Korsch believed that it is imperative to develop a theory of the counterrevolutionary role of the state and to discover ways to combat it:

... the Russian and non-Russian workers today cannot confine themselves to experiencing the steadily advancing counterrevolution without making every effort to interpret its significance. By a careful examination of the past they must find out both the objective and the subjective causes for the victory of fascist state capitalism. They must closely watch its unfolding in order to discover the old and new forms of contradiction and antagonism appearing in that development. Finally they must find out a practical way to resist, as a class, the further encroachments of the counterrevolution and later to pass from an active resistance to an even more active counter-offensive in order to overthrow



both the particular state capitalist form recently adopted and the general principle of exploitation inherent in all old and new forms of bourgeois society and its state power.<sup>55</sup>

The Soviet Union was included in Korsch's concept of the counter-revolution and he wished to call attention to the counterrevolutionary nature of the Soviet state. He indicated the need to analyze the process through which a "revolutionary dictatorship" has become "a counterrevolutionary state" and even "a powerful lever in the fascization of Europe."<sup>56</sup> The problem is rooted, he suggests, in an ambiguity in the political theory of Marxism and a failure to cut "the umbilical cord between Marxism and Jacobinism."<sup>57</sup> We noted the contradiction between the Marxian emphasis on a strong centralized state and a decentralized people's government, and between the "dictatorship of the proletariat" concept and the notion of "the withering away of the state." Marxism was too bound up, Korsch believed, with the Jacobian notion of a revolutionary dictatorship using a strong centralized state as an instrument of "permanent revolution." The problem is that the state can be used as a new instrument of domination that accrues ever more power and authority and refuses to "wither away." This happened in the Soviet Union through a "gradual degeneration" in which the state "abandoned more and more of its original proletarian features" and became "an instrument of the present day European counterrevolution."<sup>58</sup> Korsch never unambiguously offers a solution to the problem of the state but his analysis suggests a critique of the concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat and the over-emphasis of the role of the state in the revolutionary process in the Marxian theory.

Korsch criticizes those Marxists who applaud the triumph of fascism as preparing the way for the later advent of socialism, such as those in the KPD who advanced the slogan, "After Hitler, Us!" The problem, he suggests in "The Fascist Counterrevolution," is the lack of an adequate Marxian concept of counterrevolution. Korsch shows how Marx, Proudhon, Lassalle, and the Socialist Democrats all greeted various manifestations of counterrevolution as in some way creating conditions for a later victory of socialism. He argues that the disastrous position maintained by the Communists that fascism was but a step on the way to socialism is rooted in the Marxian failure to understand counterrevolution. Most Marxists, he claims, see counterrevolution as an "abnormal" interruption of a normally progressive development; hence they are caught up in nineteenth century bourgeois concepts of progress and an amelioristic evolutionary view of history. Moreover, the Marxists under attack fail to see

how fascism is part of the evolutionary growth of capitalism itself. Korsch conceives fascism as an attempt to solve the tasks which the reformist parties and trade unions promised to achieve but were unable to carry out. After the "complete exhaustion and defeat of the revolutionary forces," fascism attempts to solve the labor problem, the problem of planning the economy, and the problem of capitalist crisis, in a counterrevolutionary manner that preserves the old relations of production. Korsch argues: "From this viewpoint all those comfortable illusions about a hidden revolutionary significance in the temporary victory of the counterrevolution, in which the earlier Marxists so frequently indulged, must be entirely abandoned."<sup>59</sup>

In view of the world-wide triumph of the counterrevolution and lack of any perceptible revolutionary alternative, Korsch was very pessimistic about the possibility of defeating fascism, or even beginning a decisive working class offensive.<sup>60</sup> He was especially skeptical of the strategy of gathering all the so-called democratic forces to defeat fascism: "Least of all can fascism be defeated by those people who, after a hundred years of shameless acquiescence in the total abandonment of their original ideals, now hasten to conjure up the infancy of the capitalist age with its belief in liberty, equality, fraternity, and free trade, while at the same time they surreptitiously and inefficiently try to imitate as far as possible fascism's abolition of the last remnants of those early capitalist ideas."<sup>61</sup> In an article, "The Workers' Fight against Fascism," he analysed the "crisis of democracy" and its tendency to either collapse in the face of a fascist offensive, or to be ready to adopt fascist methods in its own economy, society, and foreign politics. In "The Fight for Britain, the Fight for Democracy, and the War Aims of the Working Class," he doubted the sincerity of the desire of the British—who had appeased Hitler and for a century had been the bulwark of imperialism—to represent democracy and the interests of the working class.<sup>62</sup> Korsch rejected here the united front strategy pushed by both the Comintern and the Social Democrats. Instead, he urged the workers not to swallow whole the democratic slogans of the bourgeoisie but to attempt to advance their own class aims and demands, and to beware of tendencies toward fascization from within and without. This does not mean capitulation to fascism: "This criticism of the inept and sentimental methods of present-day anti-fascism does not imply by any means that the workers should do openly what the bourgeoisie does under the disguise of a so-called anti-fascist fight: acquiesce in the victory of fascism. The point is to fight fascism not by fascist means but on its own ground."<sup>63</sup> Fighting fascism on its own ground presumably means fighting for control of production, fighting

for control of the state, and fighting against monopoly capital in all its forms. The old class contradictions have emerged more brutally than before, Korsch believes, and the workers' primary responsibility is to fight their major enemy, the capitalist ruling class:

What, then, is the hope left for the anti-fascists who are opposing the present European war and who will oppose the coming war of the hemispheres? The answer is that, just as life itself does not stop at the entrance of war, neither does the material work of modern industrial production. Fascists today quite correctly conceive the whole of their economy—that substitute for a genuine socialist economy—in terms of a "war economy" (*Webrwirtschaft*). Thus, it is the task of the workers and the soldiers to see to it that this job is no longer done within the restrictive rules imposed upon human labor in present-day capitalist, monopolist, and oppressive society. It has to be done in the manner prescribed by the particular instruments used; that is, in the manner prescribed by the productive forces available at the present stage of industrial development. In this manner both the productive and the destructive forces of present-day society—as every worker, every soldier knows—can be used only if they are used *against* their present monopolistic rulers. Total mobilization of the productive forces presupposes total mobilization of that greatest productive force which is the revolutionary working class itself.<sup>64</sup>

Exactly what strategy Korsch had in mind here is unclear and in view of the powerful hegemony of fascism and monopoly capitalism, he despaired of any real possibility of eliminating them. In "The Workers' Fight against Fascism," he analyzed the "economic pythia" that workers in America faced in the highly concentrated and seemingly invulnerable power of corporate capitalism. Basing his analysis on Berle and Means' *The Modern Corporation and Private Property* and the 1939 Government Report "The Structure of the American Economy," Korsch outlined the incredible concentration of corporate capital and power in America. This state of affairs represents "the end of the market" and the development of a system of corporate and state capitalism where monopoly is the "general condition of present day economy."<sup>65</sup> He argued, "More than at any previous time the monopoly of political power reveals itself as the power to rule and control the social process of production. At the same time this means, under present conditions, the power to restrict production—both the production of industry in peace and the de-

structive production in time of war—and to regulate it in the interest of the monopolist class."<sup>66</sup>

In Korsch's view this new development of corporate capitalism is similar in many ways to fascism itself:

