CHAPTER VII

EDUARD BERNSTEIN AND EVOLUTIONARY SOCIALISM

Although Bernstein was not as enthusiastic as Kautsky about disseminating Darwinism and evolutionary theory, it was clearly a vital component of his world view and had a significant impact on the development of his revision of Marxism. The influence of Darwinism on revisionism has not entirely escaped notice. Walter Benjamin drew attention to it already in 1937, as Roger Fletcher and Peter Emil Becker have done more recently. Fletcher presents Bernstein's evolutionism as kin to the more optimistic evolutionism of Spencer and Kropotkin, but neither he nor anyone else has actually explored the specific evolutionary influences on Bernstein and how this shaped his conception of socialism.

Most Bernstein scholars have ignored the influence of biological evolution on Bernstein's thought, which is surprising considering the superficially obvious parallels between the two. Peter Gay, for example, discusses at length Bernstein's modification of the Marxist conception of history, whereby he replaced the dialectic with social evolution. Gay maintains that Bernstein considered evolutionism the very core of Marxism, but never specifically links Bernstein's conception of social and historical evolution with biological evolution. Steinberg, after exploring the influence of Darwinism on Kautsky and the SPD at length, does not ascribe any role to it in affecting Bernstein's shift toward revisionism. The impact of biological evolution on Bernstein's intellectual outlook and transformation was greater than this silence on the part of scholars suggests.

Bernstein's Early Exposure to Darwinism

The first verifiable encounter of Bernstein with Darwinism occurred in 1878-79, when he departed from Berlin to work as Karl Höchberg's secretary, first in Lugano and later in Zurich. Considering Bernstein's previous commitment to materialism and socialism, as well as his antipathy for religion, it is all but certain that he had already been exposed to and had probably already embraced the theory of evolution. In any case, Höchberg was an avid Darwinian proponent, who, in his final years in *Gymnasium*, had lived in the home of that famous materialist and advocate of Darwinism, Ludwig Büchner. Büchner's materialism did not cling to Höchberg, for under the influence of Lange—another Darwinist—he embraced Kantian idealism. When Bernstein joined Höchberg in Switzerland, his first task was to assist him with the book he was currently writing, in which he intended to prove that the Darwinian theory could explain the origins of music and other aesthetic senses. Höchberg's work, *Die Lust an der Musik, den Farben und den körperlichen Formen (Pleasure in Music, Colors, and Physical Forms*) appeared in 1879 under the pseudonym H. Berg. 5

Bernstein later disputed the contention that he had become a socialist of Höchbergian stripe in the late 1870s, since he had consistently opposed Höchberg's idealist philosophy and never embraced his socialist theory. Höchberg's socialism was closer to Lange's than to Marx's, since he advocated reform socialism based on ethical ideals rather than revolutionary socialism emphasizing the class struggle. Instead of embracing Höchberg's conception of socialism, however, Bernstein converted to Marxism through reading Engels' *Anti-Dühring* while working for Höchberg in 1878-79 in Lugano. Engels' work, which Bernstein accepted as his "socialist creed," could only have strengthened his conviction of the validity of the Darwinian theory. Indeed by 1882 Bernstein was prompting Engels to contribute an article on Darwin to the *Sozialdemokrat*, but Engels was too busy at the time to comply.

Other likely sources of Darwinian influence on Bernstein were Bebel and Kautsky. Undoubtedly Bernstein read Bebel's popular treatise, *Frau*, which is impregnated with Darwinian themes. When Wilhelm Bracke sent Höchberg the manuscript of Kautsky's *Einfluss*, both he and Bernstein were so impressed by it that Höchberg invited Kautsky to join them in Zurich, where he could continue his studies

while assisting Höchberg in his editorial work.⁹ Bernstein and Kautsky became the closest of friends in Zurich, and they must have discussed Kautsky's pet theme, Darwinian evolution, especially since Kautsky wrote numerous articles on Darwinian topics while living in Zurich.

Darwinian Influences during

the Transition to Revisionism

A rather prominent interpretation of Bernstein's revisionism, especially among Marxists, is that it was merely a reflex of economic conditions in the 1890s. According to this view, Bernstein's role was incidental and intellectual influences were insignificant. There is much evidence in favor of this view, since Bernstein himself heavily emphasized economic arguments to support his ideas, particularly the disparity between the predictions of Marx and Engels and the contemporary state of the economy. He confessed that the strongest influence in moving him toward revisionism was his disappointment in the third volume of *Capital*. Others have suggested that the influence of the Fabians, Lassalle, and Lange contributed to Bernstein's revisionism.

