Chapter 7

The Question of War in Bauer’s Thought in Light of SDAP and LSI Policies

For Austromarxists, war was not an object of philosophical or ethical reflection, nor was its political aspect of major interest. They did not deny that there was a political dimension to war, yet as faithful disciples of Marx, they believed it had an instrumental role (as an aside, I have previously pointed out the peculiar inversion of this relationship with respect to Bauer’s theory on the state and the national question). As was the case with most of their positions, the Austromarxists were prone to overestimate the economic (class) factor at the expense of the non-economic (legal, political, cultural). Consequently, their view of the war phenomenon was defined by a deterministic, strictly economic perception of history, which strongly accentuated class relationships. It is also notable, however, that for Bauer and his tendency, the war question was only relevant as a matter of political practice.¹ For this reason, he analysed the causes, objectives, and perspectives of war, as well as the ways in which one might prevent it, only at congresses of the SDAP, Second International, and Labour and Socialist International. Hence, it is pivotal to assess his attitudes in consideration of the politics of the SDAP and the two internationals, all of which he helped to shape.

¹ The SDAP Position Until the Outbreak of World War I

Under the shadow of war in the Balkans and the outbreak of World War I, the Austrian Social-Democratic movement was forced to merge its politics with what was unfolding in reality, and confront the traditions of the party. Deeply rooted in the organisation was the disbelief in the possibility of war and illusions as to the power of Social Democracy to prevent it from happening. As Leser writes:

¹ What is more, Bauer and the Austromarxists regarded war merely as armed conflict between nation states, which further limited their understanding of it. On war in the broader and narrower sense (as armed action, uprising, and revolution), see Jeliński 1996, p. 160.
This optimism was not based on any analysis of the real balance of forces or sober assessment of available options to resist or intervene. Nor was it based on a realistic self-assessment of one’s own, fundamentally non-revolutionary – one might say, not even eager – attitude, but on a romanticism informed by the over-estimation of one’s own abilities. That is how reality was approached.2

This faith in the power of the workers’ movement and the revolutionary rhetoric that came with it, neither of which reflected the actual political and social balance of forces under capitalism, was by no means an Austrian peculiarity. It regularly materialised at the congresses of the Second International whenever the war question was on the agenda (Brussels 1891, Zurich 1893, London 1896). It was particularly apparent at the 1907 congress in Stuttgart, which put forward a resolution committing all Social-Democratic parties to ‘... make every effort to take advantage of the economic and political crisis brought about by war for the purpose of awakening the popular masses and accelerating the demise of capitalist class rule’.3 It was clear from this motion that any potential war was to be transformed into a social revolution. At the same time, it was a purely declamatory call to arms – none present at the congress seriously contemplated the necessary means to obtain this, nor did they take into account the obstacles they would face. One need only consider that nationalism was on the rise within the working class.

The Austrian Social Democrats failed to recognise the objectives thus outlined at the Stuttgart congress. Does this mean they were more realistic than the leaders of the Second International? Not by any stretch. Their reasons were, firstly, a typical SDAP politics of ‘patience’ – there had been persistent talk of revolution since the Hainfeld congress, yet the talk never came to fruition. Secondly, the party believed that possibilities for the Social-Democratic party to prevent war without taking radical measures were practically unlimited – a conviction that was perspicuous in Victor Adler’s contributions in Stuttgart.4

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2 Leser 1968, p. 263.
3 International Socialist Congress in Stuttgart, in Documents, Programmes, Protocols, p. 16. The resolution, authored by Luxemburg and Lenin, represented a compromise incorporating war as part of the nature of the capitalist state.
4 At the time, Adler said: ‘we do not need to wait until war is declared in order to fight the war. All our actions, all our party work serves to prevent the war – that is the true antimilitarist activity’ – International Socialist Congress in Stuttgart, in Documents, Programmes, Protocols, p. 95.
As late as 1907, the SDAP leadership did not deem it necessary to draft a plan for war prevention, despite the fact that the Austrian government had been preparing to invade Serbia for some time. Nor did it fully fathom the mechanisms that the Austrian workers’ party could use to prevent the annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. On the one hand, the party leaders were unable to win the national movements to the fight against the ruling classes and monarchy. On the other, they were increasingly reluctant to engage in protests against the government. They rejected demands made at Second International congresses to disseminate anti-war propaganda amongst the armed forces, as well as other measures that could have weakened the influence of militaristic ideas. More importantly, though, the party’s attitude toward the Habsburg monarchy’s imperialist policies was ambivalent in form. True enough, Bauer and Renner attacked imperialist aggression in their speeches in parliament — yet the majority of the German-Austrian Social-Democratic movement firmly believed in Austria’s cultural mission in the Balkans. At the 1910 congress in Copenhagen, the Austrian delegates did not form a united front on the question of militarism, even as the conflict in the Balkans drew precariously close. Renner put forward a motion on behalf of the Austrian section, calling for general disarmament, the creation of international arbitration courts, and the publication of secret pacts between parties. However, this did not mean that the Austrian Social Democrats were prepared to subordinate national interests to the interests of the international proletariat. Their refusal to rally for a general strike in the case of war was symptomatic of this. The Austrian leadership’s only response to the war was an appeal passed by the executive committee on 15 October 1912, which put forward the slogan, ‘No intervention in the Balkans war! The Balkans for the Balkans people! Maintain peace!’ as a slogan of the proletariat, thus leaving the weight of responsibility to Tsarism and international imperialism. The Balkan peoples’ right to self-determination was a controversial question, given that these were not historical nations, and therefore had, according to Marxist dogma, no right to exist independently. The demand for preserving peace in the Balkans was not grounded in any efficient war preven-

