



Political Philosophy

Week 7.

Reform or
Revolution?

‘The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point however is to change it.’





Hannah Arendt on ‘The Social Question’

- Whereas the American Revolution, via Locke, pursues political freedom, the French becomes focused on poverty and inequality
- Is freedom more than the alleviation of poverty?
- ‘[Rousseau’s] most explosive and indeed most original contribution to the cause of revolution was that he interpreted the compelling needs of mass poverty in political terms as an uprising, not for the sake of bread or wealth, but for the sake of freedom as well.’ – *On Revolution*
- ‘the most powerful and perhaps the most devastating passion motivating revolutionaries, the passion of compassion.’







No. 4 -- A Scene on Clark Street. The room on the right hand corner is where I held the Woman's meeting for a year, and the persons around are noted characters.

Vivia Divers, *The Black Hole or The Missionary Experience of a Girl in the Slums of Chicago, 1891-1892*
n.d., n.p.



'All about us are men and women who have become unhappy in regard to their attitude toward the social order itself; toward the dreary round of uninteresting work, the pleasures narrowed down to those of appetite, the declining consciousness of brain power, and the lack of mental food which characterizes the lot of the large proportion of their fellow-citizens. These men and women have caught a moral challenge raised by the exigencies of contemporaneous life; some are bewildered, others who are denied the relief which sturdy action brings are even seeking an escape, but all are increasingly anxious concerning their actual relations to the basic organization of society'

- Jane Addams, *Democracy and Social Ethics* (Introduction)