There is very little difference between that economic "co-ordination" that is achieved, and sometimes not achieved, by the political decrees of victorious Nazism, Fascism, and Bolshevism, and this new "corporate community" that has been created by a slow but relentless process in this country through the system of "interlocking directorates," through the activities of the major financial institutions, through particular interest groups, through firms rendering legal, accounting, and similar services to the larger corporations, through "intercorporate stockholdings," and a number of other devices.<sup>67</sup>

and

There is no essential difference between the way the *New York Times* and the Nazi press publish daily "all the news that's fit to print"—under existing conditions of privilege and coercion and hypocrisy. There is no difference in principle between the eighty-odd voices of capitalist mammoth corporations—which, over the American radio, recommend to legions of silent listeners the use of Ex-Lax, Camels, and neighborhood groceries, along with music, war, baseball and domestic news, and dramatic sketches—and the one suave voice of Mr. Goebbels who recommends armaments, race-purity, and worship of the Fuehrer. He too is quite willing to let them have music along with it—plenty of music, sporting news, and all the unpolitical stuff they can take.<sup>68</sup>

Korsch's evaluation of the totalitarian domination by capital and the corporate state in advanced industrial society was amazingly similar in some respects to the analyses of the Frankfurt School.<sup>69</sup> These theories were developed in the 1930's and 1940's under the dual impact of the defeat of the working-class movement in the triumph of fascism, and exposure as emigrés to the new conditions of life in the emerging late-capitalist society in the United States. Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse, and Korsch were overwhelmed by fascism and the United States in quite similar ways. The experience of a European emigré whose hopes for socialist revolution were shattered on the twin reefs of fascism and corporate capitalism were clearly and interestingly expressed in a revealing let-

ter to Paul Partos,<sup>70</sup> accompanied by a document "On American Science," written at the end of July, 1939. "America," Korsch wrote, "is truly different from Europe, certainly from the 'old' Europe in which we all lived, worked, and engaged in our struggles."<sup>71</sup> In Europe one had a relatively clear conception of the state and society, the possibilities for social change and how one could participate in the process. In Europe, "One stood within a movement with a well-known past that led from a familiar present to a sufficiently known future. One had a theory which one could relate to 'critically' at will, exactly because one stood so firmly in it." In America, however, "everything is too big, too wide, too incomprehensible, too dispersed to enable one to take a similar position." Moreover, "the isolated individual feels himself too small, too powerless, and too unknowing in view of the largeness, multiplicity, and changeability of the general existence and process." Both the individual and group found themselves in an "indeterminate" situation confronted with "unlimited possibilities": "an abstract infinity and freedom exists for everyone and for no one." Both the sciences and general conditions in America were subject to incredible change and the proliferation of novelty, making it impossible to get a firm grasp of things:

The constant change of investigated facts, the uncovering of new regions, the discovery of new methods, and the instant classification of all countertendencies, the neutralization of all abnormality and illegality, the instrumentalization of business, politics, corruption, violence, criminality—all this is so much taken for granted that the eruption of novelty in science signifies neither conflict nor tension but only the daily fulfilling of the moving principle—whereby fundamentally it doesn't matter much whether the new is truly new, since in the unceasing transition from what is now familiar to 'something new' the old (*Uralte*) and everyday (*Alltägliche*) will always be discovered again as New.<sup>72</sup>

Hence "change" (*Veränderung*) itself is the principle of American science.

In this situation of flux and seeming novelty a critical theory seems to have lost its purpose and foundation. Korsch has intimations here of Marcuse's "one-dimensionality" where all the classical contradictions of capitalism are stabilized in an unholy harmony. In the process of constant change, Korsch writes, "despite all fluctuation on the surface, there is no dangerous crisislike state, no conflict that isn't neutralized, no idea that is not at once ideologized and welcomed as a novelty by the dominant ideology."<sup>73</sup> All this simultaneous change and stability/sameness

has "the appearance of true progress," but it is really just monopoly capitalism reproducing itself, creating a confusing garden of earthly delights for consumption to provide "Prosperity everlasting"—which means in effect higher profits and more efficient social control for the monopolists. "A science that is institutionalized along with an institutionalized Big Capital produces in one and the same way a new form of social demand. In this way monopoly capitalism reproduces here in its cornucopia once again the fortunate constellation from the early time of competitive capitalism: 'The sciences blossom, the arts prosper, it is a joy to live.'<sup>74</sup> Marcuse's Happy Consciousness!

As for politics in America, Korsch could discover no point of insertion for his left-oppositionalist tendency. "One can only say and do here what is false, misunderstood, incomprehensible, if one does not wish to limit oneself to the Sisyphean task of struggling against the poisoning work of the C. P. [Communist party]."<sup>75</sup> Struggling against American reformist, bureaucratized, and corrupt unions, as against the Communist party, would only in any case serve the interests of the bourgeoisie against labor. (Horkheimer was later to take a similar political position.) The various political groups merely engage in a confused "tug of war" against each other, without the prospect of any decisive victory that will aid the working class. What could one do in this situation, Korsch wondered.<sup>76</sup> Yet, Korsch made a continuous effort to analyze the economic-political situation in America, contributed articles to the leading Marxist journals, gave lectures to workers and university people throughout his travels in the United States, and maintained close contact with Paul Mattick and the group of council communists—but had little hope of any possibility of real radical change or efficacious political activism. "What the relatively most active man of our tendency, Paul Mattick, does," Korsch wrote to Partos, "appears to me too isolated, too short term for me to get involved with it."<sup>77</sup>

For the last twenty years, Korsch noted, the "unresolved task of the revolutionary" was to seek a way that would be more than a mere "complement" to the Communist party. "The single historically real contribution here is that of the Spanish anarchists and you know better than anyone how short-lived and painful even this historically best contribution to the solution to the general task came out,"<sup>78</sup> Korsch wrote to Partos, whom he describes later to Brecht as "the last knight of the completed first revolutionary epoch of the European workers' movement who happily turned home from Valencia in the last hour."<sup>79</sup> The final result of twenty years of class struggle was, in Korsch's view, a string of defeats: "The entire past workers' movement in all its forms has really only pre-

pared internal-capitalist progress, that is presently introduced in counter-revolutionary form through 'fascism' and on a world scale is executed and secured through all capitalist systems."<sup>80</sup> Thus, although Korsch continued to maintain that the working class had a "potentially revolutionary significance," he conceded that "phenomenally" it may well have a counterrevolutionary significance<sup>81</sup>—another position that Marcuse was later to defend. This state of affairs forced Korsch to put the Marxian theory of revolution in radical question and produced the positions he would later formulate in "Ten Theses on Marxism Today."