5 See International Socialist Congress in Copenhagen, in Documents, Programmes, Protocols, p. 104. Renner's demands were an arsenal of measures typical of bourgeois pacifist ideology.

6 The French delegation issued to call a strike. The Austrian, German, and Italian delegates argued that calling a general strike would give the party an illegal character and lead to heavy repercussions. See International Socialist Congress in Copenhagen, in Documents, Programmes, Protocols, p. 104.

7 See spd 1912, pp. 107–24.
tion programme – understandably so, considering the SDAP was not a political force that may have resisted the bourgeois bloc and its politics in 1912. Victor Adler acknowledged the feeling of powerlessness that swept through the party at the 1912 congress of the Second International in Basel.\footnote{Adler expressed this as follows: ‘Unfortunately, it does not depend on us Social Democrats whether the war is coming or not. We are well aware that the working class of all countries grows more powerful every day … But let us not overestimate our own power, and let us especially not overestimate the rational thinking of our governments’ – Extraordinary International Socialist Congress in Basel from 24–25 November 1912, p. 17.} The party leader’s congressional statement supported Otto Bauer’s notion of the inevitability of war in antagonistic societies, principally within the framework of imperialism, due to the inadequacy of economic working-class struggle as an instrument of war prevention.\footnote{Ibid.}

For many European states, the assassination in Sarajevo on 27 July 1914 was a precursor to war.\footnote{A day after the assassination, hundreds of workers in Germany and Britain staged an anti-war demonstration.} Not so for the Austrian socialists, who, on Victor Adler’s insistence, not only denied the imminent outbreak of war, but also misapprehended the connection between the assassination and Austro-Hungarian imperialism.\footnote{Ardelt shares this view – see Ardelt 1979, p. 63.} They assumed that the perpetrators would be punished and order restored.\footnote{By way of testimony to the Social Democrats’ deep conviction that there was no imminent danger, Friedrich Adler wanted to set the date for the socialist congress in Vienna for August.} After the ultimatum given to Serbia, it would have been possible to coordinate the activities of all Social-Democratic parties of the empire. Yet the only outcome of the meeting between German, Czech and Polish activists on 29 July 1914 was a manifesto formulated by the German delegates. They proffered support for the Austrian Social Democrats, who in their view were not at fault for the outbreak of war. The SDAP leadership reiterated this protest on the first day of war. It was not the monarchy, they argued, who were to blame for the war, but Serbia\footnote{Kulemann notes that the Social Democrats’ negative stance on the Austro-Hungarian empire’s nations’ right to self-determination was but one step away from supporting the annexation of Serbia. See Kulemann 1979, p. 167.}.\footnote{Kulemann 1979, p. 167.}

The outbreak of World War I and confrontation with the tangible political balance was a rude awakening for the misled Social Democrats. At that time, few among them were aware that a politics based on false Marxian dogma would inevitably prove fatal for Social Democracy. As Leser writes, among these
dogmas was their belief that the masses would spontaneously jump into action if class contradictions intensified, as well as their hope for the international solidarity of workers. The latter was based on the notion that the interests of the working class as a whole were stronger than the common national interests of different classes.¹⁴ These and other basic ideological and theoretical premises of Marxism were fertile ground for one of the gravest illusions of the workers’ movement – that is, the notion that the Second International could prevent war. One of the few socialists to recognise the discrepancies between Social-Democratic theory and practice was Max Adler, who in 1915 wrote:

That is why the International did not actually fail. The war only made apparent that it did, in fact, not yet exist, that it had no existence aside from being a mere ideology of the proletariat, a noble desire without any guarantee of fulfilment.¹⁵

our translation

The war clearly exposed the miscalculations of Marx’s theory on historical materialism. For one, it revealed the limits of society’s class structures, demonstrating that national, political, and cultural cross-class bonds played a far greater role in politics than class ties. What is more, it proved that social and political interests are not clearly determined by economic matters. To no lesser degree, cross-class interests within communities stem from their various political and national histories. Legal advantages offered by the state played a dominant role. That is precisely why the Social-Democratic parties of Germany, France and Britain advocated, in spite of the arrangements made at the congresses of the Second International, a politics of ‘defending the fatherland’. The Social-Democratic Party of Germany was the first to vote for war credits, arguing that democracy and Western culture had to be defended against the totalitarianism of Tsarism. The other Social-Democratic parties of Europe also took the side of their respective governments, a move decisively influenced by the nationalistic mood of the masses.¹⁶ Consistent with their politics

