Communism, Social Democracy and the Democracy Gap

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In the twentieth century debates about Social Democracy have been framed by the question of transforming or reforming capitalism. This has been the case both for the political and the academic debate. Politicians on the left have been arguing over this question and academics, most of them left of centre, have been debating the merits of various transformatory and reforming strategies. That this should have been the case is largely due to the victory of the Bolsheviks in the Soviet Union in 1917 and the subsequent creation of strong Communist parties and eventually Communist regimes in many parts of the world. Lenin's 21 points split Social Democratic parties in most European countries and the subsequent dichotomy of Social Democratic and Communist parties became a defining characteristic of the short 20th century.[1] Of course, not all Social Democratic Parties called themselves Social Democratic. But the French Socialists, the British Labour Party and the German Social Democrats all subscribed to a recognisable set of ideas which made them join the Labour and Socialist International and which set them apart from the Communist Third International. Important differences of degree were sometimes reflected in the names that these working-class parties gave to themselves, but in the greater order of things they can all be classified as Social Democrat, not the least in that they came to form the main opposition to the Communist Parties within the spectrum of the left.

This dichotomy of Communism and Social Democracy came to dominate the terms of the debate about the left in the twentieth century.[2] Communists and Communist historiography accused the Social Democrats of betraying working-class interests by abandoning the ultimate goal of transforming capitalism. Social Democrats and Social Democrat historiography in turn sought to justify alternative ways of imagining a society which combined state intervention and markets in order to achieve a more centralised distribution of resources and provision of life chances. Both Communists and Social Democrats were predominantly concerned with the delivery of more social equality from the top downwards. Both were arguing about the best means of achieving that goal. Consequently much of the twentieth-century debate between Communism and Social Democracy was about social and economic systems - a kind of hostile dialogue about which economic order would benefit the greatest number of people in human society.[3]

Capitalism determined the discursive patterning of the debate. Other issues had to take a back seat. Arguably democracy was one of the issues which the left neglected to discuss thoroughly. In 1919 Sidney Webb argued that 'socialists have contributed so far very little to the theory or practice of democracy.'[4] 76 years later, Will Hutton could still write: 'Democracy or reforming the structure of the state never ranked high on the socialist

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[1] Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes. The Short Twentieth Century 1914-1991* (London 1994).

[2] Geoff Eley, 'Reviewing the Socialist Tradition', in: Christiane Lemke and Gary Marks (eds), *The Crisis of Socialism in Europe* (Durham 1992), pp. 21-60.

[3] For masterly comparative surveys of the European left in the 20th century see Donald Sassoon, *One Hundred Years of Socialism: The West European Left in the Twentieth Century* (London 1996), and Stefano Bartolini, *The Political Mobilisation of the European Left 1860-1980. The Class Cleavage* (Cambrige 2000).

[4] Sidney Webb, 'A Stratified Democracy', supplement to the *New Commonwealth*, 28 Nov. 1919, p. 2.

wish list.'[5] A thorough comparative analysis of the engagement of Communist and Social Democrat parties with the concept and theory of democracy would undoubtedly reveal important differences between different parties, but it is my contention here that everywhere debates about democracy had to follow the framework set by the debates on capitalism. Even the lapsed Communist Arthur Rosenberg, who famously attempted to write the history of 150 years of socialism under the analytical framework of 'Socialism and Democracy' could not escape this discursive patterning. Rosenberg distinguished between socialist democracy and various forms of bourgeois democracies. A socialist democracy was defined by its ultimate desire to abolish capitalism and introduce the self-government of the masses. By contrast, Social Democracy, for Rosenberg, was one of the four types of bourgeois democracy. While it strove for the political emancipation of the working classes, it did not question the existence of private ownership of the means of production. Hence it was closer to the other three types of bourgeois democracy: imperialist (England), liberal (Switzerland, Norway) and colonial (Canada) democracies.[6] And of course, to name but one more influential example, Max Horkheimer's famous dictum: 'Whoever does not want to talk about capitalism should also be quiet about fascism' (Wer vom Kapitalismus nicht reden will, sollte auch vom Faschismus schweigen.) also reads: Whoever wants to talk about democracy (or any political system, for that matter), also has to talk about capitalism. Not only Marxist historians and politicians started from the assumption that the economic system determined politics; it was a contention shared by many of those bourgeois social historians who employed Max Weber's social theory in the writing of their histories. They too believed that social and economic change determined political change. The rise of poststructuralism and of a new political history in the 1980s and 1990s has criticised such assumptions and instead emphasised the autonomy of political processes and the constructedness of concepts and ideas employed to understand the world. But for much of the twentieth century, Communist and Social Democratic historiographies shared the firm belief in the existence of such links between a primary economic order and a secondary political system.

If capitalism was the lynchpin of the debate, Communists and Social Democrats and their respective historiographies also debated the merits and meanings of 'democracy'. Both ideologies attempted to claim the idea of democracy for themselves. Communists tended to start from Marx's distinction between bourgeois and proletarian democracy.[7] In the French revolution of 1848, Marx argued, the two concepts of democracy had parted company for the very first time. Bourgeois democracy rested on the twin pillars of the individual rights and freedoms and the rule of law. Democracy here was a formal mechanism of interest representation. Proletarian democracy started from the assumption that the formal democratic mechanisms had to be filled with social content. Furthermore, political democracy was in need of being supplemented by the democratisation of power relationships in the economy and in society as a whole. Representative democracy restricted to the political sphere would eventually give way to participatory democracy in as many fields of society as possible. In later years, the council democracy of the Paris Commune was to provide a model for Marx's understanding of a genuine proletarian democracy.[8] For Marx such a participatory democracy would make the state the servant of genuine human needs. In this respect, Marxism proved the mirror opposite of Hegelian state philosophy.