### *Korsch and Marxism*

Korsch deeply pondered the tragic experiences of the working class movement in Europe, and continuously intended to write a study of social movements and social forces that would trace the itinerary of the revolutionary and counterrevolutionary movements from the French revolution to the present day. In a letter to Brecht, he wrote: "I am planning to re-specialize myself from 'Marxism' to sociology and to the 'Logic of the social sciences.' Two planned books: I) *Social Forces and Social Movements* should be divided into a very abstract first part, and an almost ideographical second part: dealing with revolution and counterrevolution. Working time: around two years (at least!); II) *Social Theories* should be a textbook for academic use that will eventually land me a job."<sup>82</sup> Korsch wished to appraise the various radical and bourgeois social theories in light of the historical development of those movements which either embodied them or repulsed them. He became increasingly interested in the process of history from the rise of capitalism to the present day and wrote a series of historical monographs and reflections upon history itself and those historians who interpreted it.<sup>83</sup>

But above all Korsch was obsessed with Marxism. What role had Marxism played in the defeat of the working-class movement? What validity did it have in the light of the triumph of fascism and the counter-revolution? Why had the Marxian socialist revolution failed to take place in the dominant capitalist countries? What in the Marxian theory was a hindrance to the further development of a revolutionary movement? What constructive role could Marxism still play in future revolutionary movements? Moreover, Korsch became increasingly concerned with the scientific-theoretical status of Marxism. How could Marxism stand up to the results of recent empirical and methodological research in the sciences? How could the Marxian methodology itself be strengthened and

made more rigorous with the aid of recent developments in scientific theory? Finally, what was the relation between the scientific and the revolutionary-political aspects of the Marxian theory? Korsch was involved with these questions from the 1930's up until his debilitating fatal illness ended his theoretical labors in the 1950's.

In the 1930's Korsch became increasingly interested in the theoretical status of Marxism. In a series of essays and lectures, he tested the Marxian theory against the results of the philosophy of science developed by the Vienna Circle and Phillip Frank and Kurt Lewin, with whom he studied and worked.<sup>84</sup> Korsch never adequately mediated his interest in the political-revolutionary and theoretical-scientific components of the Marxian theory. In the 1920's, he maintained a mostly pragmatic attitude toward theory, and judged a theory solely by its ability to successfully guide practice, judging, for example, a theory like Leninism on its ability to carry through socialist revolution. But in the 1930's Korsch became more interested in the formal aspects of theory, and spent much time studying formal logic, the mathematical calculus, and the philosophy of science. He never swallowed whole, however, the dogmas of positivism, and maintained a critical attitude toward scientific empiricism, logical formalism, and the other pet theories of the Vienna Circle.<sup>85</sup> It is, in fact, my belief that Korsch studied philosophy of science and engaged in meta-theoretical research primarily in the interest of strengthening the theoretical status of Marxism, which he felt had been neglected in the inept hands of the leading Social Democratic and Communist theoreticians.

Korsch at different times held two quite contradictory interpretations of the theoretical status of Marxism and points of view from which it could be evaluated. Many times he argued that Marxism requires no philosophical or scientific grounding because it is grounded in the working-class forces and class struggles in historical reality.<sup>86</sup> Moreover, he often cited his friend Brecht's dictum that "truth is concrete," that true theory is judged and evaluated according to its results in practice. But—to apply this criterion to testing Marxism—when the working class movement is defeated and its forces are exhausted or coopted, what foundation does Marxism then have and how can it be tested in practice? A possible solution, which Korsch seemed to consider but never committed himself to, would be to ground Marxism in the scientificity of its theory and evaluate it according to its truth as a description of social-economic-historical reality. Korsch in fact seemed to believe that Marxism was the true theory (in this sense) of history, society, and political economy, and that its truth did not solely rest in its embodiment in working-class forces and practice, but also in the scientific strength and cogency of the theory

itself.<sup>87</sup> Although there is an unresolved tension in the later Korsch between the insufficiently mediated political-revolutionary and theoretical-scientific components of the Marxian theory, it would be a mistake to believe that Korsch fell into the snares of either a totally pragmatized theory that solely judges theory on its political use (Korsch criticized Lenin on these grounds),<sup>88</sup> or that he took a totally positivistic view of theory. In fact, Korsch continued to defend a version of *dialectical* Marxism and never fell into the dogmas of pragmatism or positivism.<sup>89</sup>

Indeed, a serious problem for Korsch, which he never adequately resolved, was the relation between dialectics and science. Korsch continuously reflected on Hegel and dialectics and how they were appropriated/transformed by Marx. Korsch tended to play down the conflicts between dialectics and science, finding much materialism and empiricism in Hegel, dialectics in science, and a successful synthesis in Marx.<sup>90</sup> In a letter to Paul Mattick giving a critique of his concept of Marxism and dialectics, Korsch argued that dialectics for Marx is not a magic wand, but "served him as a hand tool for seeking and finding his scientific results; he once learned this method and had no other (in a lesser degree this is still so for us today)."<sup>91</sup> Korsch opposed assigning too grand a role to the concept of synthesis in Marx's dialectic (as if, as Mattick wrote, the communist society was the grand synthesis of Marx's production), and concluded that he is "an opponent of *philosophical-absolute*" interpretations of dialectics because "thereby the strict empirical scientific knowledge of the current factual situation that lies before us, and above all *praxis* as 'human sensuous activity' is underplayed (*zu kurz kommt*)."<sup>92</sup>

Korsch was equally critical, however, of making a fetish of science. Of contemporary science, he wrote, "after the abolition of fetishism which adheres to science in the epoch of commodity production . . . science will truly be equivalent to accumulated human labor-growing forces of production."<sup>93</sup> Korsch suggested that science had fallen prey to fetishism, which could only be eliminated through "eliminating classes and class contradictions"—a "practical-historical task"—and then "science can be reconstructed with material production on a higher level, in so far as 'science' is abolished (*aufgehoben*)."<sup>94</sup> Korsch then indicated that he approved of the distinction between the natural sciences and the social sciences to the extent that it elucidated the class character of the propositions of the social sciences, but he also wished to stress that even the natural sciences have a class-interest: "the same class-character can be shown in an appropriate and rational way within the natural sciences."<sup>95</sup> Further, Korsch argues against the Engels-Lenin emphasis on the pri-

macy of the man-nature relation as fundamental—which demotes the relation between socialized human beings to a secondary position, and renders the social sciences secondary to the natural sciences. Korsch counters—and I believe he is on the right track here—"To me it appears that *nothing is primary here*; that *man-nature* and *man-man* are to be coordinated, that both are equiprimordial and fundamental, historically, logically, and practically. The 'new element added on with the appearance of the finished man—namely Society,' in Engels' citation—is to me clearly an expression of a bourgeois conception of history and theory of revolution."<sup>96</sup> Moreover, although Marxism "formally recognizes the *genetic* priority of nature," its "primary interest" is in historical-social development.<sup>97</sup> Korsch then chides Mattick for wanting uncritically to "allow the whole of science to stand as objective science (like the enchanted prince in the fairy tale!). This all hangs together with what I characterize above as the 'Engels-Lenin variant' of a tendency toward natural philosophy"; i.e., he is criticizing the tendency—championed by the positivists and positivistic Marxists—to take the natural sciences as the model of truth.<sup>98</sup>

Moreover, in his discussions of the theoretical status of Marxism, Korsch constantly emphasizes that the propositions of Marxism undercut the rigid positivist distinctions between fact and value, quantitative and qualitative propositions, description and critique. In a letter to Mattick, he reiterates a position he often took: "Marxism concerns itself with society primarily in dissolution. Thus crisis is 'normal' for Marxism"—which doesn't exclude, he warns, careful, empirical, quantitative analysis of the existing society.<sup>99</sup> Above all, Korsch endlessly claims, Marxism is a theory of revolutionary practice. Hence all of its propositions are geared toward critique and social change. Such a practically-oriented theory is subject to continuous change and modification: "*I wanted to say and have said* that it is a fallacy when one thinks that the militant character of revolutionary materialist theory (which is *obviously* to be preserved!) can be *protected by other means* against a weakening of its fiber than through the *complete readiness* to accept all theoretically *justified modification* . . . the sole means toward preserving the militant character consists in further developing science. . . . I do not believe that at any time true revolutionary interest can come in conflict with real progress in science. Thus, to the contrary, all true progress in science is welcome to revolutionary theory and practice."<sup>100</sup>