¹⁴ Compare Leser 1968, p. 266.
¹⁵ ‘Die Internationale hat darum eigentlich auch gar nicht versagt, sondern der Krieg hat nur offenbar gemacht, dass sie überhaupt noch gar nicht bestanden hatte, dass sie noch keine andere Existenz führte als die einer bloßen Ideologie des Proletariats, als eines edlen Wunsches ohne irgendwelche reale Garantie seiner Erfüllung’ – Adler 1915b, p. 47.
¹⁶ The war cabinets boasted well-known socialists, e.g. Emile Vandervelde in Belgium and Jules Guesde and Marcel Sembat in France. The decision to join the war was supported by Henry Hyndman and Ernest Belfort Bax in Britain and Plekhanov in Russia.
of preserving the multinational state, the SDAP assumed a government-friendly position, citing fear of Russia as justification. The stance of the party leadership was partly down to the enthusiasm of the masses, who participated in a pro-war demonstration on the streets of Vienna.\footnote{For more on the enthusiasm of the masses, see Wandruszka 1954, p. 438; Wereszyski 1975, p. 258. According to Burian, a majority of the population of the Austro-Hungarian Empire supported the war not out of loyalty to the Habsburg monarchy, but because of its own national interest. See Burian 1974, p. 11.} The right wing of the party (Victor Adler, Austerlitz, Renner, Pernerstorfer, Leuthner), who represented the majority, sympathised with this patriotic turn and did not attempt to hide its German nationalist sentiments. The delegates were only able to avoid a compulsory vote on war credits due to the dissolution of parliament. The party press were apologetic, publishing articles that served to prove the SDAP's ideological support for the war. In a special issue of the *Arbeiter-Zeitung* of 1 August 1914, Russia was deemed solely responsible for imperialist endeavours. In the 2 August 1914 issue, Austerlitz absolved Germany and Austria from any responsibility for the outbreak of war in his article, ‘Der Weltkrieg des Zaren’ (‘The Tsar's World War’). On 5 August 1914, Austerlitz's famous comment, ‘Der Tag der deutschen Nation’ (‘Day of the German Nation’) was published: it endorsed the SDAP position on war credits and conceded the right of self-defence of every country. Austerlitz referred to the day when the interests of the Social Democracy movement merged with those of the ruling apparatus as ‘a day of the proudest and mightiest revolt of the German spirit’.\footnote{‘... Tag der stolzesten und gewaltigsten Erhebung des deutschen Geistes’ – Austerlitz 1914b.} Well aware that the Social Democrats' support for the government at the outbreak of war had exposed, to the working class, the hitherto well-concealed defensive position of the party, Bauer wrote at the end of his life:

The 4 August 1914 exposed all for what it was. For decades, the revolutionary socialist movement expected that a European war would allow the proletariat to take advantage of the shock administered to capitalist society by war and the arming of the masses. It would use it to conquer state power by revolutionary means and thus transform the social order. Had the socialist movement really stuck to a revolutionary perspective, it would have immediately had to blame the capitalist classes and their governments for the war when it broke out ... It would have had to prepare, even if forced into illegality, to exploit the revolutionary situation that would have inevitably presented itself during the war or at its end. In
reality, however, the socialist parties, frightened by the war, abandoned the struggle against their capitalist governments.19

Bauer’s Opposition to the SDAP Position on World War I

Bauer later went on to substantiate the position taken at the last congress of the Second International more thoroughly in two articles written in 1912, both of which were published under the Heinrich Weber moniker: ‘Der Sozialismus und der Krieg’ (‘Socialism and War’) and ‘Balkankrieg und die deutsche Politik’ (‘War in the Balkans and German Policies’). He viewed war from a historical class perspective, overemphasising economic factors at the expense of the political. His notion of the causes of war was one-sided: he cited the social conditions based on private ownership of the means of production, as well as the class character of the capitalist state. In the era of imperialism, Bauer argued, war had become necessary, resulting from an immanent expansionist tendency that made any enduring peace impossible. Bauer linked the nature of the Balkan war to the politics of the propertied classes. When describing the negative consequences of imperialist war – such as economic collapse, destruction, and loss of human life – he conceded that they affected all social classes. Nonetheless, he was inclined to see war as a factor of historical development. For him, the destruction of old social structures and existing political relations counted as progress. Bauer did not go as far as the left of the Second International (Vaillant, Luxemburg, Lenin), which demanded that imperialist wars between nations be transformed into wars against the governments of their respective countries. Although he wanted Social Democracy to support the revolutionary forces in Russia and the Balkan countries in their struggle against