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[5] Will Hutton, *The State We're In* (London 1995), p. 48.

[6] Arthur Rosenberg, *Demokratie und Sozialismus* (Frankfurt am Main 1962; first published in 1938), p. 302 f.

[7] Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, 3rd rev. edn (London 1954).

[8] A. Demirovi, 'Marx und die Aporien der Demokratietheorie', *Das Argument*, vol. 30 (1988), pp. 847-60.

Marx also introduced the term 'dictatorship of the proletariat' which subsequently gave rise to much misunderstanding. Marx did not use the term to suggest the abolition of democratic republicanism. Rather he used it to describe the proletarian democracy of the future. According to Marx, all democracies were based on class rule. The democratic republic was the most advanced political organisation of bourgeois society. It provided the ground on which the class struggle of the proletariat could best succeed. Marx broke decisively with the conspiratorialism of those he deemed utopian socialists. Proletarian democracy would be established after the revolution, and it would not do away with a democratic republic. Only the context and content of that republic would change. However, Marx's championing of a 'dictatorship of the proletariat' lent itself to misconstruction, especially as he never bothered to think through systematically the question of the social organisation of democracy.[9] Lenin's Bolsheviks justified their rejection of liberal democratic rule and representative democracy with reference to the need for a distinct period of a 'dictatorship of the proletariat' in which the old class society would be overcome. The Bolsheviks could do that in the name of vanguardism, i.e. the idea that their party, a small minority of revolutionaries, had the theoretical means and insights to direct the working classes and act in their name and interest. Once the classless society was created and a harmony of interests existed, several political parties were unnecessary, as no antagonistic interests needed representation. Real democracy now consisted in the vigorous defence of the interests of the workers and farmers by the Communist Party. Political discussion and debate took place only in the leading institutions of that party. The democratic rights of the people, as enshrined for example in Stalin's constitution of 1936, were a mere sham.[10] The gap between the official Communist discourse of democracy and the reality of harsh suppression of ideas which did not find favour with the leaders of the Communist Party was increasingly obvious to all those who wanted to see.

Social Democrats were keen to point out the absence of basic democratic rights under Communism and in fact often argued that the dictatorial nature of Communism brought it close to fascism. Both regimes were different sides of a coin named totalitarianism. Social Democrats were keen to present themselves as heirs to the nineteenth-century democrats who had fought hard to overcome the legacy of liberalism. Education and property should no longer define citizenship. Electoral reform became the watchword of Social Democrats across Europe, as they sought to provide access of the greatest number of people to the political sphere. Also taking their cue from the Marxist debates about class formation, they firmly believed that the working classes would ultimately form the vast majority of the overall population. It was the task of the Social Democrats to educate these workers and thereby contribute to the development of class consciousness. This process of education by what clearly was also a vanguard could best be done by a highly centralised and bureaucratised national party. Class-conscious workers would then vote for this party which in turn would allow it to capture the state. Capturing the state was perceived as the precondition for establishing a different economic and social system and, increasingly, for reforming capitalism. The widespread belief among West European Social Democrats that the capture of state power through the ballot box would inevitably lead to socialism contributed to the endorsement of an uncritical statism among the stalwarts of Second International socialism. Socialism would begin as soon as the Social Democratic representatives of the working class had captured the state

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[9] Uwe-Jens Heuer, 'Demokratie/Diktatur des Proletariats', in: Wolfgang Fritz Haug (ed.), *Historisch-Kritisches Wörterbuch des Marxismus* (Berlin 1995), vol. 2, pp. 534-551.

[10] Iring Fetscher, *Von Marx zur Sowjetideologie. Darstellung, Kritik und Dokumentation des sowjetischen, jugoslawischen und chinesischen Marxismus* (Frankfurt am Main 1977), pp. 132-38.

apparatus. Kautskyanism, Bernsteinan revisionism, Fabianism and most variants of continental Marxist thought were united in this belief in statism.

Democracy was thus primarily a means to an end. As the Eisenach programme of the German SDAP put it in 1869, '… political freedom is the most indispensable precondition for the economic emancipation of the working classes. Hence the social question is indivisible from the political question. The solution to the former is conditional on the solution of the latter, and possible only in the democratic state.'[11] Political democracy was the means to achieve social equality. When Eduard Bernstein begged to differ and argued that 'in the last instance, for me, socialism means democracy, self-administration',[12] many in his own party declined to follow him. With Kautsky they continued to believe that the existing class society made any true democracy impossible. Yet democratic institutions in the class state facilitated class conflict and thus heightened class consciousness. They paved the way to the proletarian revolution which, in democratic states such as Britain and Germany post-1918, would eventually come about by peaceful means, i.e. through the ballot box. Hence it is not surprising that Kautsky's 'democratic Marxism'[13] was opposed to transferring the Bolshevik experiment to Western Europe. Given that Kautsky nowhere specifically analysed the exact nature of the democratic transition from capitalism to socialism, his idea of democracy remained largely focussed on parliamentary representation and the championing of the rights of the individual. It is generally noticeable that late nineteenth-century Marxist Social Democracies paid little attention to minutiae of democracy and democratisation. After all, practically all of them (to varying degrees) struggled rather with the absence of democratic structures. Hence they sought to bring democratic institutions about rather than marvel about the intricate problems of democratic systems.[14]

Nevertheless, one could argue that Kautsky, Bernstein's main adversary in the revisionism debate, rather ironically was as committed to liberal democratic thought as his ideological enemy. Both adhered to the belief that political democracy was the normative precondition for the development of a socialist society. Bernstein and Kautsky both championed the concept of representative democracy over that of direct democracy.[15] In that respect they were following Kant and Mill rather than Rousseau, and both were influenced by the rights-based political language of British constitutional theory. Yet Bernstein undoubtedly paid greater attention to the intricate problems of democratisation and linked democracy more firmly to socialism than most other contemporary Marxists including Kautsky.