THE HULL HOUSE, CHICAGO



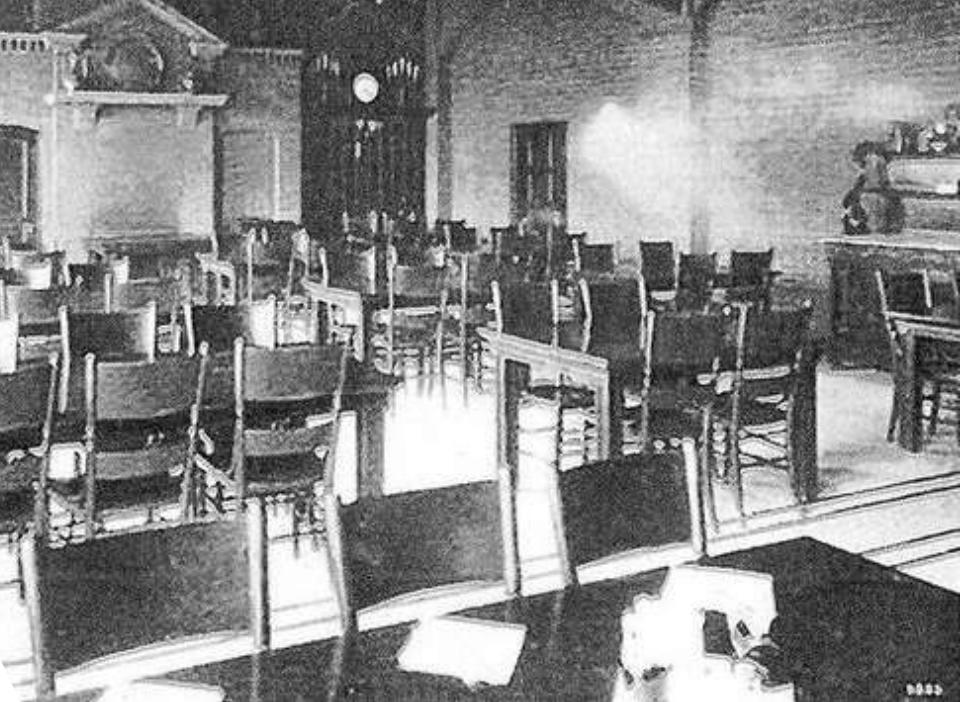
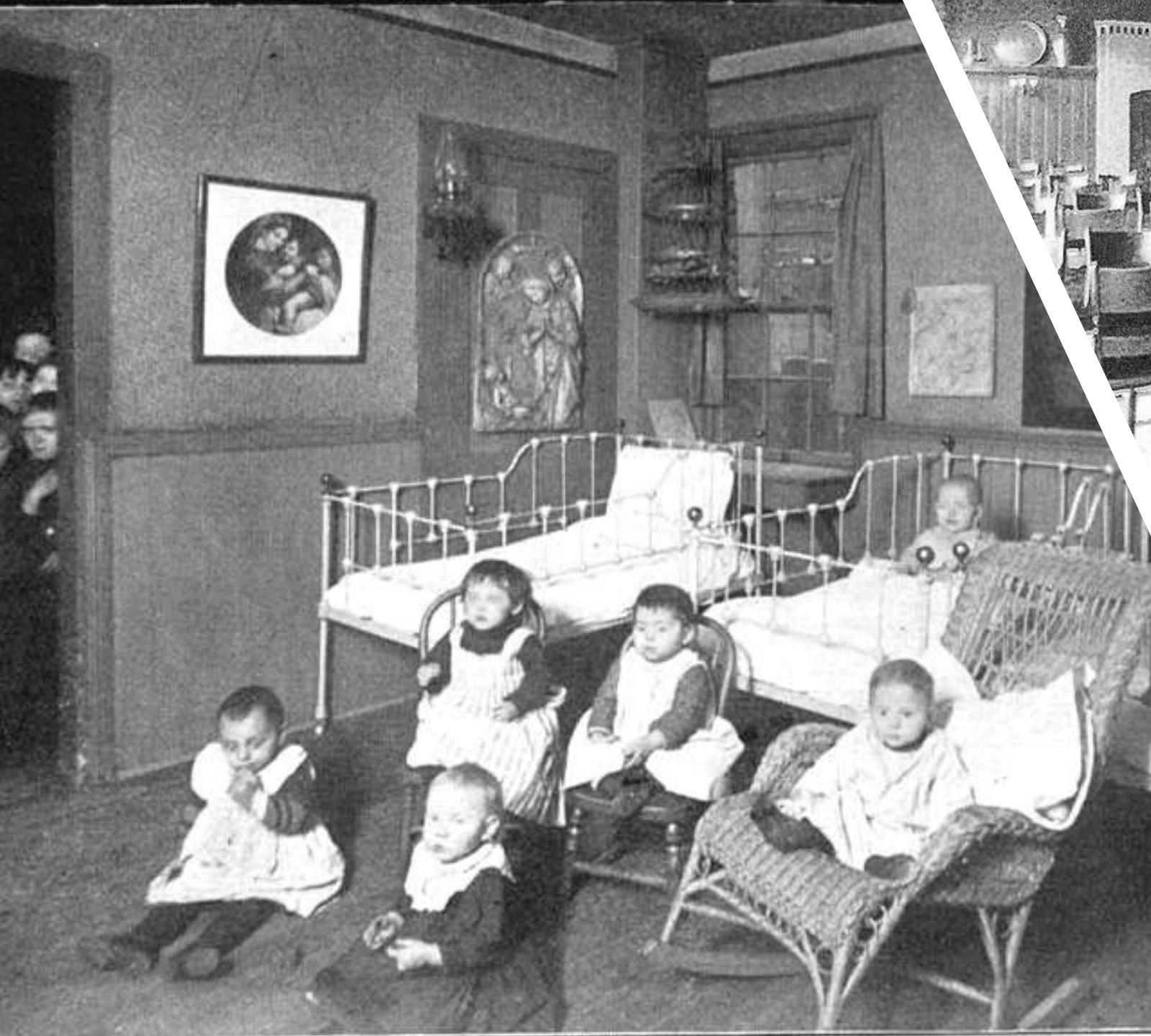
‘Partly through this wide reading of human life, we find in ourselves a new affinity for all men, which probably never existed in the world before. Evil itself does not shock us as it once did, and we count only that man merciful in whom we recognize an understanding of the criminal. We have learned as common knowledge that much of the insensibility and hardness of the world is due to the lack of imagination which prevents a realization of the experiences of other people. Already there is a conviction that we are under a moral obligation in choosing our experiences, since the result of those experiences must ultimately determine our understanding of life. We know instinctively that if we grow contemptuous of our fellows, and consciously limit our intercourse to certain kinds of people whom we have previously decided to respect, we not only tremendously circumscribe our range of life, but limit the scope of our ethics.’