These issues raise the thorny question of the relationship between Marxian dialectics and science in Korsch's thought and the problem of Korsch and positivism. It is sometimes alleged that Korsch championed

a positivistic version of Marxism and in his later work fell prey to the dogmas of positivism. Herbert Marcuse, for example, has written: "Brecht was strongly influenced by Korsch. Korsch's Marxism had a very strong positivistic content. And my friends in the Frankfurt school were against this positivistic content."<sup>101</sup> Italian critics have claimed that Korsch collapsed the Marxian distinction between the empirical level and method of research (Marx's *Forschungsweise*) and the conceptual level and method of presentation (Marx's *Darstellungsweise*).<sup>102</sup> It is claimed that Korsch collapsed/identified theory with the historical-empirical level, and thus deprived theory of (1) its autonomy; (2) its reflective-critical capacity; and (3) its anticipatory moment. Further, one could argue that Korsch operated with an instrumental concept of science and is not critical enough toward scientific methodology and practice.<sup>103</sup> Hence the argument that in the last analysis Korsch fell prey to positivism.

Although there is a case to be made for Korsch's kinship with some positivistic doctrines, one cannot simply label Korsch a positivist and end the matter without further discussion. I have tried to show that Korsch took a critical Marxist position on the sciences free from many of the positivist dogmas. Interestingly, in a letter to Partos, Korsch complained that Marx was not critical enough of the social sciences:

As you know, in my orthodox period I always claimed that the revolutionary kernel of Marx's economic theory was in its "critique," i.e., the essential critical dissolution of bourgeois "political economy." . . . In my last lessons of winter 32-33 I have changed my viewpoint a little. I have shown how modest—if looked at very closely—is the critical contribution as opposed to *Capital's* main economic content, how little developed were the critical points and how a real critique even of classical economy was traceable only in the first volume of *Capital*, edited by Marx himself, while the manuscripts worked on and edited by Engels and Kautsky (second and third volume of *Capital*; *Theories of Surplus Value*) show Marx only as a critic of vulgar economics and actually as a faithful disciple and follower of classical economics in the details of money, income, etc. . . . There was a connection between the bourgeois character of Marx's politics and the would-be continuation of the critical dissolution of bourgeois economics into a science directly social and therefore into a praxis directly revolutionary. . . . Marx certainly developed the *historical* critique of the economic categories well (and Sorel went too far when he challenged this) but he proclaimed the "over-

coming" of economics into a *directly social science* only in the abstract instead of actually bringing it about.<sup>104</sup>

This passage indicates that Korsch is criticizing Marx for being "too positivistic" and uncritical toward bourgeois science, and for not going far enough in the direction of creating a new revolutionary social science that breaks completely with previous bourgeois science. Korsch continually questioned the dogmas of orthodox Marxism and scientific positivism, and described his own theory as "a non-dogmatic approach to Marxism." Crucially, Korsch never surrendered the Marxian dialectic of theory and practice. It made no sense for him to discuss theory at all separated from social practice. In "A Non-Dogmatic Approach to Marxism," he wrote, "There is no use in discussing controversial points in any social theory (not even in that social theory which is commonly described as religion) unless such discussion is part of an existing social struggle . . . the result of any such materialist discussion must in all cases 'make a difference' in respect to the actual behavior not of an individual nor of a small group of people, but of a veritable collectivity, a social mass."<sup>105</sup> Against sterile, abstract discussions of Marxist dogmas, Korsch wrote, "It is here proposed to revindicate the critical, pragmatic, and activist element which for all this has never been entirely eliminated from the social theory of Marx and which during the few short phases of its predominance has made that theory a most efficient weapon of the proletarian class struggle."<sup>106</sup> Korsch interestingly noted in a letter to Partos that he had earlier made "the theoretical and practical position of Marx toward '*politics*' the demarcation point of my division between what is living and dead in Marxism."<sup>107</sup> The crux of the matter is that Korsch is above all a revolutionary theorist and is primarily interested in theory, science, and philosophy to the extent that they can serve an emancipatory role in the process of social change.

Hence, although Korsch is in the last analysis often ambiguous as to where he stands vis-à-vis Marxism and positivism, dialectics and empirical science, one cannot simply label him a "positivist Marxist" (à la Marcuse or Adorno) without serious qualifications. Thus I reject those interpretations of Korsch which either dismiss him as a "positivist Marxist" or praise him for his purely "scientific Marxism."<sup>108</sup> On the other hand, I do not accept the interpretations of Korsch as a "Hegelian Marxist," for from the beginning, his appropriation of Hegel was highly critical and selective.<sup>109</sup> In some of his works, (for example, "Hegel and Revolution") and in some letters, there are sharp, often violent, attacks

on Hegel.<sup>110</sup> The fact of the matter is that Korsch was neither a positivist Marxist or a Hegelian Marxist. Rather he had a dialectical version of Marxism that was at once critical of orthodox Marxism, Hegel, and positivist science, while appropriating aspects of these theories in his own project.

Korsch's major work of the 1930's, *Karl Marx*, is an attempt to mediate the contradictions between Marx and Hegel, dialectics and science, and the scientific and political-revolutionary components of the Marxian theory. However, I believe it is a mistake to take *Karl Marx* as Korsch's definitive work, or as his "masterpiece."<sup>111</sup> Moreover, I believe that Buckmiller is wrong in claiming, "Korsch's struggle with Marxism expresses itself especially in this book."<sup>112</sup> Rather, Korsch's critique of Marxism is better expressed in the series of essays collected in this anthology.<sup>113</sup> *Karl Marx*, in this sense, is non-representative of Korsch's later work, for it suppresses Korsch's radical critique of Marxism. *Karl Marx* is, and was intended to be, a popularization of Marxism that would exposit and defend the Marxist teaching for a wide audience.<sup>114</sup> As such, it is eminently successful and provides an excellent summary and overview of the Marxian teaching on "Society," "Political Economy," and "History."<sup>115</sup> But it is in no way as critical of Marxism as many of Korsch's essays from the period. The truth of the Marxian theory is assumed and defended throughout, as is its superiority to all bourgeois theories. Throughout *Karl Marx* there are laudatory passages like the following: "Marx's new socialist and proletarian science, which, in a changed historical situation, further developed the revolutionary theory of the classical founders of the doctrine of society, is the genuine social science of our time."<sup>116</sup> Or, Marxism "was far and away in advance of the other contemporary schools of social thought. It remains superior to all other social theories even now, in spite of the comparatively negligible progress which Marxists have in the meantime made in the formal development of the methods discovered by Marx and Engels. In a partly philosophical form, it has yet achieved a great number of important scientific results which hold good to this day."<sup>117</sup>

Hence, although the Korsch expert can sometimes read between the lines of *Karl Marx* "Korsch's struggle with Marxism," on the whole one finds a sympathetic and systematic defense of the Marxian theory. For example, in *Karl Marx*, Korsch does not question the Marxian theory of revolution, which he so penetratingly challenges in many of his other works. None of the critiques that I discuss in the introductory material are developed in *Karl Marx*, and Korsch generally cites the major Marx-

ist texts as gospel. Even Lenin's essay, *Left-wing Communism—An Infantile Disease*,<sup>118</sup> whose positions Korsch usually attacked, is favorably cited in *Karl Marx* (its non-critical insertion here drove Paul Mattick to a sharp critique).<sup>119</sup> It is true that Korsch generally develops a critical, dialectical version of Marxism in *Karl Marx* that is certainly superior to the Social Democratic and Communist orthodoxies, but there is no critique of Marxism of the sort that distinguishes the most challenging and stimulating work of the later Korsch.