The European-wide debate on revisionism revealed the strong commitment of Social Democratic leaders in other Marxist parties to representative forms of democracy. MacDonald saw in Bernstein, who was a close personal friend, an intellectual mentor.[16] Jean Jaurès, like Bernstein, was convinced that republicanism and democracy were eternally progressing to all fields of society. And he called on his fellow Social Democrats

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[11] Dieter Dowe (ed.), *Programmatische Dokumente der deutschen Sozialdemokratie* (Berlin 1984, 2nd edn), p. 174.

[12] Cited in Manfred B. Steger, *The Quest for Evolutionary Socialism: Eduard Bernstein and Social Democracy* (Cambridge 1997), p. 140.

[13] Dick Geary, *Karl Kautsky* (Manchester 1987), p. 78.

[14] Anton Pelinka, *Social Democratic Parties in Europe* (New York 1983), p. 14.

[15] Kautsky was instrumental in defeating the German socialist apostle of direct democracy, Moritz Rittinghausen, whom he attacked vigorously after 1893. For Rittinghausen's ideas on direct democracy see Moritz Rittinghausen, *Die direkte Gesetzgebung durch das Volk*, 4th edn (Cologne 1877). For Kautsky's rejection of Rittinghausen see Karl Kautsky, *Der Parlamentarismus, die Volksgesetzgebung und die Sozialdemokratie* (Stuttgart 1893).

[16] David Marquand, *Ramsay MacDonald* (London 1977), pp. 56 f., 164.

to engage constructively in the political process, to build alliances with other parties and other classes so as to further the aims of Social Democracy in specific policy areas.[17] The Swedish SAP had, of course, its own version of Bernstein in the figure of Hjalmar Branting, who, unlike Bernstein, was almost undisputed leader of his party from its inception to 1925. Antonio Labriola, the 'father of Italian Marxism', argued in favour of a step-by-step introduction of social reform which would extend the democratic idea and build on existing democratic institutions.[18]

In the Weimar Republic the young German democracy had no firmer champion than Social Democracy. The 1921 Görlitz programme pledged allegiance to the 'democratic republic'. Rudolf Hilferding's theory of 'organised capitalism' perceived democracy as the specific state form of the working class. Like his mentor Kautsky, Hilferding upheld the notion that democracy was the basic precondition for the socialist transformation of society.[19] Social Democratic constitutional theorists such as Gustav Radbruch and Hermann Heller contributed signficantly to the theory of democracy in the 1920s.[20] They insisted on the centrality of the rule of law in protecting all citizens from the encroachment of the state onto the territory of their individual rights. In the inter-war years both the Soviet Union and a variety of fascist regimes served as powerful reminders of the importance of the constitutional democratic state for the Social Democratic project. In his autobiography, looking back onto his experience as justice minister in the Weimar Republic, Radbruch was disappointed that he and his likes were unable to commit Social Democrats even more firmly to the democratic state: 'The masses had to be told firmly that democracy realises one half of the Social Democratic programme and that it had to be the primary consideration to stabilise what had been won.'[21]

Elsewhere, it had been easier to commit Social Democracy to championing the liberal democratic state. During the Giolittian period before the First World War, the parliamentary party of the PSI was firmly committed to the parliamentary road to socialism.[22] In Spain the PSOE put all its energy into achieving a liberal democratic state after forging an alliance with the Republicans in 1910, and subsequently important leaders of the party, such as Indalecio Prieto, rallied to the modernisation and regeneration of Spain under liberal democratic (but capitalist) conditions.[23] The British Labour Party after 1918 followed the teachings of MacDonald and the Webbs. Its MPs were totally committed to the parliamentary road to socialism.[24] The Swedish SAP moved from a self-declared working-class party to a people's party already in the 1920s – using Per Albin Hanson's notion of the people's home (*folkhemmet*) as crucial ideological tool.[25] The Dutch Social Democratic Party dropped its commitment to Marxism in 1937. Instead of endorsing the class struggle, the SDAP cited social reform and the preservation of

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[17] On Jaurès see Leszek Kołakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism. Its Rise, Growth and Dissolution* (Oxford 1978), vol. 2, pp. 129 ff.

[18] Luigi Dal Pane, *Antonio Labriola nella Politica e nella Cultura Italiana* (Torino 1975).

[19] F. Peter Wagner, *Rudolf Hilferding: Theory and Politics of Democratic Socialism* (Atlantic Highlands 1996).

[20] Hermann Heller, 'Staat, Nation und Sozialdemokratie' (1925), in: idem, *Gesammelte Schriften* (Leiden 1971), pp. 527-42.

[21] Gustav Radbruch, *Der innere Weg. Aufriß meines Lebens*, 2nd rev. edn (Göttingen 1961), p. 131.

[22] Toby Abse, 'Italy' in: Stefan Berger and David Broughton (eds), *The Force of Labour* (Oxford 1995), p.145 f.

[23] Angel Smith, 'Spaniards, Catalans and Basques: Labour and the Challenge of Nationalism in Spain', in: Stefan Berger and Angel Smith (eds), *Nationalism, Labour and Ethnicity, c. 1870-1939* (Manchester 1999), p.74 f.

[24] Ralph Miliband, *Parliamentary Socialism* (London 1961).