19 ‘Der 4. August 1914 hat demaskiert, was war. Jahrzehnte lang hatte der revolutionäre Sozialismus erwartet, ein europäischer Krieg werde es dem Proletariat ermöglichen, die ... unmittelbar revolutionäre Aktion wiederaufzunehmen, die Erschütterung der kapitalistischen Gesellschaft durch den Krieg und die Bewaffnung der Volksmassen durch den Krieg zu revolutionärer Eroberung der Staatsmacht und damit zur Umwälzung der Gesellschaftsordnung auszunutzen. Hätte der Sozialismus tatsächlich die revolutionäre Zukunftsperspektive festgehalten, so hätte er am Beginn des Krieges die kapitalistischen Klassen und ihre Regierungen für den Krieg verantwortlich machen müssen ... Er hätte, sei er auch in die Illegalität gedrängt, die Ausnützung einer revolutionären Situation vorbereiten müssen, die im Verlaufe des Krieges oder am Ende des Krieges kommen musste. In Wirklichkeit aber haben die sozialistischen Parteien, vom Kriege erschreckt, den Kampf gegen die kapitalistischen Regierungen eingestellt’ – Bauer 1976p, p. 251.
Tsarism, this demand existed in a historical vacuum. Bauer did not indicate the ways in which it could be put into practice, and in 1912 the Western countries were far from declaring war on the Tsarist Empire.

When contemplating measures suitable for the working class and Social Democracy during wartime, Bauer, who authored Der Sozialismus und der Krieg (Socialism and War), warned of placing false hope in the effectiveness of a general strike, claiming that ‘... under present circumstances, stopping a war through general strike is a utopia’. According to Zimmermann, Bauer’s position on war was ambiguous. On the one hand, he was convinced of the inevitability of war under capitalism and the pointlessness of Social-Democratic anti-war propaganda. On the other, he attempted to prove that the working class would transcend national interests, support international anti-war policies, and commence a struggle against imperialism. The weapons he suggested for this struggle – anti-war propaganda, speeches in parliament, street demonstrations – were hardly effective measures to protect the proletariat from the imperialist governments and their policies. Indeed, Bauer himself did not believe that the anti-war sentiments of the party and working class would amount to much.

Bauer’s position on the breakout of World War I and its potential consequences was far more realistic than that of Renner and the party majority. This led to the cooling of the relationship between the two politicians, and condemned Bauer to political isolation within the party. Renner not only justified the government’s acts of war; he even established a connection between war and economic progress. For him, it contained the possibility to create great economic territories and thus preserve the multinational Habsburg state. In contrast, Bauer realised that the war would stimulate the political activity of the various nations of the Empire. Consequently, he warned of the misconceptions escalated by Renner – he expected that the independence movements in the Slavic countries would receive a boost leading to the breakup of the empire. From 1914–16, this possibility was hardly ever considered in the party. Rather, there prevailed a belief that the pre-war political line must be maintained, i.e. agitating for political reforms and defending all nations of the Austro-Hungarian Empire from Tsarism. A veil of silence was cast over the Austrian imperialist war aims that these policies served to further.

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20 ‘... unter den heute gegebenen Umständen die Verhinderung eines Krieges durch den Generalstreik eine Utopie ist’ – Bauer 1980e, p. 743. According to Steiner, the majority of Social Democrats shared Bauer’s position – see Steiner 1967, p. 5.
21 Compare Zimmermann 1976, p. 448.
22 This does not at all mean that the leaders of Austrian Social Democracy misapprehended
years, the SDAP declared as its foremost tasks the preservation of party unity and the rescue of national organisations. When assessing the state of the party towards the end of the war, including the relationship to shop stewards, Julius Deutsch noted that ‘they were almost exclusively interested in the struggles of the day and immediate organisational tasks. As they rushed from election campaign to publicity campaign, their political work evaporated’ (our translation).\textsuperscript{23} In 1915, the SDAP leadership took up an anti-war initiative organising a peace demonstration – yet for fear of repercussions, the demonstration never took place.

During the same period, left oppositional forces hostile to the war gained strength among Social-Democratic parties. At international congresses in Zimmerwald (August 1915) and Kienthal (April–May 1916), they subjected the pro-war politics of the party majorities to sharp criticism. In Germany, where they failed to arrive at a joint position, the opposition split the newly formed Independent Socialist-Democratic Party of Germany (USPD) away from the SPD in April 1917. In Austria too, an opposition led by Friedrich Adler surfaced the moment war was declared. Adler expressed defiance for the first time in his letter to the party leadership of 7 August 1914, where he questioned the necessity of defence as a war demand of the Social-Democratic party, albeit taking care not to allow his theoretical critique to transcend the boundaries of party unity. A group of critical party members gathering around him from 1915–16 held similar positions – among them were Max Adler, Leon Winarsky, Gustav Proft, Theresia Schlesinger, Robert Danneberg, Gustav Eckstein and Rudolf Hilferding. The Social-Democratic parties’ vote for war credits and the pro-war policies of the SDAP leadership being the main targets of their criticism, they supported the anti-war programme of the German USPD and demanded peace without conquered territories or war reparations. The left group was organisationally and numerically weak, counting only some 120 members – mainly intellectuals – who did not dare leave the party even though their critique met with no significant resonance in the SDAP. Lively debate now took place on the platform legally provided by the ‘Karl Marx debating society’, which the left had