On the other hand, not only *Karl Marx* but the overwhelming bulk of Korsch's later work refutes the judgment that Korsch abandoned Marxism.<sup>120</sup> Although Korsch radically questioned aspects of the Marxian political theory and theory of revolution, he never abandoned his commitment to the liberation of the working class and to the Marxian belief that the working class and its struggles are the motor and telos of our history and the vehicle of social change. Hence, Korsch never surrendered the Marxian position that the overthrow of capitalism and construction of socialism is the main task on the historical agenda. Korsch's friend and student, Heinz Langerhans, is on the right track when he claims that "the proletariat is the empirical foundation of Korsch's theory," and that "Korsch never discussed 'Marxism' through the omission of the authentic point-of-reference 'proletariat,' and to be sure proletariat as an active power."<sup>121</sup> For Korsch, in Langerhans' words, "the activity of the revolutionary proletariat as the empirical foundation of Marxism" remained the crucial pivot around which his own theory revolved. Korsch never abandoned a practical concern with the liberation of the working class, and continuously stressed the role of revolutionary practice in social change. As Langerhans notes, "this activist component is the decisive characteristic of Korsch's theoretical efforts and his position within the communist movement right up until his death."<sup>122</sup>

To the end of his life, Korsch championed a "non-dogmatic Marxism," and the main source of his later despair was the belief that a defeated and enslaved working class could not realize the Marxian theory in a non-revolutionary era dominated by the counterrevolution. A new period of revolutionary struggles, however, would awaken interest in the Marxian theory and enable Marxism to arise again as a politically relevant historical force. This began happening in the so-called Third World with the national liberation movements, and Korsch welcomed these movements as providing a possible rebirth of revolutionary theory and new possibilities for revolutionary practice.<sup>123</sup> Indeed, Korsch had been keenly aware of this phenomenon since the 1920's and his group

*Kommunistische Politik* and later Mattick's group and journal published many articles on China and other revolutionary struggles in the Third World.<sup>123</sup>

In posing the question of whether Korsch abandoned Marxism it is significant to note that the project he was working on in the mid-1950's when he contracted sclerosis was a manuscript called "The Time of Abolitions," which attempted to take up a problematic that was central to the Marxist theory, but which had never been adequately developed. His wife Hedda writes: "He thought that as capitalist society had developed since Marx's time, Marxism too should have developed to understand it. His uncompleted text, the 'Manuscript of Abolitions,' is an attempt to develop a Marxist theory of historical development in terms of the future abolition of the divisions that constitute our society—such as the divisions between different classes, between town and country, between mental and physical labor."<sup>124</sup>

Korsch thought Marxism through to the end and lived through a period of history that put Marxism in radical question. Korsch himself never reached a final verdict on the present status and future fate of Marxism, and the movement of history has not yet put us in a position to write the final obituary or elegy to Marxism. It is our lot, as it was Korsch's, to live through a period of revolution and counterrevolution where the outcome is uncertain and the role of Marxism in this scenario is vital but problematical. Bertolt Brecht, who studied with Korsch, well understood the predicament of his former teacher. Walter Benjamin reports: "Yesterday after playing chess Brecht said: 'You know, when Korsch comes, we really ought to work out a new game with him. A game in which the moves do not always stay the same; where the function of each piece changes after it has stood in the same square for a while.'"<sup>125</sup> Korsch helps us to understand the changing moves of the game of revolution and counterrevolution in our time, but does not—no one does!—give us the rules, the strategy for winning, or the probable outcome.

### *Korsch in Exile*

Korsch's years of exile in England, Denmark, and the United States are generally tragic and depressing. Forced to emigrate from Germany at Hitler's rise to power, Korsch went to England where he began work on *Karl Marx*. He found a generally cold reception there and was involved in the inevitable emigré politics and one sordid scandal.<sup>126</sup> He found

moments of refuge and stimulating conditions for work in his visits with Brecht, who was living in Denmark. In travels throughout Europe before the outbreak of the second World War he attempted to maintain contact with leading left-oppositionalist figures and groups. But for the most part Korsch was cut off from contact with the revolutionary movement with which he had been so deeply involved.

In 1936 Korsch emigrated to America, where he was to remain for the rest of his life, outside of brief trips to Europe and Mexico. In America he was almost totally isolated from the revolutionary politics to which he had dedicated his life. He was never able to find satisfactory employment in America and was never able to carry through any of several major works which he outlined. He traveled widely, had contacts with many American intellectuals, European emigrés, and small working class groups, but was never able to find any adequate institutional arrangements or political involvement. He applied repeatedly for university appointments or financial support from American foundations, but was only able to receive infrequent visiting appointments, on the assistant professor level, at American universities (although he had been a full professor in Germany in the early 1920's). We have noted his general evaluation of America and the lack of a revolutionary movement with which he could get involved.

The main source of information on Korsch's exile period is his letters, which disclose his continuing interest in Marxist theory and practice. A letter to Paul Mattick, translated in this anthology, sheds light on the complex relation between Korsch and the Institute for Social Research.<sup>127</sup> Korsch, we recall, was the teacher and friend of Felix Weil who financed the Institute, and who purportedly wanted Korsch to head the Institute.<sup>128</sup> Korsch's students were active in the Institute while it was centered in Frankfurt, and Korsch frequently published in the Institute's journal. A growing strain evolved between Korsch and the Institute during the exile period, probably on account of Korsch's more orthodox—and political—version of Marxism. This tension is expressed in Korsch's pejorative evaluation of the Institute and its leading personalities in the letter to Mattick.<sup>129</sup> This tension explains why collaboration between Korsch and the Institute was unlikely to produce any positive results, and in fact Korsch seemed to have very little productive contact with the Institute thereafter.

Korsch did, however, remain in contact with Brecht, who provides an interesting picture of Korsch in America in his *Arbeitsjournal*: "Caught Korsch again who must leave the day after tomorrow. He has become heavier and speaks somewhat more in footnotes. He has really changed



in personality (*typ*). He was always strong, was, however, rather thin, and had these deep blue eyes beneath the dark brown. He is now industrious, robust, the eyes are smaller, almost cunning. He lives from the \$100 of the Institute and works on his essays. That is unchanged, he says he poetizes (*dichtet*) his science, while I make my poems like a shoemaker makes shoes. At the moment, he is interested in Geopolitics.<sup>130</sup>

A remarkable letter from Korsch to Brecht fleshes out Korsch's 1940's perspectives.<sup>131</sup> Korsch's expulsion from the world revolutionary movement seems to have elevated him to an increasingly Olympian perspective. This drive to grasp the dynamics of the totality of world history, of the world-historical totality, is expressed in Korsch's report to Brecht on "The Present Situation and Perspectives." Korsch tells how he broke off his studies of the Philippines and the struggles between the new colonialism and national liberation movements to grasp the dynamics of a "new era of regression on a world-wide scale." Korsch saw new tendencies of intellectual retrogression and new forms of imperialist barbarism that led him to a comparison with the decline of the Roman empire. Striking is his desire to grasp the dynamics of the whole process of history from the "century of Marx" (1848-1948) to the present day. Indicative of Korsch's historicism is his desire to grasp the interconnections between the theoretical dimensions of Marxism and its historical context, focusing on those "practical challenges" which led to a disintegration as well as a development of the Marxian theory. Korsch indicates to Brecht how the Cold War and the emerging spectre of "Yankee imperialism" has forced him to re-evaluate his position on the Soviet Union. He concludes with some cryptic remarks on the emerging "new world order."