[25] Sheri Berman, *The Social Democratic Moment. Ideas and Politics in the Making of Inter-War Europe* (Cambridge/Mass. 1998), chapter 7.

democracy as the party's most important aims.[26] But also in countries well-known for their more illiberal traditions, Social Democrats often held up the values of liberal democracy. In July 1933 Otto Bauer called on fellow Austrian socialists not to lose sight of the fact that the establishment of a dictatorship of the proletariat was out of the question amidst rising fascist dictatorships. Instead, he argued: 'the decision will be made today not between democracy and the dictatorship of the proletariat, but between democracy and the dictatorship of fascism.'[27] Especially in the inter-war period a range of unstable democracies re-enforced the general concern of Social Democrats with class and the class struggle rather than with democracy per se. A relentless class struggle from above seemed to destroy bourgeois democracy in many of the newly founded democratic regimes of central and eastern Europe. Could bourgeois democracy therefore ever deliver socialism? Many Social Democrats continued to cling to this belief, although significant minorities within Social Democratic parties begged to differ. Ultimately the united and popular fronts of the 1930s were all based on the lowest common denominator: a defence of democracy against the advancing forces of fascism.

In the more stable conditions under the post-1945 Pax Americana in Western Europe Social Democratic notions of democracy became limited to parliamentary representation, the rule of law and the championing of the rights of the individual. In particular the Swedish road to socialism now became a model for many Social Democrats in Western Europe. The Swedish Socialist Workers' Party (SAP) was arguably the first and the most successful Social Democratic Party in accepting and practising pluralist democratic power politics in the early 1930s. They had forged an important alliance with the Agrarian Party (representing largely agricultural interests) and, while in government, began to experiment with Keynesian anti-cyclical economic policies. Within the framework of the liberal constitutional order and the democratic state, Swedish Social Democrats set out to manage capitalism more effectively and produce a 'capitalism with a human face'. The SAP was convinced that democracy and cross-class alliances were the key to a socialist society of the future. Its leading theoreticians, such as Hjalmar Branting, Ernst Wigforss and Per Edvin Sköld were also its leading politicians, and they shared a fundamental belief in the liberal democratic state's ability to deliver socialism.

If the Communist notion of democracy was the thinnest of fig leaves for dictatorship, the Social Democratic notion of democracy became increasingly narrowed down to liberal versions of representative democracy. What increasingly moved out of sight between the dominant Communist and Social Democrat historiographies were notions of democracy that had been present among groups of socialists who did neither fit the Communist nor the Social Democrat paradigm. To start off with, there is the history of the early labour movement which preceded the setting up of 'proper' Social Democratic parties. This history is all too often treated as a mere pre-history in the Communist and Social Democrat narratives. Yet theirs is often a different history from that of the later mass socialist parties. In Britain, for example, the radical working-class Chartist organisations of the 1830s and 1840s formulated aspirations for a more democratic polity which were taken up by some socialist groups in the closing decades of the nineteenth century but became marginal within the mainstream Labour Party after 1906.[28] In

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[26] Dietrich Orlow, Common Destiny. *A Comparative History of the Dutch, French and German Social Democratic Parties, 1945-1969* (Oxford 2000), p. 21.

[27] Otto Bauer, 'Um die Demokratie', *Der Kampf*, vol. 26 (July 1933), 270. Cited in: Gerd-Rainer Horn, *European Socialists Respond to Fascism. Ideology, Activism and Contingency in the 1930s* (Oxford 1996), p. 22.

[28] Logie Barrow and Ian Bullock, *Democratic Ideas and the British Labour Movement, 1880-1914* (Cambridge 1996).

Germany Thomas Welskopp has only recently restored the early history of Social Democracy to a history in its own right. He emphasised throughout that early Social Democracy was part and parcel of a democratic and national-revolutionary people's movement. The commitment of its members to intra-organisational democracy with agreed written procedures and elected committees was second to none. In their associational culture they practised an active citizenship and saw such active citizenship as the key to self-fulfilment.[29] Similarly, Maurice Agulhon has shown for the early French labour movement how workers in their associations, clubs and societies shaped their own public sphere and articulated a wide array of social, political and cultural concerns.[30] The early labour movement in Europe, sections of which stood condemned by no lesser gods than Marx and Engels as utopian socialists, did develop ideas about communitarianism, co-operation and self-management which have been largely ignored by Social Democratic histories. They also often preached and practised the liberation of women and a radical gender politics which would often not be matched by the left until the late twentieth century.[31]

Some of these early nineteenth century traditions survived and were further developed by the anarcho-syndicalist traditions of direct industrial action and workers' self-organisation. Paradoxically, some anarchist circles at the same time continued to practice strict conspiratorialism which was built on authoritarian rule and tended to disregard democratic procedure in every respect. Others championed the broadest measure of participatory democracy in local small-case communities of sovereign individuals who would at best co-operate in voluntary larger federations, ideally without developing intricate forms of representations. Overall, the anarcho-syndicalist mistrust and rejection of all centralist organisations and institutions, including political parties, parliaments, church and state stood in marked contrast to both the Social Democrat and Communist traditions.[32] In the revolutionary period between 1917 and 1923 council republics were the aim of a number of socialist revolutionaries in central and eastern Europe. They were informed by notions of a more radical and more direct democracy which often went hand in hand with demands for greater control over MPs, championing of plebiscites and referenda as well as suggestions for the rotation principle in leadership which would prevent the kind of hero-worshipping which was so prominent in Social Democratic and Communist organisations. After the First World War, left socialists formed a distinct group between Communists and Social Democrats. A number of parties joined neither the Third International nor the Labour and Socialist International, but, in 1921, set up the International Workers' Union of Socialist Parties, also known as 'Vienna Union'. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s a string of independent socialists defied the stark dichotomies between Communist dogmatism and Social Democratic reformism. Often it is among this group that we find the most interesting ideas concerning democracy. Democracy was not just seen as a political process but a mechanism of decision-making and balancing out conflicting interests which needed implementing at all levels of society. The key question was not about political power but about social power. Democratic processes needed to be adopted in all power relationships - in the family, at the workplace, in neighbourhood groups and even in the army. Ideas about industrial democracy, workers'

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[29] Thomas Welskopp, *Das Banner der Brüderlichkeit. Die deutsche Sozialdemokratie vom Vormärz bis zum Sozialistengesetz* (Bonn 2000).

