

# CLASS UNITY

## Study Guide: The Class Struggle [[link](#)]

[Chapter IV](#) through [Chapter V](#)

### Things to Keep in Mind

“How well Karl Kautsky wrote [when he was still a Marxist and not a renegade].”  
— VI Lenin, “Left-Wing” Communism: an Infantile Disorder ([1920](#))

Karl Kautsky was the close associate and ideological hitman of August Bebel in the German Social Democratic Party (SPD). In the 1890s and the 1900s his name became essentially synonymous with the ideological current known as “orthodox Marxism”, more or less the dominant set of ideas in the SPD, and thus in the Second International, an international socialist party that existed from 1864-1916.

The International broke apart under the stress of WWI, and Kautsky himself played an ambivalent but ultimately tragic role in this process. Initially he agreed to go along with the SPD’s choice to back the German Empire in the War, only splitting when it was too late. He earned more notoriety in the judgment of the subsequent left when he opposed the Bolshevik Revolution, notably exchanging polemics with Lenin and Trotsky. However, the problem as they saw it was not that Kautsky was simply not a Marxist, but rather that he had been a Marxist—perhaps *the* Marxist—and had *renege*d, that is gone back on, rejected, and failed to carry through the project of Marxism that he himself had fought for for so long.

When reading *The Class Struggle*, it is very tempting to parse through every sentence trying to locate the exact wayward idea containing the kernel of Kautsky’s future renegade status. This is not the way in which we want to read this text though. Rather than asking the question of how Kautsky and the Second International were Marxists, were botching Marxism, or could serve as a model of us in the present, we instead want to focus on questions surrounding *politics*. How did they think about politics, what assumptions did they make, and how are those assumptions similar or especially different from the assumptions that seem to be common sense today?

### Guiding Questions

*Read these questions beforehand and think about what you think the answers are as you go along. In your notes, indicate key quotes that might be related to each question.*

#### IV. The Commonwealth of the Future

Higher wages, shorter hours, better conditions, nationalization of natural monopolies. All of these things are kinds of reforms that could be enacted in capitalism. Against what criteria should these types of social reforms be judged?

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Do reforms end up fixing or heightening the contradictions of capitalism? If they ended up heightening them, why did they think that some of these reforms were still a good thing?

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Were "nationalization" and "socialization" of the means of production synonymous for the Second international?

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Consider the following quotes:

“The coming system of socialist production will not be the sequel to ancient communism; it will be the sequel to the capitalist system of production,”

“create economic development; the crowding out of small industry will be taken care of without its help by the capitalist class. It is true that socialism has no reason for attempting to hinder this development. But to stop economic development would not be to serve the real interests of the small farmers and business men. For all attempts to this end must remain fruitless, if they do not cause positive harm. To propose to the independent craftsman or farmer measures by which their small concerns can once more be made profitable, would not be in any sense to serve their interests; the only effect would be to arouse illusions which could not be realized.”

In what sense were the Second International anti-capitalists in light of these quotes? How do we understand the relationship between political progress and economic development?

## V. The Class Struggle

NOTE: this translation uses the term “slum proletariat”. This would have better been left in the original German *lumpenproletariat*.

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Did the 2nd international assume that the more destitute one is, the more likely one is to support socialism? Why might their view be similar or different than common-sense notions today?

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What does the Second International think radicalizes people? What do they think radicalizes people in the direction of socialism specifically?

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What are potential political consequences of downward economic mobility?

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What do the Second international people think about servants and menials? How might this be analogous to managers, supervisors, unpaid disciplinary work, vigilante mobs, etc, and their psychology and relationship to class struggle?

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How did national divisions hinder the workers' movement for socialism? How did socialists try to overcome these divisions? How does Kautsky understand immigration of workers? What are its causes? What can be done about it?