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\item[23] ‘Ihr Interesse war fast ausschließlich auf die Tageskämpfe und die unmittelbaren organisatorischen Aufgaben gerichtet. Zwischen Wahlkampf und Werbeaktion verlief ihr politisches Wirken’ – Deutsch 1918, p. 608.
\end{footnotes}
reconvened in December 1915 in order to propagate ‘Zimmerwald left’ ideas.\textsuperscript{24} The peace resolutions that the members of the society submitted to the 1915 and 1916 party congresses found no support. The SDAP leadership had no desire whatsoever to drop its pro-war policies. Furthermore, it feared an increase in the influence of left-wing agitators on war-weary workers, and that the same fate which befell the German sister party could develop once again – that is, that the workers’ movement might split and thus lose strength. Bauer, who at the time was a prisoner of war in Russia, wrote letters to the SDAP leadership in which he endorsed the split in the German workers’ movement, considering it a result of the distorted proportionality between reformist and revolutionary trends. He did not take the ideological and theoretical arguments raging in the SDAP during the wartime seriously. Rather, he claimed that the party had preserved its revolutionary character, and that its unity was not in jeopardy. He was only right on the latter point. Despite its protests against the party leadership and the patriotic endeavours of the centrist forces behind it, the left did not want a repetition of the German scenario. It feared the powerful repercussions that the ruling apparatus might unleash against the workers’ movement if the latter were significantly weakened.

Divergent positions on war, though manifest since its outbreak, were most vociferous at the SDAP congress from 19–24 October 1917. Otto Bauer, newly released from a POW camp, took over the leadership of the opposition, which numbered 51 out of 283 delegates. Upon his initiative, the opposition introduced its own programme, the so-called ‘Declaration of the Left’. Acting as representatives of the class interests of the workers’ movement, the opposition attacked the coalition between Social-Democratic and bourgeois parties, the SDAP’s vote for war credits, and the nationalism of the party leadership. It expeditiously demanded to work towards a swift end to war.\textsuperscript{25} Note that the

\textsuperscript{24} The second Zimmerwald congress from 5–8 August 1915 saw sharp polemical exchanges between Lenin’s group of radicals and the moderate reformists under Robert Grimm’s leadership. The draft brought forward by the so-called Zimmerwald left founded by Lenin was rejected by 19 to 12 votes; yet the adopted manifesto demanding unity of the workers’ movement to defend peace was a serious step on the path towards uniting all socialist forces against the war. Friedrich Adler, impressed by the Zimmerwald manifesto, published an article, ‘Die Internationalen in Österreich und die Internationalen aller Länder’ (‘The Austrian Internationalists to the Internationalists of All Countries’), directed against the politics of the party right. See Hautmann 1971, p. 22.

\textsuperscript{25} The ‘Declaration of the Left’ states: ‘Social Democracy can only fulfil its historical task in the class struggle ... Reformism necessarily leads to ministerialism. We reject every permanent alliance with bourgeois parties, every bloc politics. We stick to the old principle,
class position of the left was not wholly consistent: as mentioned earlier, it supported the centrist project of conceding national autonomy while maintaining the existing ties between all nations of the empire. Because it did not want to cause a split, the left advocated, quite irrespective of the slogans expressed, an overall position closer to the right than the left wing of the Zimmerwald conference, and supported the SDAP leadership in a vote of confidence. The latter amounted to the opposition subordinating itself to the party leadership, and therefore agreeing to reject its demand for peace without conquered territories or war reparations. In late 1917, the Social Democrats still hoped the Austro-Hungarian Empire would escape the clutches of war with nothing more than a slap on the wrist, and that the party might continue its reformist policies. Bauer did not quite agree with this, yet he did not openly oppose the political line adopted by the SDAP. It was only a few years later, when critically revisiting the positions of the party, that Bauer admitted their character had been pro-war – during the first years of the conflict, the Social Democrats supported the war apparatus simply because they feared the overwhelming might of Tsarism.

“Not one man and not one penny for the capitalist state” (our translation) – Protocol of negotiations at the congress of the German Social-Democratic Workers’ Party in Austria from 19 October, in Documents, Programmes, Protocols, p. 116. Max Adler was the main left speaker at the war congress of the SDAP. In his critique of the war, he shifted emphasis from the political to culture and consciousness. He assumed that the Social-Democratic party could stop the war by weakening the masses’ psychological and moral preparedness to participate in it. See M. Adler 1981b, p. 282.