[30] Maurice Agulhon, *The Republic of the Village: The People of the Var from the French Revolution to the Second Republic* (Cambridge 1982).

[31] Pamela Pilbeam, *French Socialists Before Marx. Workers, Women and the Social Question in France* (Teddington 2000), especially chapter 6 on 'the "new" woman'.

[32] Marcel van der Linden and Wayne Thorpe (eds), *Revolutionary Syndicalism: An International Perspective* (Amsterdam 1989); David Goodway (ed.), *Anarchism: History, Theory and Practice* (London 1989).

control, socialisation and workers' self-management were particularly prominent among left-wing socialists who refused to commit themselves either to the reformism of Social Democracy or the undemocratic antics of the Communists.

Particular emphasis was often put on the democratisation of the economic sphere. Calls for economic democracy became popular in the inter-war period and were adopted even by many Social Democratic parties in the inter-war period. In Germany, the idea was developed by Fritz Naphtali, the head of the ADGB's Research Institute for Economic Affairs between 1925 and 1928. The democratisation of the economic sphere was to be achieved through extending the powers of works councils and establishing institutions for economic self-administration in which unions would be represented on equal terms with the employers. While the first steps towards 'economic democracy' could already be achieved under capitalism (essentially through state intervention in central processes of economic decision-making), full 'economic democracy', Naphtali insisted, would only be possible in a socialist economy. Hence the transformation of capitalism and the abolition of the private ownership of the means of production remained the long-term aim of the ADGB.[33] The Dutch SDAP also demanded a significant improvement in worker participation in management at the end of the First World War.[34] Whitley councils in Britain after 1918 as well as the Mond-Turner talks in the late 1920s signalled an interest in economic democracy among sections of the British labour movement as did the more theoretical contributions of Webb, Cole and Harold Laski.[35] In France, Jaurès had already argued that the political democracy of the republic had to be extended to the whole of the country's economic life.[36]

Yet, despite the popularity of demands for economic democracy even among mainstream Social Democrats, it is among groups of left-wing Social Democrats, independent socialists, guild socialists, anarcho-syndicalists and unorthodox Communists that we find most concern for the fostering of a democratic civil society in the inter-war period. Statism of the Communist or Social Democratic variant, they argued, neglected the problem of social power and did not actively seek to empower working people in their everyday lives. People had to practice democracy on a daily basis rather than delegate responsibility for decision-making to elected representatives or a party vanguard. They had to be encouraged to take control of their lives in a more direct way. Localised direct democracies in which the people could realise democracy in all spheres of life were to be preferred to the deadening weight of heavily bureaucratised parties, trade unions and states. Rosa Luxemburg's opposition to Leninism was rooted, above all, in different ideas about the democratic organisation of society.

In the post-Second World War period many of these concerns surfaced again with the post-1956 emergence of the first New Left, with the advances of the student movement in the 1960s, with second-wave feminism, with the growth of green/ecological movements in the 1970s and with the revival of notions of active citizenship in communitarian thought in the 1980s and 1990s. 1956 brought various attempts in Eastern Europe to democratise the Stalinised people's democracies. Reforms went furthest in Poland and Hungary and included economic, cultural and political liberalisation as well as experiments with grassroots democracy which eventually resulted in the declaration of a multi-party state in

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[33] John Moses, 'The Concept of Economic Democracy within the German Socialist Trade Unions during the Weimar Republic', *Labor History* 34 (1978), pp. 45-57.

[34] Lex Heerma van Voss, 'The Netherlands', in: Berger and Broughton (eds), *Force*, p. 50.

[35] Jutta Rabenschlag-Kräußlich, *Parität statt Klassenkampf? Zur Organisation des Arbeitsmarkts und Domestizierung des Arbeitskampfs in Deutschland und England 1900-1918* (Frankfurt am Main 1983); Michael Dintenfass, 'The Politics of Producers' Co-operation: the FBI-TUC-NCEO Talks 1929-1933', in: John Turner (ed.), *Businessmen and Politics: Studies of Business Activity in British Politics, 1900-1945* (London 1984).

[36] Kołakowski, Currents, vol. 2, p. 130.

Hungary on 30 October and the withdrawal of Hungary from the Warsaw Pact on 1 November 1956. In Western Europe, the invasion of Hungary by Warsaw pact troops on 4 November 1956 and the swift restoration of a dogmatic Communist regime at long last loosened the bonds of large sections of the intellectual left to the Soviet Union and the Communist project in Eastern Europe. The critique of Stalinism in the West went together with a continuing commitment to anti-capitalism which made left intellectuals explore alternative routes to overcoming the capitalist systems of the West. E.P. Thompson's concerns with the morality (rather than the economics) of capitalism and his emphasis on the lived experience of workers under capitalism were a direct reaction to his rethinking of Communism in the wake of 1956. His concern for the agency of working people was also a concern with the ways in which people organised their everyday lives.[37]