Only a few have noted the role of biological evolutionary theory in Bernstein's intellectual transformation. There are cogent reasons for this oversight. First of all, Bernstein upheld the theory of biological evolution during his orthodox Marxist phase, while Marx, Engels, Kautsky, Bebel, and others viewed Marxism and evolution as mutually compatible and even in some sense supporting each other. Thus biological evolution certainly did not entail evolutionary socialism. Second, Bernstein emphasized the economic aspects of his disagreement with Marx's theory and never explicitly argued that biological evolution supported his views. In fact, he contended that it was illegitimate to argue for specific social theories based on biological theories. Thus Bernstein would probably have denied that Darwinism or evolution had helped mold his conception of society. For these two reasons, it would be folly to argue that evolution was decisive in converting Bernstein to revisionism. However, though it was relegated to the background, it was not without significance. Before

we prove this by showing how the concept of biological evolution invaded Bernstein's ideas and rhetoric, let us first examine the influences on Bernstein's thinking during the time that he was moving toward revisionism.

During the 1890s, simultaneous with his progression toward revisionism, Bernstein began to study natural science and Darwinism more intensively than previously. He admitted this himself in an 1894 letter to Kautsky discussing the social Darwinist Heinrich Ernst Ziegler's recent book. 13 Although he continued writing on economic and social subjects, he began contributing articles and reviews to Kautsky's Neue Zeit on natural science. He even complained in 1896 that Die neue Zeit had too many articles on Sozialpolitik and not enough on literature, science, and other fields. 14 In 1890 Bernstein translated a lecture given by the biologist Grant Allen to the Fabian Society, which was then published in Die neue Zeit as "Ein Schüler Darwin's als Vertheidiger des Sozialismus" ("A Disciple of Darwin as Advocate for Socialism"). 15 In the mid-1890s he reviewed books on Darwinism by Benjamin Vetter, a zoologist and editor of Kosmos, and Herald Höffding, expressing interest in and receptivity to evolutionary theory. 16 He further evinced interest in Darwinism by editing and publishing Engels' manuscript on "Der Anteil der Arbeit an der Menschwerdung des Affen" in 1895-96.17 Bernstein began to take up the cudgels against the social Darwinists in the 1890s, who had renewed their onslaughts on socialism. He wrote review essays to refute the erroneous application of biology to sociology in the works of Ziegler, J. Novicow, and E. Sacher. 18 Although he was challenging the position of the social Darwinists, he was nevertheless imbibing evolutionary doctrine, which he by no means rejected. In his writings and correspondence during the 1890s he showed familiarity with the current state of Darwinian theory and the works of Darwin, August Weismann, Herbert Spencer, Ray Lankester, Otto Ammon, and others. 19 There can be no doubt that Bernstein was engaged in thinking about biological evolution in the period immediately preceding and accompanying his move to revisionism.

More well-known than Bernstein's interest in Darwinism was his study of Lange, especially *Arbeiterfrage*, which many consider an important influence leading

Bernstein toward revisionism.²⁰ Upon reading Ellissens' new biography of Lange, Bernstein composed a highly sympathetic three-part article on Lange. In preparing to write his article, he intensively studied works by and about Lange and admitted to Kautsky, "The work [about Lange] brings me much pleasure, since I am learning a lot through it."21 Though critical of various aspects of Arbeiterfrage, Bernstein's appraisal of it was largely positive. He commented on the strong influence of Darwin on Lange, who attempted to use Darwinism as a weapon against bourgeois economic theories; unlike later Darwinists trying to refute socialism, Lange distinguished sharply between civilized humans and other organisms. However, Bernstein criticized Lange for too one-sidedly applying the struggle for existence to human society.²² In 1894 Bernstein wrote a review essay on a new edition of Arbeiterfrage, recommending it as still valuable and fresh.²³ The influence of Lange is evident in Bernstein's first and most important book on revisionism, Die Voraussetzungen des Sozialismus und die Aufgaben der Sozialdemokratie (1899, The Presuppositions of Socialism and the Tasks of Social Democracy, translated as Evolutionary Socialism), especially in the conclusion, where he claimed, "If I did not fear being wrongly understood, . . . I would translate the 'back to Kant' into a 'back to Lange.'" But he made it clear in the same breath that he did not approve of many of Lange's views.²⁴ While Lange's Arbeiterfrage by no means converted Bernstein to Lange's Darwinian social theory, it did force him to grapple with the issue more concretely.