It appears from Korsch's letters that his moods changed from deeply pessimistic and depressive to relatively cheerful.<sup>132</sup> He traveled around America a lot and continually sought contacts with political groups, maintaining a sharp interest in the political events of the day. In a 1948 letter to an Australian leftist journal, included in this anthology, he indicated his willingness to contribute articles and notes his plans to write a book that will "trace both the final results of the 'Marxist' era of the workers' movement to the original *theory and practice* of Marx: (1) before, during, and after 1848; (2) during the period of the Working Man's International Association in the 1860's."<sup>133</sup> He also indicated an interest in Bakunin and enclosed an article on the Paris commune which he says, "might interest people who have not freed themselves from the Marx-Lenin-Trotsky legend to the same extent as you or I might claim it for ourselves."<sup>134</sup>

The last document in the anthology is a letter to Erich Gerlach, with

an additional note to Ruth Fisher. It shows both Korsch's attempt to make contact with the American working-class movement, and a desire to restore the "ideas of Marx."<sup>135</sup> Korsch, we see, never abandoned his interest in Marxism and was vitally concerned with the theory and practice of revolution right up until an attack of sclerosis ended his theoretical labors. Korsch spent his last years in McLean's Psychiatric Hospital and died in Belmont, Massachusetts, on October 21, 1961.

Korsch was in a sense ahead of his times. His version of critical Marxism that challenged Social Democratic and Communist orthodoxies and his search for new possibilities and forms of revolutionary change found an eager audience in the New Left throughout the world in the 1960's.<sup>136</sup> New Korsch translations and anthologies have recently appeared in every major European language, and there is a proliferating amount of literature discussing and appraising Korsch's work. Korsch-discussions in English-speaking countries have been hampered, however, by the inaccessibility of some of his most important texts which have not been translated, and/or lie buried in obscure, now defunct, journals. Moreover, there has been a general unfamiliarity with the Korschian opus as a whole and the historical circumstances within which his work was produced. The present introduction and anthology attempts to alleviate this condition, and to provide the necessary prerequisites for a critical Korsch reception in the English-speaking world, challenging us to discern "what is living and dead" in both Marxism and Korsch. My introduction has traced the complex development of Korsch's life and work, and has shown the need for a historical-theoretical reconstruction of the Korschian work, as well as the need for a critical reception that applies the same critical standards to Korsch that he applied to other thinkers, especially the Marxists. Korsch in an especially interesting way was connected with one of the most fateful political and intellectual dramas of our time, and his odyssey as a critical Marxist through the forlorn terrain of the working-class movement helps us to come to terms with a crucial segment of modern history. Korsch's adventures with Marxism have produced a body of work that continues to challenge and stimulate our own critical thinking and to this end the anthology is dedicated.

### Notes

1. A series of articles on trade unions and wage-price controls were collected in a pamphlet, *Um die Tariffähigkeit* (Berlin: Prager, 1928).

2. Karl Korsch, *Um die Tariffähigkeit*, p. 5.

3. It is going too far, however, to claim that Korsch ever believed there was a mystical identity between his theory and existing political practice, as Adorno implies in making Korsch, along with Soviet Marxism (1), examples of "identity theory"; see T. W. Adorno, *Negative Dialektik* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1966), p. 144. The sentence equating Korsch and Diamat with Marxist identity theory was strangely omitted from the English translation of Adorno's book.
4. See above, "Korsch's Revolutionary Marxism," and "Fundamentals of Socialization."
5. Karl Korsch, *Die materialistische Geschichtsauffassung, "Eine Auseinandersetzung mit Karl Kautsky."* A fine discussion of Korsch's critique of Kautsky is found in Leonardo Ceppa, "Korsch's Marxism," *Telos* 26 (Winter 1975-1976): 88ff.
6. Actually, Rosa Luxemburg saw this as early as her *Social Reform or Revolution* in 1899. The same point was also developed by Lukács in "Bernstein's Revenge," in *Tactics and Ethics* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973).
7. Korsch, *Die materialistische Geschichtsauffassung*, pp. 4-5.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 6.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 130.
10. Korsch, *Marxism and Philosophy*, pp. 98-99. Korsch had alluded to the kinship of Lenin and Kautsky as representatives of the "Marxist center" in the *Anti-Kautsky*, p. 80.
11. Korsch, *Marxism and Philosophy*, p. 129.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 109.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 110.
14. Karl Korsch, "The Passing of Marxism Orthodoxy," *International Council Correspondence* 3, no. 11-2 (December 1937); also in this anthology.
15. *Ibid.*
16. *Ibid.*
17. Korsch, "The History of the Marxist Ideology in Russia," *Living Marxism* 4, no. 2 (March 1938): 44-50; also in this anthology.
18. *Ibid.*
19. *Ibid.*
20. Karl Korsch, "The Crisis of Marxism," unpublished manuscript, in this anthology.
21. *Ibid.*
22. *Ibid.*
23. Karl Korsch, "Über einige grundsätzliche Voraussetzungen für eine materialistische Diskussion der Krisistheorie," *Proletarier* 1, no. 1 (February 1933): 20-25, translated in this anthology as "On Some Fundamental Pre-conditions for a Materialist Discussion of Crisis Theory," by Karl-Heinz Otto and Andrew Giles-Peters.
24. Korsch, "The Crisis of Marxism."
25. *Ibid.*
26. *Ibid.*
27. Karl Korsch, "Ten Theses on Marxism Today," unpublished lecture, in this anthology.
28. See Karl Marx, *The Civil War in France*, in Robert Tucker, ed., *The Marx-Engels Reader* (New York: Norton, 1972), discussed by Korsch in "Revolutionäre Kommune," *Die Aktion* 19, nos. 5-8 (September 1929): 176-181, and *Die Aktion* 21, nos. 3-4 (July 1931): 60-64, translated in this anthology as "Revolutionary Commune" by Karl-Heinz Otto and Andrew Giles-Peters.
29. Karl Korsch, "Das Problem der Staatseinheit-Föderalismus in der Französischen Revolution," *Grünberg-Archiv* 15 (1930): 126-146. Here it should be noted that, although Korsch saw a certain sort of decentralization constituted by a workers' councils system as providing a corrective to an overly bureaucratized centralism, he never took the anarcho-syndicalist-federalist position, because he always believed that a complex socialist economy required state intervention and a central plan to regulate the production and distribution of goods.
30. See Marx's theory of the two stages in *Critique of the Gotha Program*, in Tucker, *Marx-Engels Reader*, which was favorably discussed by Korsch in a 1922 edition to which he wrote an introduction; compare his terse critique in "Ten Theses on Marxism Today."
31. See Lenin's *One Step Forward, Two Steps Back*, in *Selected Works* (New York: International Publishers, 1971), vol. 3, for an analysis of the Blanquian roots of Social Democracy; perhaps Korsch is applying this analysis to Marxism as a whole. Walter Benjamin compares Marx and Blanqui in the last part of his "Arcades" project; here it is interesting to note that Korsch and Benjamin were guests of Brecht at the same time in Denmark in 1935.
32. Karl Korsch, "Theses on Hegel and Revolution," in "A Non-Dogmatic Approach to Marxism," *Politics* 3 no. 5 (May 1946): 8-11, and in this anthology.
33. Karl Korsch, "Marx' Stellung in der europäischen Revolution von 1848," in *Politische Texte*, p. 374.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 377.
35. Karl Korsch, "Marxism and the Present Tasks of the Proletarian Class Struggle," *Living Marxism* 4, no. 4 (August 1938): 115-119, and in this anthology.
36. *Ibid.*
37. Korsch, "Revolutionary Commune."
38. *Ibid.*
39. For more detailed information on the Spanish collectives, see Sam Dolgoff, ed., *The Anarchist Collectives* (New York: Free Life Press, 1974). For accounts of the Spanish Civil War, see Franz Borkenau, *The Spanish Cockpit* (London: Faber and Faber, 1962); Pierre Broue and Emile Témime, *Revolution and the War in Spain* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1972); and, of