- Jane Addams, *Democracy and Social Ethics* (Introduction)



Introducing Jane Addams (1860-1935)

- One of 8 children, mother died in childbirth aged 2
- Founded the Hull House Settlement in Chicago in 1889, which becomes a major centre of social work
- While a prominent writer in the American Pragmatist tradition, and an occasional university lecturer, Addams was better known then and subsequently for social work and activism
- She co-founded the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the American Civil Liberties Union and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom
- Awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1931
- Key concepts: sympathetic knowledge, pluralism, lateral progress



Hull House (1889-2012)

- In Chicago's Near West Side, defined by heavy European immigration
- Inspired by Toynbee Hall, Whitechapel, and similar
- This 'community of university women' initially provided classes, clubs, concerts and lectures, but expands in response to local need
- Produces Chicago's first public playground, public gym and bathhouse
- First juvenile courts, and lobbies for rubbish collection and sanitation, restrictions on child labour and worker exploitation, assistance and integration for immigrants, boosts in child education
- At its peak, 2000 visit weekly





Over to you

Discuss one of two questions:

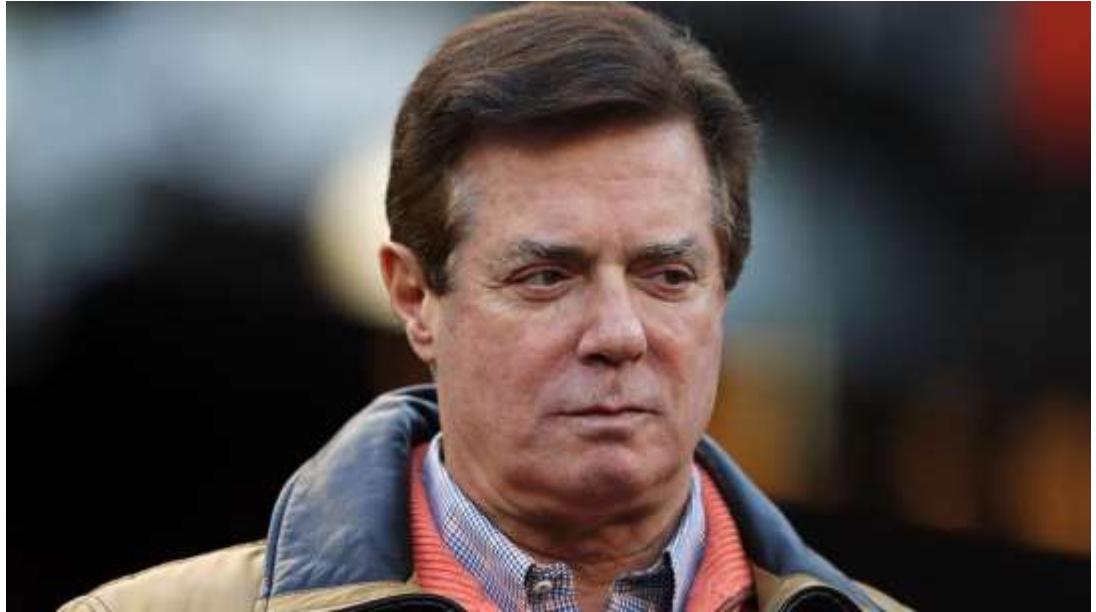
1. What distinguishes the corrupt alderman from the more aloof business class of reformers? What point do you think Addams is trying to make? (60)
2. How does Addams argue for civic virtue at the end? What is the significance of the appeal to morality, action and community? (61)