It is probable that the Fabians contributed to Bernstein's appreciation of Darwinism. Bernstein's intellectual debt to the Fabians—many of whom were zealous adherents of Darwinism—has been well documented, despite Bernstein's asseverations to the contrary. The speech by Grant Allen that Bernstein translated was originally presented to the Fabian Society. J. Ramsay MacDonald, who honored Bernstein with a farewell party when he moved from England in 1901, had avidly studied natural science in the 1880s. Bernstein was quite impressed by MacDonald's speech to the Fabian Society in 1895 and a friendship between the two ensued. MacDonald's social views were infused with Darwinian principles, and some of this could have rubbed off on Bernstein.

Other Fabians were equally imbued with the Darwinian spirit, sometimes tempered by Spencerian views.²⁸ Sidney Webb's social thought was influenced by Darwin, Huxley, and Spencer, as he made quite clear in *Fabian Essays* (1889):

Owing mainly to the efforts of Comte, Darwin, and Herbert Spencer, we can no longer think of the ideal society as an unchanging State.

The necessity of the constant growth and development of the social organism has become axiomatic. No philosopher now looks for anything but gradual evolution of the new order from the old, without breach of continuity or abrupt change of the entire social tissue at any point during the process.²⁹

The same year the Fabian Essays were published, another Fabian, David Ritchie, wrote *Darwinism and Politics*, in which he asserted that evolution is "a guide to direct us how to order our lives." Social evolution was also an important part of the world view of Beatrice Webb, for whom Herbert Spencer had been a personal mentor before she married Sidney Webb. H. G. Wells had studied biology for a year under Thomas H. Huxley, and evolution figured prominently in his writings. The political and social thought of Graham Wallas was also colored by evolutionary theory, as were the writings of George Bernard Shaw. Bernstein's contact with Fabian socialists provided him many opportunities to encounter Darwinism and may have made him more receptive to Spencerian ideas than were his compatriots in Germany.

The Biological Component

of Evolutionary Socialism

Whatever impact the Fabians may have had on Bernstein's ideas, it is clear that Bernstein's speech to the Fabian Society in January 1897 marked a turning point in his thought. This lecture is interesting because it shows that Bernstein was eager to present Marxism to the Fabians as an evolutionary social theory in full harmony with biological evolution. A preview of his speech in the *Fabian News* announced that he would depict "The real Marx; an evolutionist in human and natural history, in economics and Socialism." In the address itself, which was later published in *The*

Progressive Review, Bernstein made good his promise to portray Marx as an evolutionist in natural history by linking Marx and Darwin: "Marx has so often been compared with Darwin, and, in my opinion, very justly so. That Marx from the beginning took the greatest interest in Darwin's researches, there is not the slightest doubt." After further developing the Marx-Darwin parallelism, Bernstein added:

But, from all said, so far, it is quite evident that Marx's theory is eminently evolutionary. . . . To Marx, evolution included revolution and *vice versa*; the one was a stage of the other. Not every revolution must be violent or sanguinary. . . . Marx, then, was, if you like to put it thus, a revolutionary evolutionist. 36

Bernstein later considered this speech his last attempt to defend Marx's views in their entirety, because during his lecture he developed doubts concerning the truth of statements he was making.³⁷ His stress on the evolutionary side of Marx, which he had buttressed by paralleling it with biological evolution, came to entirely suppress the revolutionary impulses of Marxism. After this speech, he no longer viewed evolution and revolution as compatible and considered Marx's attempted synthesis of the two contradictory.

Despite his rejection of numerous tenets of Marxism that he had previously upheld, Bernstein considered his form of socialism a continuation (and thus revision) of Marx's and Engels' socialist theory rather than a refutation of it. He believed he had distilled from Marxism its fundamental concept, i.e., the idea of evolution and development, and had eliminated its erroneous aspects. Evolution thus became the highest principle of explanation for Bernstein, who wrote, "An idea underlies revisionism, the idea of evolution, the idea of development." Gay maintains that Bernstein's concept of progress, which Bernstein described as "organic evolutionism," was unilinear and more closely related to nineteenth-century positivism than to Marxism. In the sense that Bernstein saw historical progress as continuous rather than dialectical, this may be true; however, because he ascribed a role to ethical activity, his view was by no means unilinear, but resembled Darwin's branching model of evolution. There was no preordained goal or necessary direction of development

in Bernstein's revisionist social theory. He aroused the ire of fellow socialists by declaring, "I openly admit it, I have very little interest or feeling for what is commonly understood as the 'final goal of socialism.' This goal, whatever it may be, is nothing at all to me, the movement [is] everything." Thus his vision of sociology as a scientific discipline was free of teleology, though he admitted that socialism as a political movement did strive toward certain goals. Because of this, socialism could no longer claim to be scientific. Marx, on the other hand, looked forward to the inevitable development of a blissful communist society and equated his vision of the future with scientific predictions.