course, George Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1953).

40. Karl Korsch, "The Pre-history of the Spanish Revolution," in *Politische Texte*, p. 243.

41. *Ibid.*

42. Karl Korsch, "Die Spanische Revolution," *Die Neue Rundschau* 42, no. 9 (September 1931): 284-302, translated in this anthology as "The Spanish Revolution" by Karl-Heinz Otto, Andrew Giles-Peters, and Heinz Peters.

43. Karl Korsch, "Economics and Politics in Revolutionary Spain," *Living Marxism* 4, no. 3 (May 1938): 76-82, and in this anthology.

44. *Ibid.*

45. For a discussion of Korsch's principle of historical specificity, see *Karl Marx*. I discuss the principle in the introduction to "Korsch and Marxism."

46. Karl Korsch, "Collectivization in Spain," *Living Marxism* 4, no. 6 (April 1939): 178-182.

47. *Ibid.*

48. *Ibid.*

49. *Ibid.*

50. Korsch, "Thesen zur Kritik des Faschistischen Staatsbegriffs," *Gegner* 7, no. 4-5 (March 1932): 20, translated in this anthology as "Theses Toward a Critique of the Fascist Concept of the State" by Karl-Heinz Otto and Andrew Giles-Peters.

51. See Hedda Korsch, "Memories," p. 44, for details of Korsch's attempt to organize anti-Nazi resistance in 1933.

52. Karl Korsch, "State and Counterrevolution," *Modern Quarterly* 11, no. 2 (Winter 1939): 60-67, also in this anthology.

53. *Ibid.*

54. *Ibid.*

55. *Ibid.*

56. *Ibid.*

57. *Ibid.*

58. *Ibid.*

59. Karl Korsch, "Fascist Counterrevolution," *Living Marxism* 5, no. 2 (Fall 1940): 29-37, also in this anthology.

60. Korsch's despair is evident in his letters to his more optimistic friend Paul Partos; see *Jahrbuch Arbeiterbewegung* 2, pp. 218-219, 222, and 225-226.

61. Korsch, "Fascist Counterrevolution."

62. Karl Korsch, "The Fight for Britain, the Fight for Democracy, and the War Aims of the Working Class," in *Living Marxism* 5, no. 4 (Spring 1941): 1-6.

63. Korsch, "Fascist Counterrevolution."

64. *Ibid.*

65. Karl Korsch, "The Workers Fight against Fascism," *Living Marxism* 5, no. 3 (Winter 1941): 36-49, also in this anthology.

66. Korsch, "Fascist Counterrevolution."

67. Korsch, "Workers Fight against Fascism."

68. Korsch, "Fascist Counterrevolution."

69. For a discussion of Korsch's relationship with the Frankfurt School members and their Institute for Social Research, see "Korsch's Revolutionary Marxism," and the letter to Paul Mattick in this anthology.

70. Karl Korsch, "On American Science," from a letter to Paul Partos, end of July, 1939, in *Jahrbuch Arbeiterbewegung* 2, pp. 227ff. Paul Partos (1911-1964) was Hungarian by birth and studied with Korsch in Berlin in the 1920's; he seems to have been one of Korsch's closest and most intelligent students. Partos emigrated to Paris in 1933 and participated in many anti-fascist groups. He fought in the Spanish Civil War and emigrated to England in 1939.

71. Korsch, "On American Science," p. 227.

72. *Ibid.*, p. 229.

73. *Ibid.*

74. *Ibid.*

75. Korsch to Partos, July 26-29, 1939, in *Jahrbuch Arbeiterbewegung* 2, p. 225.

76. *Ibid.*

77. *Ibid.*, p. 226.

78. *Ibid.*

79. Korsch to Brecht, July 31, 1939, in *Jahrbuch Arbeiterbewegung* 2, p. 233.

80. Korsch to Partos, July 26-29, 1939, p. 226.

81. *Ibid.*, p. 227.

82. Korsch to Brecht, July 31, 1939, p. 233.

83. See Korsch's later essays, "War and Revolution," "The World Historians," "Notes on History," and "A Historical View of Geopolitics."

84. See Korsch's essays, "The Law of Casualty and Its Limits" and "Mathematical Constructs in Psychology and Sociology," and his 1930 lecture, "Albert Einstein." These themes are discussed in Gian Rusconi's "Dialektik in pragmatischer Anwendung," in Pozzoli, *Über Karl Korsch*.

85. See Korsch's letters to Partos for critiques for positivist doctrines, in *Jahrbuch Arbeiterbewegung* 2, pp. 219, 223-224, and 230-232.

86. Karl Korsch, *Karl Marx* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1938).

87. *Ibid.*

88. Korsch, *Marxism and Philosophy*, pp. 126ff.

89. See my discussion in the introduction to "Korsch and Marxism" for an elaboration of this theme.

90. Karl Korsch, "Der Empirismus in der Hegelschen Philosophie" (1931 lecture, discussed in Rusconi, "Dialektik"); "The Marxist Philosophy and the

Sciences" (a review of Haldane's book in *Living Marxism* 5, no. 1 [Spring 1940]: 59-61); and *Karl Marx*.

91. Korsch to Paul Mattick, May 10, 1935, in *Jahrbuch Arbeiterbewegung* 2, p. 138. Paul Mattick was a member of the extreme left party, the KAPD, in Germany during the early 1920's, and emigrated to the United States in 1926. He worked in Chicago with offshoots of the IWW, and in the 1930's organized an international Communist group that published their views in *International Councils Correspondence* (later *Living Marxism and New Essays*) to which Korsch was a frequent contributor. Later Mattick published *Marx and Keynes* and many books and articles. See Mattick's essay "The Marxism of Karl Korsch" in *Survey* (London), no. 53 (1964), pp. 86-87.

92. Korsch to Mattick, May 10, 1935, p. 139.

93. *Ibid.*, p. 137.