In the 1960s the students were enamoured by Max Horkheimer's attacks on 'integral statism' (*integraler Etatismus)*, a concept first put forward in Horkheimer's Californian exile in 1942. He argued that the 'authoritarian state', whether of the capitalist or communist variant, had perfected its power mechanisms to such a degree that it could function without reference to open terror. In capitalist states, Social Democratic parties and trade unions had become part and parcel of the authoritarian state. These former interest organisations of workers had reduced notions of progress to the advancement of state capitalism. The real enemy of Horkheimer's forceful essay was bureaucracy and the bureaucratic state. The aim was to create spaces for individuals to make decisions about their lives which are not predetermined by overpowerful and centralised bureaucracies.[38] The significance of 1968 for the left in Europe lay in its championing of anti-authoritarianism and its formulation of a new democratic politics of the everyday which declared proudly that the personal was the political. It highlighted the agency that people had over their lives and contrasted such practices of self-actualisation with the alienation produced by passive consumerism.[39] At the universities students experimented with new democratic forms of teaching and learning. In the wake of the student rebellion of the 1960s we also witness the birth of a strong feminist movement. One of its key concerns was the liberation of women who arguably suffered most from the authoritarian regulation of gender relations. Women's liberation movements sprang up across Western Europe and, organised in small localised groups committed to democratic procedure, co-ordinated imaginative campaigns for the legalisation of abortion and against a wide array of discriminatory and degrading practices directed against women. Giving women the rights over their own bodies (reproductive rights) as well as access to jobs, equal pay and generally access to social and political power, these were among the most important demands made by feminists, and all of them were closely related to questions of democracy.[40]

The Green movement picked up the criticisms of Communist and Social Democratic notions of progress that had been voiced by left-wing dissenters in the 1950s and 1960s. Quality of life, they argued, could not be measured simply in terms of maximising economic growth levels and rising consumption levels. Such progress had led to alienating forms of consumerism and to the ruthless exploitation of nature. It had brought the planet to the brink of global self-destruction. What was urgently needed was a

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[37] See, for example E.P. Thompson, *The Communism of William Morris: A lecture by Edward Thompson given on 4th May 1949 in the Hall of the Art Workers' Guild, London* (London, 1965), p.18.

[38] Max Horkheimer, 'Autoritärer Staat', in: idem, *Gesellschaft im Übergang* (Frankfurt/Main 1981).

[39] Ronald Fraser et al., 1968: *A Student Generation in Revolt* (New York 1988); David Caute, *The Year of the Barricades: A Journey through 1968* (New York 1988).

[40] Monica Threlfall (ed.), *Mapping the Women's Movement: Feminist Politics and Social Transformation in the North* (London 1996).

search for new ways of constructing social communities and collective identities. The Greens cherished the anti-authoritarian counter-culture of 1968 and aimed to support projects which breathed the air of participatory democracy and direct action connected to the student rebellion of the 1960s. As parties they found it difficult to accept strong organisational and bureaucratised structures and preferred more informal and loose organisations which often showed an ingrained hostility against forms of leadership and officialdom. Their rejection of consumerism found expression in a formulation of a specific postmaterialist political agenda which succeeded in making significant inroads into a variety of European electorates in the 1980s and 1990s.[41] A variety of Green thinkers attempted to give often very different answers to the central question of reconfiguring humanity's relationship to the natural environment and of democratising the everyday life of citizens across Europe.[42]

Communitarian thinkers, not unlike Green theorists, also started from the assumption that people need to be freed from the tutelage of large central organisations. The social order envisaged by communitarians often involved small decentralised communities in which individuals know each other and interact with each other on a basis of shared norms and values.[43] Communitarian thinkers have criticised Social Democrats and Communists for being one-sidedly concerned with how to optimise the equal distribution of resources. In doing so, they neglected the central question of involving the people in decision-making processes about such allocations of resources. This is also why the traditional left has been incapable of putting forward a convincing theory of political democracy which puts the active engagement of citizens centre stage. Instead it created a nanny state which produced welfare dependencies and the passive endurance of vast sections of the underprivileged of the increasingly diminishing welfare benefits shared out by an impoverished state struggling with successive economic crises. The necessary reduction of the public sector, communitarians argued, needs to go hand in hand with the encouragement of more active forms of citizenship, where people are enabled to take control over their lives. This is only possible where diverse forms of social exclusion are effectively overcome. New Social Democratic thought, and in particular that of the British Labour Party, has drawn extensively from communitarian thinking on citizenship.[44]

Throughout the 20th century minority traditions within the left have shown a remarkable appreciation of and concern with the problems of the democratic organisations of society, an appreciation that was largely (although never entirely) absent from the Communist and Social Democratic mainstreams. Today, at the beginning of the 21st century, the dichotomies between Communism and Social Democracy which structured the last century have gone. Class has long ceased to be dominant cleavage in European politics. Capitalism is the name of the global economic order, and its adversary in the form of the anti-globalisation movement is a curious mixture of anti-movements which lack both coherence and convincing alternatives.

It is beyond doubt that Communism has been a huge failure: it could not create a viable social and economic system; it often could not even fulfill the basic needs of its populations. More to the point, for the purposes of this essay, Communism failed to develop democratic procedures which would have given it legitimacy among wider

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[41] Gerassimos Moschonas, *In the Name of Social Democracy. The Great Transformation: 1945 to the Present* (London 2002), pp. 154-56.

[42] Alan Scott, *Ideology and the New Social Movements* (London 1990).

[43] Michael Taylor, *Community, Anarchy and Liberty* (Cambridge 1982); Amitai Etzioni, *The New Golden Rule: Community and Morality in a Democratic Society* (New York 1997).