What Bernstein's evolutionary form of socialism was intended to displace was a revolutionary outlook that expected an imminent collapse or catastrophe to precipitate the fall of the bourgeois order and the introduction of socialism. Bernstein lamented that so many socialists, though ostensibly proponents of evolution, nevertheless espoused this theory of catastrophe. Bernstein thereby implied that his revisionism would do for social theory what Darwinism had done for biology. It would substitute an evolutionary gradualism for a catastrophic explanation.

Bernstein believed that Marx and Engels had erroneously maintained a revolutionary outlook because of their reliance on the Hegelian dialectic. The second chapter of *Voraussetzung*, which unfortunately is not included in the English translation, is entitled "Die Fallstricke der Hegelianisch-Dialektischen Methode" ("The Snares of the Hegelian-Dialectical Method"). In this chapter Bernstein claimed that Marx's and Engels' accomplishments were made in spite of, not because of, the Hegelian dialectic. On the contrary, the dialectic misled them to advocate Blanquism and revolutionary violence. ⁴³ Bernstein no longer believed that all development could be explained by contradiction, since cooperation is also a driving force of development. ⁴⁴ In 1898-99 Bernstein even alleged that what Marx and Engels had contributed to socialist theory was more in harmony with Spencer's evolutionary doctrines than with Hegel's dialectical philosophy. ⁴⁵

Although he made no overt appeals to biological evolution in "Probleme des Sozialismus" nor in *Voraussetzung*, his most famous works laying the foundation for

revisionism, he did occasionally use biological analogies in them, implying that society evolved like organisms. For example, he compared consumer cooperatives to organisms capable of evolving. His account of the evolution of unions sounds remarkably similar to Darwin's theory of the natural selection of chance variations. Unions, he explained, began as elementary organisms, and as they grew, they experimented with various forms of administration (chance variation), until they found the most appropriate form for their further evolution (survival of the fittest). In *Voraussetzung* Bernstein sometimes presented social institutions as organs of evolving organisms. Nevertheless, despite relying heavily on the term evolution, he usually avoided explicit organic metaphors; the passages I have just adduced are exceptions, not typical of the entire book.

In other writings, however, Bernstein made it clear that the social evolution he was describing was indeed comparable to biological evolution. Sometimes this was done rather subtly by describing social development as an organic evolution:

the solution [for the labor problem] will be found more certainly, will be put into effect more quickly, [and] will be purchased with less disadvantage, the more social transformation comes about through constant, organic evolution.⁴⁷

In one of Bernstein's clearest explications of revisionism, *Der Revisionismus in der Sozialdemocratie* (1909), he made explicit what was only implicit in the above passage. According to Bernstein, Marx conceived of society as an evolving organism, and in the forward to *Capital* he had emphasized the principle of organic evolution. Bernstein cited two sentences from *Capital*, on which revisionists placed special importance: (1) "Even if a society has begun to discover the *natural law* of its movement, it can neither *skip over* nor *decree away natural phases of evolution.*" (2) "Contemporary society is no firm crystal, but rather an *organism capable of transformation* and *constantly in the process of transformation.*" Just as in his speech to the Fabians, he drew parallels between Marx and Darwin, whose two works of 1859 "in their fundamental ideas breathe the same spirit."

When discussing the Marxist conception of history and social development, Bernstein often compared Marx's accomplishment with Darwin's. He used this comparison rhetorically to the advantage of his revisionist views by noting that Darwinian theory, though correct in its fundamental assertion that species have evolved, has had to be corrected and modified over the years. Marxism, likewise, would have to be adjusted to new evidence if it was to be a scientific social theory. Marx's materialist conception of history needed amendment, according to Bernstein, by giving a greater role to non-economic aspects of society in historical development, while retaining the mode of production as the primary driving force. He thought Marx and Marxists underemphasized the significance of natural and biological influences, among other things. He explained--like Engels' in "Der Anteil der Arbeit an der Menschwerdung des Affen"--that the evolution of the human hand lifted humans above animals by allowing humans to produce tools. This was no news to Marxists, but Bernstein went further by ascribing a significant role to the climate in historical development. He wanted to give nature and biological evolution a greater role in human history than most Marxists would allow. 50