94. *Ibid.*, p. 137. In a letter to Paul Partos, December 16-17, 1935, in *Jahrbuch Arbeiterbewegung* 2, pp. 169-170, Korsch argues that "fetishism" is a more useful concept than "reification" and explains his preference: "You still always use the Lukácsian concept of 'reification.' Now to be sure Marx in fact occasionally speaks of a 'thinglike disguise' and a 'thingification' (*Verachlichung*) of the social character of production. But the expression 'fetishism' is infinitely better for materialist and sociological conception and description of this form of thought. With Lukács, who extends the use of this concept without measure, it is at bottom a matter of a protest of a 'philosophy of life' against the cold, rigid, fixed factual and material world. . . . 'Fetish' is in its very form a sociological category. Further, it expresses what is really taking place in reality: the transference of human social powers to things, of the production of currently living labor to accumulated dead labor of the past as capital." Actually, Korsch's definition of fetishism here is compatible with Lukács' notion of reification. See George Lukács, "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat," in his *History and Class Consciousness* (London: Merlin Press, 1971).

95. Korsch to Mattick, May 10, 1935, pp. 142-143.

96. *Ibid.*, p. 142.

97. *Ibid.*, p. 149.

98. *Ibid.*, p. 143.

99. *Ibid.*, p. 150. See further, Korsch, "Why I am a Marxist," p. 69.

100. Korsch to Mattick, December 12, 1938, in *Jahrbuch Arbeiterbewegung* 2, pp. 195-196.

101. Herbert Marcuse, radio broadcast in West Germany, Saarländischen Rundfunks, from October 8, 1973, "Brecht im Exil." Further, see T. W. Adorno, *Vorlesung zur Einleitung in die Soziologie* (Frankfurt: Junius-Drucke, 1973), p. 37.

102. The distinction is made by Marx in the introduction to *Capital*. See the articles by Leonardo Ceppa, "Korsch's Marxism," and Furio Cerutti,

"Hegel, Lukács, and Korsch," both in *Telos* 26 (Winter 1975-1976), for criticisms of Korsch's failure to develop this distinction.

103. Here one might compare Korsch's position toward science with that of Horkheimer and Adorno in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (New York: Seabury, 1972), Horkheimer in *Eclipse of Reason* (New York: Seabury, 1973), and Marcuse in *One-Dimensional Man* (Boston: Beacon, 1964).

104. Korsch to Partos, June 12, 1939, in *Jahrbuch Arbeiterbewegung* 2, pp. 160-162. This is an extremely interesting letter full of illuminating insights.

105. Korsch, "A Non-dogmatic Approach to Marxism."

106. *Ibid.*

107. Korsch to Partos, June 12, 1939, p. 161.

108. "Positivism" was always a perjorative term for Korsch which he, like the Frankfurt school, juxtaposed as the polar opposite to dialectical Marxism. See his letter to J. A. Dawson (in this anthology), where he negatively refers to Popper's "positivism." For a discussion of those advocates of "scientific Marxism" who take Korsch as an ally, see Giacomo Marramao, "Korsch in Italy," *Telos* 26 (Winter 1975-1976).

109. See his critiques of Hegel in *Marxism and Philosophy* and *Karl Marx*. I might note that Korsch's critique/appropriation of Hegel is remarkably complicated and would require a long study to adequately sort out and fully develop. Especially interesting in this regard is his unpublished lecture "Der Empirismus in der Hegelschen Philosophie" and the essay "The Old Hegelian Dialectic and the New Materialist Science," *International Council Correspondence* 3, nos. 9-10 (October 1932): 16-21.

110. See Korsch's letter to Paul Mattick, March 27, 1939, *Jahrbuch Arbeiterbewegung* 2, p. 210, where he writes about Hegel: "It is really a shame that the nonsense, overcome by the bourgeoisie, of a genuinely 'German' mystic from a hundred years ago, who at best mirrored the experience of the great bourgeois revolutions from 1789 to 1830 in a distorted form, is still today hindering again the activity of the workers and their thoughts."

111. Ceppa, "Korsch's Marxism," p. 107.

112. Buckmiller, "Marxismus," p. 82.

113. I develop this point in the introduction to "The Crisis of Marxism."

114. See Korsch's letters to Mattick (May 10, 1935, and August 29, 1935) and Partos (January 19, 1939) where he makes this point, pp. 135, 153, and 202. Here I might note that the German edition of *Karl Marx*, ed. Gotz Langkau (Frankfurt: Europäische Verlag, 1967), contains material from the original German manuscript that was not published in the English edition.

115. A Review of *Karl Marx* in the *Sociological Review* in 1939 referred to the book as "the Marx study most solidly close to the actual teachings of Marx . . . and invaluable help in finding out about Marx, the real Marx as distinct from the figment his disciples made of his doctrine"; cited approvingly

by Erich Gerlach in "Karl Korsch's Undogmatic Marxism," *International Socialism* (London), no. 19 (1964), no. 22.

116. Korsch, *Karl Marx*, p. 23.

117. *Ibid.*, p. 231.

118. In a letter responding to Mattick (May 10, 1935), Korsch concedes, "With Lenin, it would be in fact better *never* to cite his 'infantile disease' essay without some kind of fundamental critical reservation. It was in fact in its content, function, and intention a basically counterrevolutionary work" (p. 193).

119. The orthodox Communist position on Korsch from the 1920's to the present day is that Korsch is a renegade who is anti-Marxist to the core. For an example of the stupidity of this point of view, see Richard Albrecht, "Die gegenwärtige Korsch-Renaissance in der BRD und Westberlin," *Sozialistische Politik* 5, no. 22 (February 1973): 49ff. Ceppa in "Korsch's Marxism," p. 118, concludes (wrongly) that "few doubts remain as to Korsch's total rejection of the Marxian perspective." I hope here to demonstrate the groundlessness of this position.

120. "Revolution und Konterrevolution: Eine Diskussion mit Heinz Langenhans," in Pozolli, *Über Karl Korsch*, p. 273.

121. *Ibid.*

122. See my discussion of Korsch and the third world in the Introduction to "Models of Revolutionary Struggle."

123. See "Die Chinesische Revolution," in *Politische Texte*.

124. Hedda Korsch, "Memories," p. 45.

125. Walter Benjamin, *Understanding Brecht* (London: New Left Books, 1973).

126. A woman, Doris Fabian, who was involved with Korsch, committed suicide and Korsch was accused of being responsible. See his disclaimer in a letter to a "comrade Balabanow," August 1, 1935, where he defends himself. *Jahrbuch Arbeiterbewegung* 2, pp. 154-157.

127. Karl Korsch, "Letter to Paul Mattick," November 20, 1938, translated in this anthology.

128. See "Korsch's Revolutionary Marxism."

129. One might compare Brecht's equally negative opinion of "the gentlemen from the Institute," expressed throughout his *Arbeitsjournal* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 1973).

130. Brecht, *Arbeitsjournal*, p. 280.

131. Karl Korsch, "Letter to Brecht," April 18, 1947, *Alternativa* 105, no. 18 (December 1975): 253-257, translated in this anthology by Mark Ritter.

132. The sources here are Korsch's letters in *Jahrbuch Arbeiterbewegung* 2, pp. 175-235, *passim*.

133. Karl Korsch, "Letter to J. A. Dawson," May 3, 1948, in this anthology.

134. *Ibid.*

135. Karl Korsch, "Letter to Erich Gerlach," December 16, 1956, translated in this anthology.

136. For a discussion of the Korsch reception in Europe, see Buckmiller, "Marxismus," and Nick Xenos, "Introduction to Korsch," *Telos* 26 (Winter 1975-1976). Giacomo Marramao discusses the Korsch reception in Italy in *Telos* 26, and Paul Piccone discusses "Korsch in Spain" in *New German Critique* 6 (Winter 1975).