[44] Andrew Gamble and Anthony Wright (eds), *The New Social Democracy* (Oxford 1999); Lothar Funk (ed.), *The Economics and Politics of the Third Way* (Hamburg 1999).

sections of the population. Instead it relied on centralised bureaucracies which stifled innovation and wasted human and natural resources on a grand scale. By comparison Social Democracy has been a remarkable success story. Western Europe changed fundamentally over the course of the 20th century. Social Democratic principles of equality, welfare and state intervention in markets helped to make it a better place for the overwhelming majority of the population. Outrageous inequalities of consumption still exist, but even the poorer section of the population have been given access to resources to a hitherto unprecedented degree. The Social Democratisation of West-European politics came to a crushing halt in the 1980s. Neo-liberalism swept everything before it and portrayed three of the four pillars of the old Social Democratic self-understanding as key evils which had caused the economic crisis of the 1970s: statism, Keynesian economics and the welfare state now all stood condemned. The only pillar which was left largely intact was the commitment of Social Democracy to democracy. Democracy seemed indeed, in the words of Paul Hirst, 'socialism's best reply to the right'.[45] But a statement such as this only brings us full circle and returns us to the question: which democracy?

At the beginning of the 21st century the project of democracy needs rethinking. In the 1990s there was much talk about growing disillusionment of voters with political parties which found expression in lower and lower participation rates in elections. Increasing numbers of citizens withdrew even from the limited sphere in which they had previously been active: the ballot box. Their passivity seemed to threaten the legitimacy of representative democracies. Arguably this development was also related to the one-sidedness of the Social Democratic concern with providing the citizens with adequate resources and protecting them from the vagaries of the market. Such statist policies imposed both rights and duties on passive citizens and produced a state-directive collectivism. Politics and political processes became increasingly removed from the eveyday lives of citizens. They were hardly involved in the systems of institutions meant to ensure protection agains arbitrary rule. If freedom has to be institutionalised, arguably it is institutionalised too much today. Power has been carried out too much on behalf of citizens rather than by them. In fact, an activation and politicisation of citizens was often explicitly avoided, as high levels of politicisation were perceived as dangerous for political stability. Joseph Schumpeter, in his influential exploration of the relationship between capitalism, socialism and democracy of 1942 argued that people tended to act irrationally. They could not be trusted to make rational, or, for that matter, moral choices.[46] A fugitive from European fascism, Schumpeter felt attracted to theories of crowd psychology, and the victory of fascism in many European states in the inter-war period cast a long shadow over democratic theories in the post-war era. To many, like Schumpeter, it seemed best to leave politics to the reasonable democratic elites. The people were asked nothing more than to vote every couple of years.

Arguably the expansion of citizenship rights pushed forward by Social Democracy throughout the twentieth century did not always include the propagation of more active forms of citizenship. In the 1960s and 1970s some on the left had already argued that the representative democracies in the West resembled 'thin democracies'.[47] Today these democracies are in need of addressing the crucial question of how to engender a more active sense of citizenship in its populations. Citizenship has to become less of a status and more of an active practice and experience. Yet citizens have to be made: they need

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[45] Paul Hirst, 'Democracy: Socialism's Best Reply to the Right', in: Barry Hindess (ed.), *Reactions to the Right* (London 1990), p. 161.

[46] Joseph Schumpter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (New York 1942).

[47] Benjamin R. Barber, *Strong Democracy: Participatory Politics for a New Age* (Berkeley 1984); see also Philip Green, *Retrieving Democracy* (London 1985).

resources, especially education, knowledge and experience, and the continued existence of hierarchic and authoritarian structures in society form a distinct hindrance to the possibility of democratic learning.[48]

A variety of often quite diverse contemporary thinkers have at least begun to address this problem of involving more people in decision-making processes,[49] and a transformed Social Democracy is struggling with the task of addressing some of the key issues outlined above.[50] Thus, for example, the concern with democratisation is a central ingredient of Anthony Giddens's 'third way'. In his historical analysis, Giddens comes to the conclusion that 'socialism is closely tied up with ideals of democracy … Reformist socialism … has accepted the importance of democracy for socialist goals … Democracy essentially offers a framework within which socialist parties can peacefully rise to power and implement their programme of change.'[51] Indeed Social Democracy's record, as far as democratisation is concerned, has been considerable. They contributed vitally to a strengthening of parliamentary democracy, not the least through franchise reforms. They fortified a public sphere upholding public freedoms. They championed a civil society which expanded workers' rights. They fought for the legal recognition of trade unions, reinforced civil liberties and built up welfare legislation entrenching social rights. Not a mean record by any stretch of the imagination.

And yet the concern of contemporary analysts, like Giddens, is for the need for a further 'democratisation of democracy'. He calls on the left to go beyond orthodox liberal democracy and experiment with extending democracy to more social spheres. Ultimately, Giddens argues, democratisation may well be the key means to enhance social cohesion in Western societies.[52] Calls for 'democratising democracy' and 'second-wave democratisation' abound in Giddens's 'third way' publications. Decentralisation of political decision making, constitutional reform (devolution), administrative efficiency, less bureaucracy, local direct democracy and more active citizens' involvement describe 'a form of government which it should be the aim of social democrats to promote: the new democratic state.'[53] Giddens was, of course, not the first political philosopher on the left to put democracy centre stage. Margaret Thatcher was just celebrating her third subsequent election victory, when John Keane suggested that the crisis-ridden socialist tradition could be revitalised by reference to democratic theory. His self-declared aim was to show 'how the meaning of socialism can and must be altered radically – into a synonym for the democratisation of civil society and the state.'[54] Equally, albeit with different emphases, Jürgen Habermas has argued at length that socialism needs to be rethought in liberal-democratic terms. His theory of communicative action is still at the basis of how citizens can seek consensus and achieve communal fraternity.[55] But, more recently, Habermas has also stressed the importance of liberal freedoms and bourgeois rights. After all, Habermas maintains, the question of how power is organised is not solved by decisions on who holds

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[48] Adrian Oldfield, 'Citizenship: An Unnatural Practice'?', in: *Political Quarterly* 61 (1990), pp. 177-87.