Bernstein also expressed appreciation for J. Ramsay MacDonald's Darwinian approach to socialism. In a review of *Socialism and Society* (1905), Bernstein described MacDonald's view of social development as a "biological-continuous" conception rather than a "dialectical-catastrophic" one. While not agreeing with every detail of the book, Bernstein nevertheless thought that "in the heart of the matter his conception of socialism and social development is the only one of which it may be said, in our view, that it does justice to the modern knowledge of the laws of evolution." In *Socialism and Society* MacDonald had argued that Marxism was only semi-scientific, because it relied on the Hegelian dialectic instead of the more scientific Darwinian theory. He stated, "Darwin had to contribute the work of his life to human knowledge before Socialism could be placed on a definitely scientific foundation." Bernstein later wrote the foreword to the German translation of MacDonald's *Socialism and Government* (1909), in which he again noted MacDonald's use of the

organic principle in social theory. Bernstein amplified on MacDonald's use of the organic analogy, which he considered apt:

Organic life is at the same time conservative and revolutionary. It conserves things necessary for functioning and gets rid of things becoming superfluous or harmful. It tolerates advancement, but cannot stand any arbitrary interventions, which ignore the working together of the parts belonging to the whole. ⁵³

When MacDonald published the English translation of Bernstein's *Voraussetzungen* in 1909, he suggested that it carry the title *Evolutionary Socialism*, which conjured up connections with biological theory that were largely absent in the book itself.⁵⁴

Contending with Social Darwinists:

Natural and Social Laws

While pointing out the parallelism between biological and social evolution and using the Marx-Darwin connection to his rhetorical advantage, Bernstein would have decisively rejected any suggestion that his social theory was an application of biology to human affairs. ⁵⁵ Although he never denied that there could be connections, relationships, parallels, and analogies between the natural and social realm, he consistently limited the applicability of biology to society by stressing the uniqueness of humanity. He maintained that only through empirical investigation of society could social laws be understood. These may or may not be similar to the laws of nature.

When the English biologist Grant Allen publicly endorsed socialism, Bernstein was elated and used the opportunity to engage in polemics against leading Darwinists such as Haeckel, Spencer, and Oscar Schmidt, who were dismissing socialism as contrary to the law of natural selection. Bernstein pointed out that socialists accepted the biological theory of evolution just as readily as the anti-socialist Darwinists. However, the socialists have not been able to concede that, what once ruled the unconscious world that is dependent on nature as a natural law, must also be a law for humanity, which is conscious of its position in nature and which more and more subjects nature to itself.⁵⁶

Bernstein soon had another occasion to grapple with the relationship of Darwinian principles to society, for Lange had also attempted to construct a Darwinian social theory. One of Bernstein's strongest criticisms of Lange was that he blurred the boundaries between nature and humanity. Lange erred, according to Bernstein, by viewing economics as a part of natural history and not understanding the historical distinction between natural and social laws.⁵⁷

In the 1890s numerous attempts were made to apply Darwinian laws to social theory. The conclusions reached by these thinkers were often inconsistent and contradictory, ranging from the rabidly anti-socialist views of Heinrich Ernst Ziegler and Haeckel to Enrico Ferri's defense of socialism on Darwinian grounds. Bernstein followed this debate carefully and contributed several review essays to the discussion. His conclusion was always the same: Any attempt to apply Darwinian laws to society is based on a misconception. Bernstein was particularly incensed at Ziegler's attempted refutation of socialism on Darwinian grounds, which, according to Bernstein, ignored a vital distinction:

And like the human, as much as he himself remains a creature of nature in the highest stage of evolution, differs essentially from all other organisms, so also does social science from natural science.⁵⁸

Bernstein reiterated this in his critique of Novicow's biological economic theory:

The more human society distances itself from the primitive form, the less do the concepts derived from biology fit it, and the attempt to transfer the same to the social relationships of cultured humanity is altogether absurd. 59

Bernstein, like Engels, argued that humans alone have the capacity to consciously and rationally affect nature and are thus not subject to the same laws governing the rest of nature. While rejecting the direct application of natural laws to society, Bernstein made it clear that he did not deny the lawfulness of social development. In fact, he even admitted that one could properly speak of the natural laws of society, so long as one meant merely the objective laws governing social development and not the application of the laws of nature to society.