'During one of the campaigns a clever cartoonist drew a poster representing the successful alderman in portraiture drinking champagne at a table loaded with pretentious dishes and surrounded by other revellers. In contradistinction was his opponent, a bricklayer, who sat upon a half-finished wall, eating a meagre dinner from a workingman's dinner-pail, and the passer-by was asked which type of representative he preferred, the presumption being that at least in a workingman's district the bricklayer would come out ahead. To the chagrin of the reformers, however, it was gradually discovered that, in the popular mind, a man who laid bricks and wore overalls was not nearly so desirable for an alderman as the man who drank champagne and wore a diamond in his shirt front. The district wished its representative "to stand up with the best of them," and certainly some of the constituents would have been ashamed to have been represented by a bricklayer. It is part of that general desire to appear well, the optimistic and thoroughly American belief, that even if a man is working with his hands to-day, he and his children will quite likely be in a better position in the swift coming to-morrow, and there is no need of being too closely associated with common working people.' (58)

‘If we believe that the individual struggle for life may widen into a struggle for the lives of all, surely the demand of an individual for decency and comfort, for a chance to work and obtain the fulness of life may be widened until it gradually embraces all the members of the community, and rises into a sense of the common weal.

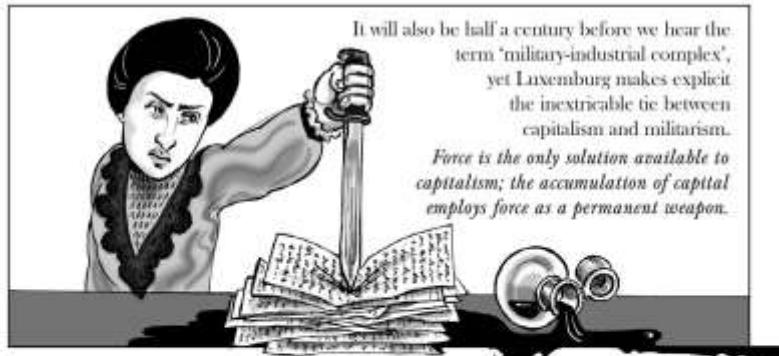
In order, however, to give him a sense of conviction that his individual needs must be merged into the needs of the many, and are only important as they are thus merged, the appeal cannot be made along the line of self-interest. The demand should be universalized; in this process it would also become clarified, and the basis of our political organization become perforce social and ethical.’ (61)





Introducing Rosa Luxemburg (1871-1919)

- Polish Jewish Marxist and revolutionary, similar social class to Addams
- Moves to Berlin in 1898 and comes to the lead the Left-wing of the Social Democratic Party, pushing it towards revolutionary aspirations
- Like Addams, a pacifist who founds the anti-war Spartacist League in 1915 with Karl Liebknecht
- Amid waves of post-war rioting in Berlin, she gets swept up in what becomes the Spartacist Uprising of January 1919...
- It is crushed by the now-Social Democratic government, and she and Liebknecht are executed.
- Her legacy is a body of thought concerned with revolution that highlights pacifism, democracy, opposition to imperialism and to compromise...