Towards the end of the war, minister president Max Hussarek von Heinlein brought forward a draft for the establishment of national cantons that would allow the preservation of the federal state. The draft found encouragement from the German part of the SDAP leadership, yet the delegates from the Slavic countries supported the sectional interests of their respective nations. On 4 November 1918, foreign minister Count Ottokar von Czernin turned to US president Wilson requesting help for the peace mission. Emperor Charles I of Austria’s manifesto of 17 November, proposing to treat Austria as a federation of free nations, found no support. A note sent by Wilson on 19 November 1918 recognising the independence of Poland, Yugoslavia, and the Czech Republic also meant the end of the monarchy.

See Bauer 1925, p. 27.
By the early 1920s, the living conditions of the Austrian working class had heavily deteriorated: inflation, prices, and unemployment rates all rose. At the same time, Michael Mayr’s government, newly formed in the autumn of 1920, stopped all social and political reforms. From 1921 onwards, there was an increase in terrorist activities conducted by so-called ‘movements for the defence of the fatherland’ against the ‘red peril’. Their orientation was recognisably fascist. In Italy, the fascist movement that would soon seize power consolidated itself. In this political climate, the centrist circles in the workers’ movement strove to reunite the Social-Democratic parties in order to preserve the gains that had been won and prevent another war. At the 1923 congress in Hamburg, the Social Democrats brought the Labour and Socialist International (LSI) into being, which continued the reformist orientation of the Second International. This organisation came about through the unification of the so-called Geneva and Vienna internationals and comprised more than 40 parties with over 6 million members. Like the Second International, it was a loose association of parties intending to construct the socialist movement as a place where information and experience might be shared. Rather than having an absolute character, the resolutions it passed were mere suggestions for the activities of the individual parties. Discussion in Hamburg focused on the danger of war and the possibility of preventing it. A resolution passed by congress, ‘The imperialist peace and the tasks of the working class’, demanded that vigorous steps be taken in order to preserve peace and stop imperialist policies and military alliances. Even by that period, the LSI had already repeated the same mistakes as the former international: it did not proffer any guidance on how to fulfil the agreed demands, and there was a miscalculation on the actual strength of the workers’ movement, its ability to co-operate in the case of war, and chances to put the demands into practice. When appearing at the Hamburg congress, Bauer reminded delegates of the inglorious past of the Second International and argued that it was impossible to conduct true anti-war politics by passing resolutions. Instead of mere verbal declarations, he suggested convening a special foreign office staffed by experts to analyse the political situation in the respective countries and to establish measures to prevent international conflicts from escalating into a world war. Against Bauer’s warning, the LSI confined itself at subsequent congresses to passing anti-war resolutions.

In the meantime, the offensive of bourgeois and fascist forces had gathered strength in Austria. Paramilitary Heimwehr units assumed control over enterprises, while its battalions attacked workers at demonstrations. Attaining increasing influence in the Christian Social and Greater German parties, they
gradually worked towards seizing state power. Further to constituting the greatest threat to democracy, they were generally believed to entertain alliances with imperialist circles in Germany and Italy. This suggested that they might implicate Austria in a war. From 1927–9, the SDAP focused on the question of whether peace could be preserved in Europe. Bauer reproached Max Adler, who had set the tone of this debate, with a harsh rebuttal. Within the SPD, the discussion around the Social-Democratic movement’s position on the German army (Reichswehr) and protracted armament plans (e.g. the new battleship Panzerkreuzer A) inspired this particular disagreement. Much like the left opposition in Germany, Max Adler protested against further militarisation, advocating a standpoint close to Lenin’s: every imperialist war should be used to awaken the revolutionary consciousness of the masses and turn them against their respective governments.28 For him, ‘socialist education’ already provided a sufficient impediment to imperialist war policies, as well as an instrument for transforming an ongoing war into a socialist revolution. Interestingly, Adler did not consider any legal or institutional process for his theory, and as such Bauer’s accusations of idealism were quite justified. Bauer highlighted the impracticality and utopian nature of the Social-Democratic war programme drafts. Yet at the same time, he fell victim to a different extreme, which could be ascribed to his unflinching loyalty to Marx’s theory. Like Marx, he regarded politics as merely instrumental in comparison to economics. This was based on the understanding that the entire politics of the workers’ party had to do justice to economic, social, historical, and class conditions. For him, it was these elements – rather than the raison d’État or national interests – that determined the war character. It would be fair to say that Bauer differentiated, even if he did not mention this explicitly, between ‘just’ and ‘unjust’ wars – a dichotomy harking back to the classical Marxists and assumptions widespread in the Labour and Socialist International. What is more, he seconded Jean Jaurès’s view that the working class should participate in wars to defend their own national territories and resist imperialist wars of conquest. This is implicit in his negative view of a paper exploring the function and role of the German army submitted by the SPD left – or, more specifically, the Klassenkampf (Class Struggle) group around Max Seydewith, Kurt Rosenfeld, Paul Levis and Max Adler. Stressing the imperialist quality of all wars, the paper advocated Germany’s full disarmament. Bauer objected to this, convinced instead that Social Democracy had to establish its positions on analyses of the international and political balance of forces. In addition, the disarmament of one side alone would render defending

28 See Adler 1981b, p. 41.
the country against a potential invasion impossible. Concretely, he feared that French and British troops might potentially march through German territory in a war against Russia.