[49] Edmund Neill, 'British Political Thought in the 1990s', in: Stefan Berger (ed.), Labour and Social History in Great Britain: Historiographical Reviews and Agendas 1990 to the Present, *Mitteilungsblatt des Instituts für soziale Bewegungen* 28 (2002), pp. 167-84.

[50] Herbert Kitschelt, *The Transformation of European Social Democracy* (Cambridge 1994).

[51] Anthony Giddens, *Beyond Left and Right: The Future of Radical Politics* (Cambridge 1994), pp. 59, 62.

[52] Giddens, *Beyond Left*, pp.104-33.

[53] Anthony Giddens, T*he Third Way. The Renewal of Social Democracy* (Cambridge 1998), pp. 70-7, and idem, *The Third Way and its Critics* (Cambridge 2000), pp. 58 ff.

[54] John Keane, Democracy and Civil Society. *On the Predicaments of European Socialism, the Prospects for Democracy and the Problem of Controlling Social and Political Power* (London 1987), p. xiii.

[55] Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, 2 vols (New York 1989); see also Axel Honneth and Hans Joas (eds), *Communicative Action: Essays on Jürgen Habermas's Theory of Communicative Action* (Harvard 1991).

power. Therefore the law becomes the central element in upholding a precarious balance of interests in democratically constituted societies.[56]

In the 21st century the left needs to turn around the order of things. Social Democracy needs to be rebuilt from its democratic foundations. In what arguably amounts to the most spirited defence of the ambitions of the European left and, at the same time, the most trenchant critique of its failures, Geoff Eley has recently argued from a Marxist perspective that, 'by identifying "the Left" not with socialism but with a more capacious and exacting framework of democracy, in all its appropriate social, economic, cultural and personal dimensions, the disabling implications of the crises of socialism during the last third of the twentieth century might be brought under control.'[57] In my view this is fundamentally correct and represents the most fruitful perspective from which to write the history of the left today. Eley, who, in many respects, attempts to rewrite Rosenberg's history of the relationship between democracy and socialism for the 21st century, places much emphasis on democracy's desire to transform capitalism. While this is undoubtedly a legitimate angle to take, from what I have said here today, I would like to argue that it is at the same time a very traditional angle. For eventually, Eley, like so many writers of the left before him, thereby upholds the superiority of the socio-economic over the democratic. Characteristically, throughout the book, he shies away from precise definitions of what he understands by democracy. Problematically, Eley links advances in democracy to a revolutionary perspective: 'the most important gains for democracy have only ever be attained through revolution […].'[58] There are sparks of revolutionary romanticism, when he writes that 'there remains something uniquely inspiring in the spectacle of masses of people in political motion, collectively engaging the future.'[59] Yet in the introduction, where Eley talks about democracy, he almost exclusively talks about liberal understandings of democracy and the rule of law. From a liberal understanding of democracy, the left of course had many allies among European left liberals and Christian Democrats who also sought to extend democracy to broader sections of the population. Characteristically, Eley, at two points actually includes Christian Democracy among his understanding of the left - without, however, even beginning to discuss the bases of Christian Democratic politics in post-war Europe.[60] If Eley is willing to admit at times that Social Democrats have contributed significantly to the advances of democracy in twentieth-century Europe, he tends to be dismissive of their reformism and parliamentarism at other points in the book. Thus, for example, the 'constitutionalisation' of Social Democratic parties in the inter-war period is portrayed one-sidedly as a conservative plot to blunt working-class radicalism.[61] Reformist parties like the British Labour Party 'remained stuck in a parliamentarist groove' in the 1980s',[62] as though parliamentary politics mattered little. At the same time as dismissing what has been crucial to the democratic self-understanding of Social Democrats, Eley shows remarkable sympathies for the Communist project, despite having to admit that the Soviet model had purged socialism of democracy.[63] Creative energies and intellectual potential are time and time again primarily located in Western Communism, Euro-Communism and thereafter in

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[56] Jürgen Habermas, *Faktizität und Geltung. Beiträge zur Diskurstheorie des Rechts und des demokratischen Rechtsstaats* (Frankfurt am Main 1992).
[57] Geoff Eley, *Forging Democracy. The History of the Left in Europe, 1850-2000* (Oxford 2002), p. 503.
[58] Ibid, p. x.
[59] Ibid., p. x.
[60] Ibid, pp. 289, 492.
[61] Ibid, p. 241.
[62] Ibid, p. 464.
[63] Ibid, p. 306.

the new social movements, whereas Social Democracy at best earns the begrudging respect of the author.

Yet, however much one might differ with this particular take on the left, ultimately Eley is right: the history of the left as motor of democratic advances in the 19th and 20th centuries 'needs to be recovered and given its due.'[64] It has to be recovered precisely because the left has always underplayed that aspect of its history as one part in the greater struggle to either tame or overcome capitalism. A thorough discussion of democracy though, in my view, needs to be disentangled from debates about socio-economic systems. Democracy needs to be given true primacy before tired debates of social and economic transformation. The German sociologist, sometime adviser to Chancellor Gerhard Schröder and veteran-68er Oskar Negt has recently argued, ' a public debate about democracy and socialism … would be a first important step towards solving the identity crisis of the left.'[65] Why a first step, I am tempted to ask? Let a discussion of democracy and socialism be the decisive step towards a different identity of the left which at long last puts to rest its one-sided fixation with economics. The left cannot '"exit" from its own history,[66] but it can begin to tell different stories about its past which will influence the way in which it can build the future.

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[64] Ibid, p. 10.

[65] Oskar Negt, *Achtundsechzig. Politische Intellektuelle und die Macht* (Frankfurt/Main 1998), p. 166. See also ibid, pp. 135 ff. for a discussion of 'new forms of democratic participation'.

[66] Moschonas, *In the Name*, p. 329 concludes that 'Social Democracy is ready to "exit" from its own history.'