Bernstein considered it especially fallacious to apply the Darwinian concept of the struggle for existence to human society. He challenged popular depictions of competition in capitalist society as a form of the struggle for existence by pointing out that in nature the struggle for existence occurs because of a lack of the means of subsistence, while in capitalist society, there exists relative surplus. The Malthusian population principle, which underlies the Darwinian theory of natural selection, is only valid under certain social systems. It is not universally applicable to humans, because human multiplication is limited, while human productivity has no natural limits. 62

After Bernstein moved to revisionism, he not only rejected the applicability of the struggle for existence to human society, he also denied the necessity of the class struggle. Whereas Marx had elevated the class struggle to the key principle for interpreting the history of society and thus one of the most important of all social laws, Bernstein considered the class struggle a natural law that humans should consciously attempt to overcome:

But the class struggle is first of all an unregulated driving force in social evolution; it functions like a natural law in a nature independent of humans, where limitless waste of time, work, and material occurs.⁶³

The class struggle is thus neither desirable nor inevitable for humans, who can shape their society according to conscious purposes. Socialism should turn its focus away from cooperation with the class struggle and toward eliminating it through rational activity.⁶⁴

Bernstein's position on the relationship of natural and social laws in the 1890s was entirely consistent with the stance Kautsky took in his critique of Ferri, and Bernstein wrote Kautsky that he approved of his article on Ferri. ⁶⁵ It should come as no surprise, then, that he--like Kautsky--left room for a certain amount of overlap or interaction between biology and sociology, despite the main thrust of his writings separating the two. He admitted at times that there are analogies and similarities between some biological and social laws, though he warned against carrying these too far. ⁶⁶ He recognized that the investigation of society could never be fully disengaged from biology:

The questions of the evolution of the family, property and the state in humanity [an allusion to Engels' book], the population question, competition, the question of war, etc. are linked with certain questions of natural science, but they are not themselves questions of natural science as such.⁶⁷

Thus Bernstein left a crack open in the door separating natural science from social theory.

Later Bernstein argued that, while it may be inadmissable to apply the results of natural science to politics, it is perfectly valid to utilize the methods of natural science in explaining political phenomena. The former is the mistake of the reactionary Darwinists Ammon, Ludwig Woltmann, etc., who press analogies between nature and society too far. However, Graham Wallas in *Human Nature in Politics* (1908) took quite a different approach by using the methods of natural science, according to Bernstein in his foreword to the German translation of Wallas' book. Thus Bernstein justified Wallas' attempts to infuse biology into sociology. ⁶⁸

After embracing revisionism, Bernstein had even more reason to distinguish between biological and social laws. In contrast to Engels and Kautsky, Bernstein no longer agreed that socialism was strictly scientific. Although it contained some scientific elements, whereby it could explain historical phenomena, it also included goals without any scientific basis. The goals were rooted in human desires and ethics, not in objective circumstances. Bernstein explained his position most clearly in *Wie ist wissenschaftlicher Socialismus möglich?* (How Is Scientific Socialism Possible?), where he asserted:

This goal [socialism] is not merely an act foretold by the theory, whose appearance is more or less fatalistically expected, but rather it is to a high degree a *desired* goal, for whose realization one struggles.⁶⁹

Since will and purpose are important ingredients of any socialist theory, socialism can never be purely scientific: "I have said directly, in its program for the future socialism cannot be exclusively scientific, because it is dictated by willing, by the class struggle."⁷⁰ The same holds true for all sociology, according to Bernstein, because it also contains goals and aspirations, not just explanations of past events.⁷¹

Promoting Human Evolution

Theories on how to improve the human species based on Darwinian theory took two main forms in the late nineteenth century. The first advocated the untrammelled functioning of natural selection in human society, while artificial selection or eugenics became popular later. Both views, however, were based on the view that heredity is the chief determinant of human traits and is relatively fixed. Bernstein, however, like Bebel, was unconvinced that heredity and selection were the most important principles governing human evolution. Although he admitted that they play a role, he argued that environmental influences were as significant or perhaps more so than the selection of heritable traits.

One of Bernstein's most forceful attacks on the selection theory appeared in an article he wrote supporting the idea of unions. He criticized those writers, especially Ammon, who opposed humanitarian intervention in society as detrimental to the selection of the fittest. Bernstein claimed that this theory of selection had its roots in Malthus and abetted the capitalist ideology. The theory emphasizing environmental influences on evolution, however, is eminently democratic or even communistic, according to Bernstein. The establishment and functioning of unions, far from leading to degeneration, as some Darwinians--including Darwin himself (though Bernstein probably did not know it)--feared, would actually lead to an improved humanity by creating a better environment for workers and by instituting a humane form of social selection. The "brutal means of natural selection" will be banished by this future society and unions will play a role in this. 72

