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| Bernstein, Eduard (January 6, 1850, Schöneberg – December 18, 1932, Berlin) |
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| Eduard Bernstein was a prominent politician in the German Social Democratic Party (SPD), at the time the largest workers’ party in Europe. With August Bebel and Karl Kautsky, he wrote the SPD’s official platform, the *Erfurt Program* (1891), and also edited the SPD’s central organ, *Vorwärts.* However, he spent many years exiled in London: ties to the Fabian Society tinged his views with English practicality and moderation. Against the Marx-Engels party orthodoxy, which awaited the logical implosion of capitalism, Bernstein suggested in *The Prerequisites for Socialism and the Tasks of Social Democracy* (1899) that gradual changes, peacefully enacted within the existing order, are more likely to bring about social justice. He critiqued the theory of surplus value and argued for protectionism where Marx had favoured free trade as catalyst for the catastrophe. His is an evolutionary socialism, commending in all matters strategic compromise and piecemeal reforms. This rightist deviation from the party line was labelled ‘revisionism’ and sparked a vigorous debate. Bernstein was vilified. Before World War I, reformism nonetheless dented the standard doctrine of the SPD (embodied by Kautsky) at the same time as radicals (including Karl Liebknecht, Rosa Luxemburg, and Lenin) were challenging it from the left, preparing a revolution proper. |
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