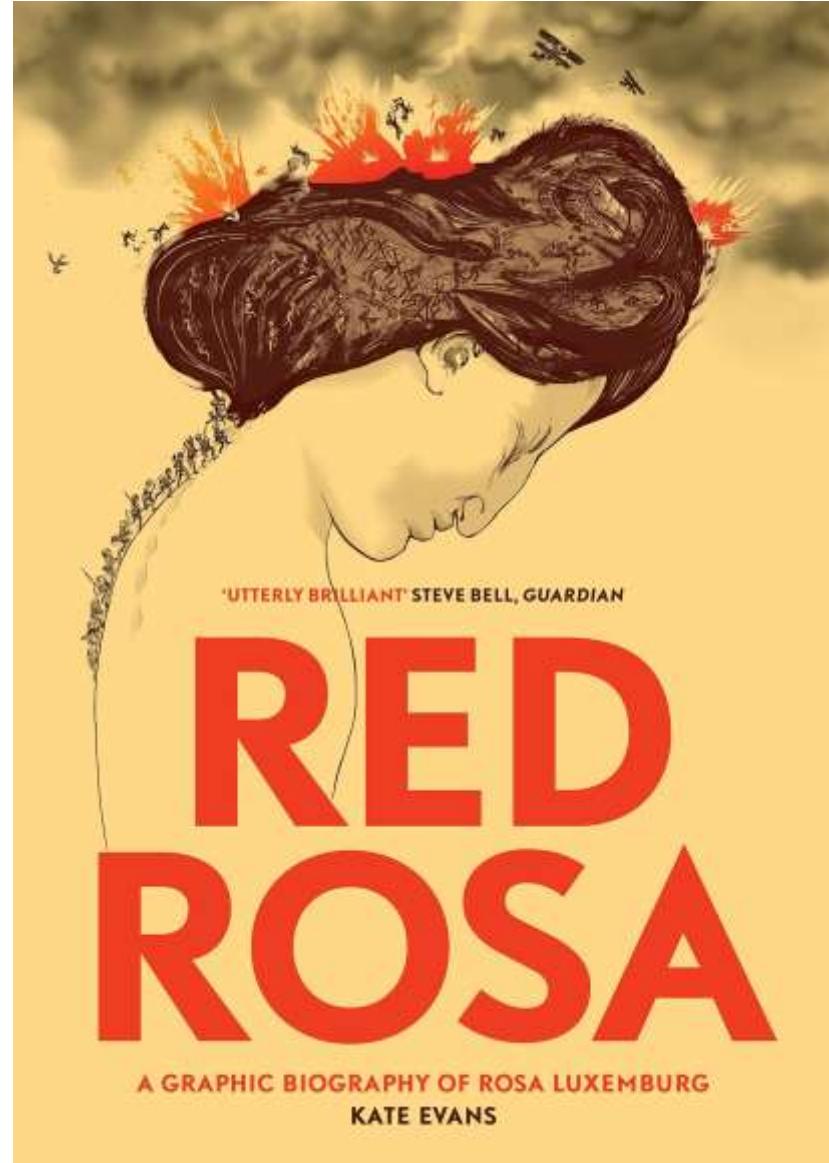


Her words are timely. Europe resonates with the marching feet of troops about to engage in the deadliest conflict the world has ever known.

ALL EUROPE WILL BE CALLED TO ARMS, AND SIXTEEN TO EIGHTEEN MILLION MEN, THE FLOWER OF THE NATIONS, ARMED WITH THE BEST INSTRUMENTS OF MURDER, WILL MAKE WAR UPON EACH OTHER.

THEY ARE LEADING US STRAIGHT INTO A CATASTROPHE.

THEY WILL REAP WHAT THEY HAVE SOWN.