Bernstein also relied on his environmentalist conception of human evolution to counter the arguments of racial theorists, many of whom upheld the Weismannian theory of hard heredity. He believed they overemphasized the influence of inherited characteristics at the expense of education and the conditions of life.⁷³ He chided Woltmann for ignoring the significance of climatic and social conditions in his zeal to

defend his racial theories.⁷⁴ However, he praised Wallas and Hertz for exposing the falsehoods of reactionary racial theories.⁷⁵ In addition, Hertz

delivered a contribution to this argument [between inheritance and environment theory], which is a real advancement of our knowledge, and indeed in the sense, that the position of the environmentalist theory, which is favorable to progressivism, or one may even say, to socialism, has received a very significant strengthening and consolidation through an abundance of historical and other proofs.⁷⁶

Bernstein's environmentalist view of human evolution was entirely consistent with the Marxian view of the malleability of human nature. He believed that humans had tremendous capacity to adapt to the conditions of nature in which they found themselves. However, in his revisionist phase, he no longer believed that a rapid transformation of human nature could be effected merely through a revolution in property relations. He considered this too simplistic, because the economy is not the only factor shaping human nature. Thus Bernstein substituted a gradual change for the sudden transformation of humanity expected by Marx and Engels.

Ludwig Woltmann in the Revisionist Camp

The adage that politics makes strange bedfellows was never more poignantly displayed than in the case of Woltmann and Bernstein. Woltmann is best-known today for his role in spearheading and organizing the racialist wing of the eugenics movement in the early years of the twentieth century, for whose tenets Bernstein had considerable antipathy. However, before embracing racialist ideas after the turn of the century, Woltmann had been a member of the SPD for a decade, and had corresponded with Georg Vollmar, Kautsky, and Bernstein. When Bernstein advanced his revisionist thesis, Woltmann became an immediate supporter. As Bernstein later pointed out, he and Woltmann were more united in what they opposed than in what they supported. Nevertheless there were points of contact between their views of Marxism in the late 1890s, though many of these vanished when Woltmann turned away from socialism toward racialist thinking.

Woltmann had greater success in his attempt to infuse Darwinian theory into socialist ranks than in his short-lived attempt to promote revisionism, though his turn to racism alienated most socialists. Already as a student in the early 1890s Woltmann endeavored to relate Darwinism to socialism. He continued his studies in both medicine and philosophy, receiving doctorates in both fields in 1896. His philosophy dissertation, Kritische und genetische Begründung der Ethik (Critical and Genetic Explanation of Ethics), was an attempt to synthesize Kant and Darwin. Most of the dissertation dealt with Kant, but Woltmann's express purpose was to use Kant's critical theory to expose the fallacy of "uncritical" applications of Darwinism to human society:

With certain scientific specialists reason appears to have landed in so much discredit, that they degrade themselves by learning from the animals and their instincts, how humans should arrange their life and society.⁷⁹

According to Woltmann, human reason--itself a product of evolution--exalted humans above the animal realm and made it possible to live in freedom according to ethical laws rather than remaining subject to instincts and natural laws. Woltmann argued along these same lines in a treatise on Marxism, where he criticized social Darwinists for applying the struggle for existence to human society. He claimed that analogies between organic and social evolution ignored the increase of human intelligence and the use of tools, which alter the conditions of evolution.

Although agreeing with Bernstein that a distinction must be maintained between humans and animals, Woltmann's position is actually much closer to Lange, also a neo-Kantian. Both Lange and Woltmann embraced Darwin's theory of natural selection and considered the struggle for existence among humans in some form inevitable, though they believed that humans could exercise rational control over these natural laws to mitigate the harshest aspects of the struggle. Bernstein, on the other hand, did not believe that humans were in any sense subject to laws of nature and had nothing but disdain for the idea that humans were locked in a struggle for existence.

Despite his advocacy of ethical socialism and his desire to place humans on a footing above the animal realm, Woltmann continually sought to infuse socialism with Darwinism. He believed it was desirable to synthesize Marx, Darwin, and Kant. In his defense of Bernstein's revisionism before the Hanover Party Congress of the SPD in 1899 he asserted.