As an advocate of the preservation of Germany, Bauer gave a speech entitled ‘The situation in Germany and central Europe and the working class struggle for democracy’ at the 1931 congress of the Labour and Socialist International in Vienna, in which delegates from 32 countries participated. In his analysis of the crisis in Germany, he cautioned that it would lead to the rise of Nazis and Communists in the state – as both groups intended to destroy the democratic foundations of the Weimar Republic, provoke a civil war, and introduce a dictatorship. Bauer demanded that the Western countries grant credits to Germany and annul her war debt in order to prevent the latter becoming reality. The majority of the Vienna congress adopted a resolution based on Bauer’s suggestions.

By then, however, the German Social Democrats had already been losing votes to the National Socialists since 1931. There were no forces left with whom they could have allied in order to defend democracy, considering that the Communists were arch-enemies of Social Democracy at the time. Hence, they supported the bourgeois government as a ‘lesser evil’. When Adolf Hitler assumed the post of chancellor on 30 January 1933, the Weimar Republic was still in a deep sleep. Hitler’s reprisals and ban on the SPD, the leading party of the Labour and Socialist International, reinforced fears stirring in the socialist camp of the fascist peril. In light of the disagreement as to the measures that the working class should instigate in the case of war, the LSI convened an international socialist congress in Paris from 21–5 August 1933. Bauer, one of the leading speakers, pointed out that the Nazis’ seizure of power by constitutional means had shattered the masses’ faith in the bourgeois democratic system. In his resolution entitled ‘Strategy and Tactics of the International Workers’ Movement’, he recommended that the Social-Democratic parties employ different methods of struggle against reaction depending on the conditions in each respective country.\[29\] In fascist countries, the working class should organise revolutionary uprisings to bring down the regimes and introduce socialist democracy. In bourgeois democratic countries, it should preserve the existing democratic liberties by expanding political democracy. The adoption of the resolution by congress testifies to how intently Social-Democratic leaders believed that mere formal measures could stop the bourgeois counter-revolution. Bauer soon

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29 It was adopted with 291 to 18 votes. Five members abstained. This document would become the basic LSI programme for the struggle against fascism.
became aware that this was a gross misapprehension. Two months later, at the last SDAP congress in October 1933, he admitted:

Today, we certainly do not have the time, leisure, or maturity to discuss which path socialism will take to prevail in the world. Today at this congress, we are facing the far more urgent and pressing task of elaborating the ways in which we can defend ourselves against the immediate fascist threat in Austria ... Then we have to go into battle, but with full awareness of what this battle means. Then we need to know ... that there can be no other decision than to win or perish and disappear for a long time.30

our translation

Despite this solid assessment of the threat posed by fascism, the party leadership, with Bauer at its helm, continued to pursue a conciliatory pact with the Dollfuss government. As late as 1933, Bauer inaccurately assumed that the bourgeoisie would join forces with the working class in order to defend bourgeois democracy against fascisation.

The defeat of the workers’ uprising in February 1934, the dissolution of the Communist Party of Austria and SDAP, and the newly established corporative state in Austria were the central justifications as to why Bauer assumed a similar approach to the LSI left, which had been calling for a united front of Communists and Social Democrats against fascism since the Paris congress.31

In the summer of 1935, Bauer, Jean Żyromski and Teodor Dan worked out the so-called war theses, which were published in the form of a pamphlet, Die Internationale und der Krieg (The International and the War). The text contained both short-term and long-term tasks for the LSI and working class in the struggle against fascism.32 Furthermore, it contained an assessment of

30 ‘Heute haben wir sicher nicht die Zeit, nicht die Muße und nicht die Reife, zu diskutieren, auf welchem Weg sich der Sozialismus in der Welt durchsetzen wird. Heute stehen wir auf dem Parteitag vor der ungleich unmittelbareren und dringlichere Aufgabe, zu erörtern, in welcher Weise wir uns der unmittelbar drohenden faschistischen Gefahr in Österreich erwehren können ... Dann in den Kampf gehen, aber mit der Erkenntnis, was dieser Kampf bedeutet. Dann muß man wissen ... dass es keine andere Entscheidung gibt, als zu siegen oder unterzugehen und für lange Zeit zu verschwinden’ – Bauer 1976k, p. 701 and p. 723.

31 This position was advocated by the representative of the Italian Socialist Party, Petro Nenni, the members of the French Section of the Workers’ International, Marceau Pivert and Jean Żyromski, and the delegate from the Belgian Workers’ Party, Paul Spaak, among others.