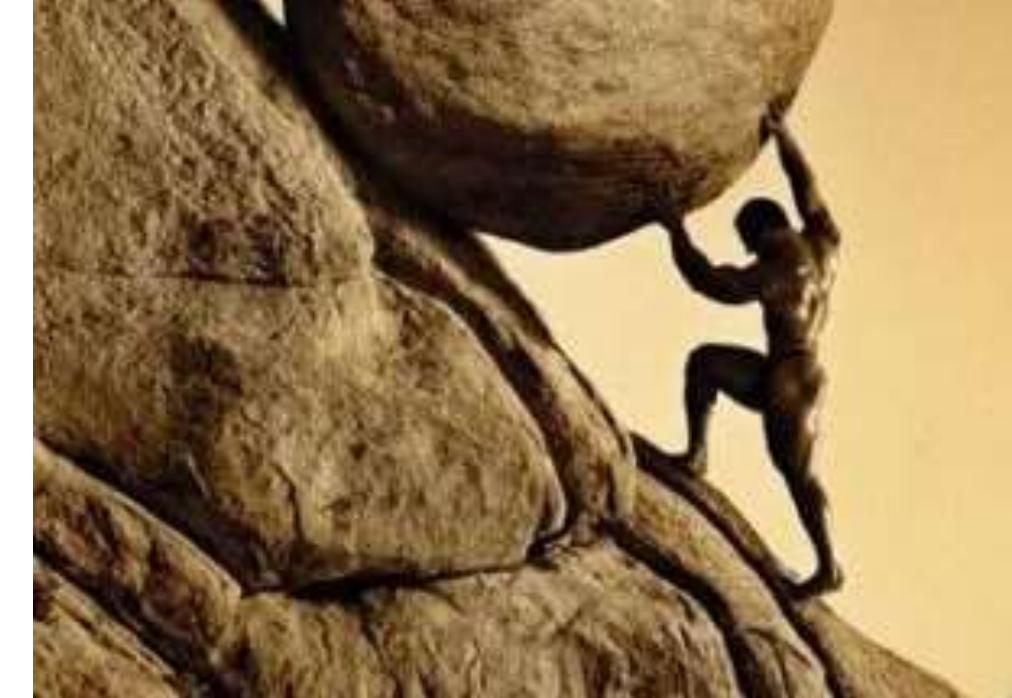


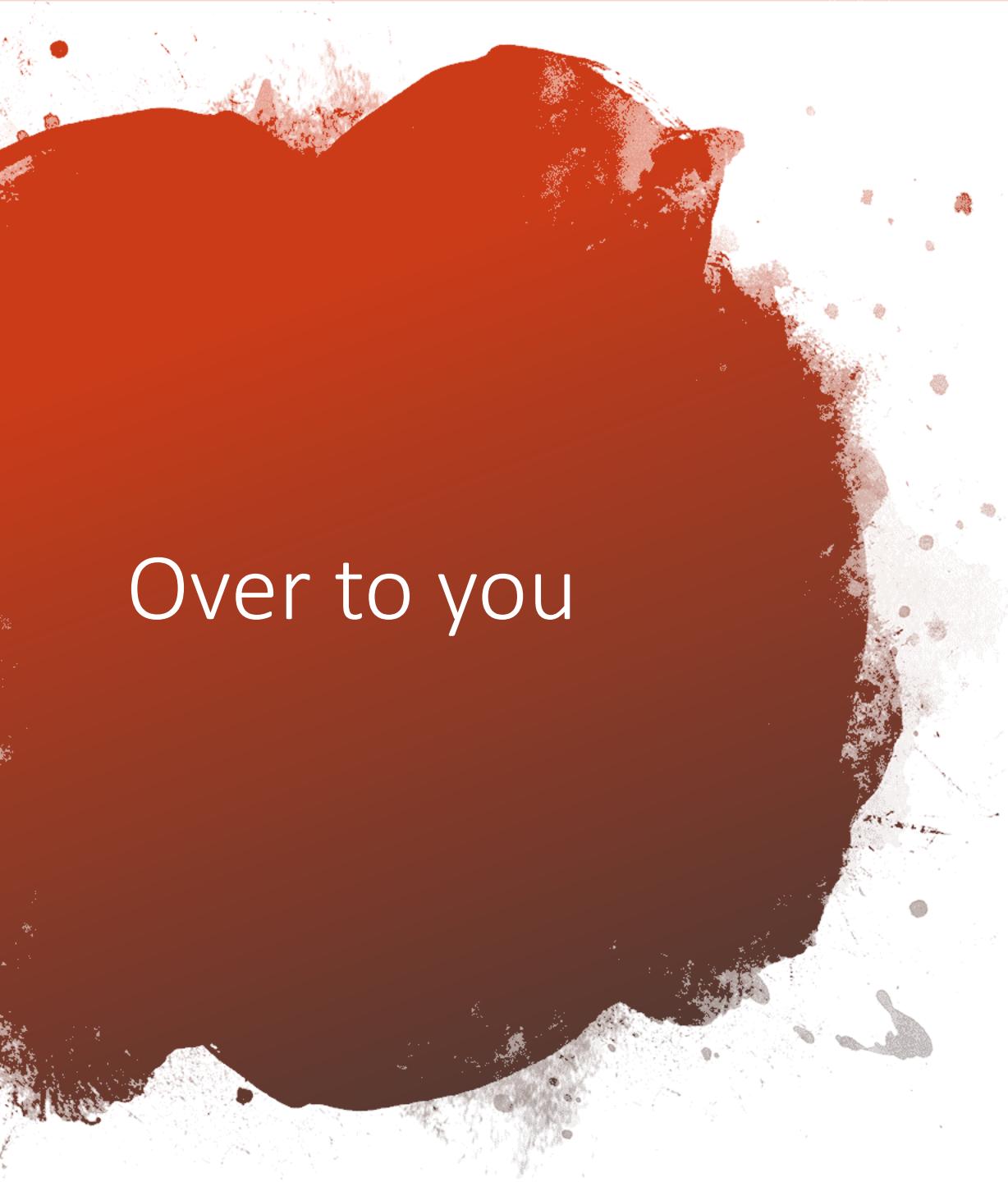
What do the SPD want?