In our agitation let us rather put in place of the "dialectic" the much more precise and richer concept of "evolution," which is much more comprehensible to the workers! Bebel has indeed cited the spirit of the great Darwin, to whom we stand closer than to Hegel. 82

The synthesis of Marx and Darwin is also apparent in *Der historische Materialismus* (1900), where Woltmann presented Marx's economic and social theory as a subfield of biology and consciously tried to link historical and biological materialism. ⁸³ The synthesis of Marx and Darwin is more extensive and forthright, of course, in *Die Darwinsche Theorie und der Sozialismus* (1899). In this work Woltmann rejected the separation of Darwinism and socialism into separate spheres of knowledge, which Kautsky and Bernstein had been promoting. He insisted, "Socialism must be brought into a much closer relationship to the theory of natural evolution than has previously occurred." He lamented that most socialists who supported Darwinism never grappled specifically with the theory of natural selection, which he believed needed to be incorporated into socialist doctrine. ⁸⁴

Although Woltmann proposed more radical means to achieve equal social conditions than the social reforms advocated by Büchner, their basic positions in the 1890s were not that far apart. Rather than abolishing the struggle for existence among humans, which he considered beneficial, one of the main purposes of socialism would be to restore conditions under which the struggle for existence could function properly, according to Woltmann. Present political and social institutions, including, of course, private property, only hinder the working of nature and could contribute to the degeneration of the human species. Socialism would sweep away the unnatural advantages enjoyed by the bourgeoisie and provide all people with equal opportunity in the struggle for existence. Further, it would reintroduce the group struggle for

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existence, which has been replaced in more recent human history by individual struggle. Far from desiring to reduce competition and eliminate inequalities, Woltmann wanted a system that would promote fair competition, so social inequalities would be a true reflection of biological inequalities. 85

Woltmann became increasingly alienated from socialism as his work on *Politische Anthropologie* (1903) progressed. He hoped his book would capture first prize in the Krupp competition for the best answer to the question, "What do we learn from the principles of evolutionary theory in relation to the inner political development and legislation of the states?" When he was not awarded first prize, he angrily refused a substantial amount of money offered as a lesser prize. 6 Contrary to the Kantian cosmopolitanism he had earlier espoused, in which race was inconsequential, he came to regard race as the key to interpreting history and politics. 7 Woltmann never entirely dismissed Marxism from his ideology, but now he tried to synthesize Marx with Darwin and Arthur de Gobineau, the latter two being predominant. 8 Darwinism began to totally dominate his social thought, as is evident from the goals he had for the new journal he founded in 1902, *Die Politisch-Anthropologische Revue*:

[This journal] wants to depict the biological and anthropological foundations in the evolution of peoples (*Völker*) and from this viewpoint to try to judge the entire cultural history of the human race. It wants, to put it briefly, to apply the principles of the theory of natural evolution in a critical and consistent way to the social, political, and mental development of the races and state.⁸⁹

As Woltmann applied Darwinism to social development, he began to consider race a factor of supreme importance and began writing books promoting Aryan racial supremacy. By so doing Woltmann lost touch with the socialist movement, including Bernstein, who had no sympathy for Woltmann's new biological and racial social philosophy. Abandoned by his former colleagues, Woltmann then befriended some of his former anti-socialist adversaries, e.g. Otto Ammon.

Conclusion

While not wanting to bring natural and social science too close together, Bernstein acknowledged the parallels between his revisionism and biological evolution. While other factors shaped Bernstein's revisionism more than evolution, biological theories did play a secondary role and were later incorporated into revisionist rhetoric. Both he and Woltmann buttressed their position by referring to Darwinian gradualism. They apparently wanted to present their form of socialism as consistent in some sense with science (Bernstein's friend, J. Ramsay MacDonald, did this even more explicitly in England).

Bernstein's concept of biological evolution was similar to Bebel's and Kautsky's, since they all emphasized the influence of the environment on evolution and denied the struggle for existence, especially in human society. Although Bernstein did not (as far as I know) discuss the inheritance of acquired characteristics explicitly, it is clear that his environmental view was closely related to Lamarckism. In his move to revisionism, Bernstein did not abandon the crucial Marxian distinction between humans and animals, which caused him to reject the application of natural laws to society. Bernstein still had a great deal in common with his erstwhile friends and later antagonists in the SPD, and he remained in the party.

Woltmann, however, though sharing Bernstein's belief in gradualism, upheld a quite different view of biological evolution, which corresponded to a different set of political and social beliefs. He did not maintain the distinction between natural and social theory as rigorously as did Bernstein, and he was fully persuaded of the validity of Darwin's theory of natural selection. Biological inequality and competition were inherent in Woltmann's social theory and were conditioned by his understanding of biology.

ENDNOTES

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- 6. Bernstein to Bebel, 20 October 1898, in Victor Adler. Briefwechsel mit August Bebel und Karl Kautsky, ed. Friedrich Adler (Vienna, 1954), 259.
- 7. Bernstein, Sozialdemokratische Lehrjahre, 72, 114; Entwicklungsgang eines Sozialisten (Leipzig, 1930), 12-13; "Naturwissenschaft wider Gesellschaftswissenschaft," Die neue Zeit 12,2 (1893-94): 70.
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