32 Compare Löw 1980, p. 219.
the political situation and a prognosis as to how this situation would affect the international workers’ movement. While in 1935 many Social Democrats had their doubts as to whether the course of history would flow as such, the manifesto’s authors firmly believed war between Germany and the USSR was inevitable, and that Germany’s potential victory in this conflict would be synonymous with the subjugation of the whole of Europe to the brutality of fascism. The manifesto insisted upon the following political efforts for the proletariat during the war: (1) the destruction of German fascism by an anti-Hitler coalition comprised of the allied nations and the Soviet Union; (2) support for the Soviet Union in its endeavour to defeat the capitalist social order; (3) taking advantage of the war in order to seize power and commence building socialism, particularly since transfiguring the war in Germany into a proletarian revolution would be a prerequisite for a successful revolution across Europe.33 The manifesto’s originators regarded the following as short-term tasks for the LSI: (1) support for capitalist governments in creating a system of collective security; (2) support for armament policies; (3) defending all countries threatened by Hitler’s aggression while simultaneously warning the working class of their respective governments’ imperialist policies; (4) urging neutral countries to place sanctions on Germany. Of particular interest for Bauer and his collaborators were the war doctrines of the Soviet Union. Considering a USSR victory as a factor that could revolutionise conditions in Western Europe, they incited the whole working class to stand in solidarity with the Soviet Union in case of German aggression. What is more, they appealed to anti-Bolshevik oppositional forces in Russia to join in defending the fatherland, while expecting the Soviet government to release the opposition in order to strengthen the country’s anti-fascist potential. Without a doubt, Bauer was one of the key figures to inspire these demands. After all, he had idealised the process of building socialism in Russia for a long time.

Beside the nonsensical demand pointed out by Hanisch, it is impossible not to notice the three great illusions on which Bauer’s theses were based. The three authors of the 1935 anti-war manifesto failed to recognise the connection between the war objectives of the Soviet Union and its imperialist ambitions, underestimated the enormous impact of the realities created by Nazism on the German working class, and therefore erroneously anticipated the outbreak of

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33 Commenting on the latter of Bauer’s aims, Hanisch writes: ‘One must try to imagine this: in the midst of World War II, the “popular masses” are supposed to unleash a proletarian revolution in France and Britain against their own governments – i.e. start a civil war before defeating fascism. In light of the experience of World War II, a downright crazy idea’ (our translation) – Hanisch 2011, p. 347.
proletarian revolution in Germany. Ultimately, they believed that the divide in the international workers’ movement could be overcome despite existing differences. Their position was not met with approval within the LSI. Friedrich Adler, who was the LSI secretary at the time, rejected the war theses, as he did not consider the LSI ready for a unified statement on the imminent war. Léon Blum and the ‘Neu Beginnen’ group likewise criticised the theses. Bauer directly responded to this in his December 1935 article in Der Kampf and in the book Zwischen zwei Weltkriegen, where he outlined three distinct working-class attitudes towards war: (1) patriotism, which aims to keep the peace and involves the subordination of the proletariat to the government (Germany and Austria during World War I); (2) revolutionary deviationism, which aims to transform the war into a socialist revolution under any socio-political circumstances, even the defeat of one’s country (the Zimmerwald left); and (3) defending the fatherland and attempting to use the masses’ readiness for war in order to seize political power (the left wing of the LSI).34 Bauer identified the following main reasons for war: in the foreground, the interests of American, British, French and Japanese imperialism in Africa, the Middle East, Far East and China; national conflict involving minorities that result for the new division of Europe after World War I to a secondary degree; and lastly, the economic crisis as the reason for the victory of fascism in Germany and Italy. Bauer was convinced that the capitalist countries’ war objectives were directed firmly against the socialist countries – i.e. the Soviet Union and China – irrespective of any signed agreements, such as that between the Soviet Union and France. In addition, he believed that the coming war would be a conflict between two different socio-political systems. Therefore, he maintained that it would be necessary for the Social Democrats to co-operate with the Communists if war were declared, and called on the French, British and Russian proletariat to unite. However, due to mutual feelings of disregard, the LSI had no interest whatsoever in forming a united front with the Comintern. True, it passed a resolution upon Bauer’s request (17 November 1935) that granted every affiliated party the right to co-operate with the Communists – but even so, co-operation did not materialise due to insurmountable mutual prejudice. Likewise, Bauer’s attempts to entice the Social Democrats into supporting the popular front in Spain (February 1937) and allowing the Russian trade unions to affiliate to the International Trade Union Confederation remained fruitless. Disappointed with the stance of the LSI, Bauer accurately observed at the end of his life that the isolation of the Soviet Union significantly weakened the international proletariat in the

34 Compare Löw, p. 219.
struggle against fascism. We will address this question in more detail when discussing fascism in the following chapter. For now, let us conclude with a brief statement: concrete analyses, assessments or conclusions were not what made Bauer's stance on war valuable against the backdrop of European Social Democracy. The crucial element was his critical attitude toward the illusions of the international workers' movement: its misapprehension of the workers' organisations' willingness to engage in anti-war activities, and its misguided belief in the efficacy of their actions.