- Agitation for workers rights (unions)
- Get socialist candidates elected
- Strikes for better work conditions
- Organised May Day as a general strike

By the 1890s, Edouard Bernstein was arguing that the route to socialism was through gentle reforms that wouldn't scare people off.

Democracy, worker rights and an elected SPD would ease Germany into socialism...





Over to you

Choose one of the two questions:

1. How is Bernstein said to be guilty of undermining the very basis of socialism? Do you think Luxemburg's criticisms are fair? (131-2)
2. Compare the ideas and suggestions of Jane Addams and Rosa Luxemburg. What are the strengths and weaknesses of either? Who is more persuasive, or relevant today?

'Revisionist theory stands before an Either/Or. Either the socialist transformation is, as was admitted up to now, the consequence of the internal contradictions of the capitalist order - then with this order will develop its contradictions, resulting inevitably, at some point, in its collapse. In this case, however, the "means of adaptation" are ineffective, and the breakdown theory is correct. Or, the "means of adaptation" are really capable of stopping the breakdown of the capitalist system and thereby enable capitalism to maintain itself by suppressing its own contradictions. In that case, socialism ceases to be a historical necessity.' (134)

'the present tactic of Social Democracy does not consist in *waiting* for the antagonisms of capitalism to develop to their most extreme point and only then transforming them. On the contrary, the essence of revolutionary tactics is to recognize the direction of this development and then, in the political struggle, to push its consequences to the extreme. Thus, Social Democracy has combatted protectionism and militarism without waiting for their reactionary character to become fully evident.' (143)

'In view of the fact that bourgeois liberalism has sold its soul from fear of the growing labor movement and its final aim, it follows that the socialist labor movement today is and can be the only support of democracy.' (154)



Reform or revolution?

- Addams and Luxemburg share views on democracy, pacifism and the necessity of alleviating poverty and inequality
- But for Addams, democracy is part of a broader social ethics in which sympathetic knowledge, community action and slow, responsive, progressive reforms are decisive...
- For Luxemburg, social problems are ultimately caused by capitalism. And any effort to gradually ameliorate them simply props up a system which causes the misery in the first place. It defeats the point.
- Revolution is necessary to force society from capitalism to socialism...

Next week... *the ballot or the bullet?*

- Continuing our study of responses to social injustice, we'll discuss contributions from three sides:
- Gandhi, writing for non-violence in colonial India; and Martin Luther King and Malcolm X, disagreeing on the tactics necessary in the American Civil Rights movement
- Read Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj* (1909, ch17), “MLK, “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” (1963); Malcolm X, “The Ballot or the Bullet” (1964)
- Is violent resistance sometimes justifiable or inevitable as a means to an end against an entrenched status quo? Or does the use of violence forfeit the ethical and political legitimacy of resistance movements?
- Email any questions to dan.taylor@marywardcentre.ac.uk