

# The Many Social Democracies of Interwar Europe: Social Democratic thought in the interwar period

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# Introduction

Social Democracy was the largest social movement in interwar Europe. At its peak, the movement had 6,204,112 official party members, and could count on 26,400,689 votes throughout the continent.<sup>1</sup> Social Democratic ideology, while varying in radicality, was largely millenarian in intent. Social Democracy imagined a society transformed from capitalism to socialism. For such a vast social force in European interwar society, understanding its thought is of vital importance.

Social Democracy found interwar capitalism difficult to conquer. Hyperinflation wrecked its way through Central and Eastern Europe in 1922-24, and the Great Depression came after 1929. By 1934 Fascism claimed Social Democratic movements in Germany and Austria, forcing both into exile. Simultaneously, the British Labour Party split over how to respond to the Depression. France's SFIO governed briefly during the Popular Front period. It also succumbed to these crises fracturing its coalition.<sup>2</sup> The interwar period for Social Democrats, though promising in its early years, proved largely unsuccessful. Capitalism remained, and by the beginning of World War II, Social Democratic parties were in opposition or exile. What is now needed is an account of the intellectual products of Social Democracy.

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<sup>1</sup> These figures were taken from an LSI membership report. See *Fourth Congress of the Labour and Socialist International: Vienna, 25th July to 1st of August, 1931*, (London: Labour Party, 1932), 380.

<sup>2</sup> See Gerd-Rainer Horn, *European Socialists Respond to Fascism: Ideology, Activism and Contingency in the 1930s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); Julian Jackson, *The Popular Front in France: Defending democracy, 1934-38* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

My thesis surveys the ideological contours of Social Democracy in the interwar era. The primary focus of my thesis is political thought and political economy. Through these examinations my thesis reveals that interwar Social Democratic thought was vibrant and innovative. The various crises of interwar Europe both produced and exposed internal contradictions. These contradictions formed through challenges to Social Democratic hegemonic discourses. Pressures from the right and left flanks congealed around their opposition to mainstream thinking, particularly during the Depression. These processes produced intellectual innovation, forging distinct modes of thought.

This thesis pays particular attention to Social Democratic thinkers from Germany, Austria, Britain, and France (particularly in the later parts of the thesis France becomes prominent). There are moments where other parts of Europe are featured, particularly exiled Mensheviks, many of whom settled in Germany after 1917/18.<sup>3</sup> There are instances where Social Democrats from Poland, Belgium, and other parts of Europe play an important role in this narrative. When these locales produced ideas that shaped the wider movement, this thesis turns to them.

The four countries I focus on were important power blocks within the movement. They were centres of political and ideological clout. While Austria is a small country, its influence was significant. Vienna produced some of the movements most influential thinkers in Karl Kautsky, Rudolf Hilferding, Max Adler, Otto Bauer, and Helene Bauer. British socialism quickly expanded in the interwar years. Key people within British Labour, like Arthur Henderson and Thomas Shaw, were vital to the reestablishment of the international movement in the formation of the Labour and

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<sup>3</sup> For more on this see André Liebich, *From the other shore: Russian social democracy after 1921* (London: Harvard University Press, 1997).

Socialist International. British thinkers, for the most part, lacked the Marxism of their continental comrades; they nonetheless thought of themselves as part of the same struggle and intellectual community. The works of Social Democratic thinkers were translated into many languages. Continental thinkers published original pieces in Labour Party periodicals. Likewise, British thinkers saw their works translated into German. Social Democratic parties were also members of an international organisation throughout most of the interwar period in the Labour and Socialist International. Since the LSI was a hub of socialist discourse, its dynamics are vital in understanding Social Democratic politics and ideology. The Social Democracies of Central and Western Europe, alongside Britain, demands a cohesive analysis and narrative. The spirit of these intellectual communities requires restoration. The German socialist sociologist Werner Sombart captured this expansive conception of socialism in 1924.

Does “modern socialism” in the singular really exist...? Or are there only a multitude of mutually incompatible doctrines?...However, those who have been able to penetrate the essence of modern proletarianism sense that all the different manifestations are based on the same substance. Conceding mutual disagreements, some kind of homogeneous spirit unites the thinking of the working class and its leaders: Bebel and Jaures, MacDonald and Lenin, Bernstein and Rosa Luxemburg, Turati and Labriola, Branting and Vandervelde, both Adlers, father and son, and it is the same spirit which distinguishes them sharply from all other thinkers.<sup>4</sup>

Following this line, my thesis follows a broad definition of Social Democracy. It incorporates a person, or party that is socialist in their objective, seeking to overturn or reform capitalist relations empowering the proletariat. Institutional processes would achieve this, but mass mobilisation also had an important place in the radical sections of Social Democracy. Social Democracy became synonymous with

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<sup>4</sup> Werner Sombart, *Der proletarische Sozialismus* (Jena: Gustav Fischer, 1924), i.

institutional reform, particularly in the post-war World War Two period, epitomised by the SPD's 1959 Godesberg Program.<sup>5</sup> Interwar Social Democracy fluctuated between reformism and revolutionary tendencies, and was a key cleavage throughout the period. In any case, Social Democracy is defined by an emphasis on creating a collectivist alternative to capitalism, through various democratic means. Democracy thus plays an important role in Social Democratic discourse. Social Democracy hoped to democratise political economy. The socialisation of economies and democratisation were part of the same struggle.

### Sources

My thesis draws from an amalgam of sources. Social Democratic thinkers produced a rich intellectual literature. They published in a wide array of mediums. Books and pamphlets were key vehicles for discourse, not just internally, but externally too. Chapter 1 cites differing published interpretations of the Russian Revolution by Social Democrats. This sparked counter publications by communists. As I demonstrate in Chapter 2, books became an essential component in interrogating Social Democratic orthodoxy. Henry De Man's *The Psychology of Marxian Socialism* (1921) was a major critique of Marxism, spurring heated debates about Social Democratic political thought and strategy. Theoretical journals like the SPD's *Die Gesellschaft* and the Austrian's *Der Kampf* feature in my research. *Die Gesellschaft* was the successor to the *Die Neue Zeit*. It started in 1924 and Rudolf Hilferding, the party's foremost

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<sup>5</sup> Sheri Berman, *The Primacy of Politics: Social Democracy and the Making of Europe's Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 191.

theoretician, was its chief editor.<sup>6</sup> Otto Bauer, Karl Renner, and Adolf Braun cofounded *Der Kampf* in 1907.<sup>7</sup> The Labour's Party's journal *The Labour Magazine*, also plays an important part. Such publications defined and contested Social Democratic ideology. These sources are particularly important in revealing Social Democratic thought.

Physical and online archives also feature in my work. The Amsterdam Institute of Social History provided large numbers of published and unpublished texts, alongside personal papers from key thinkers; Karl Kautsky, Eduard Bernstein, and Otto Bauer in particular. The physical archives of the Labour and Socialist International at the People History Museum in Manchester provide important context. The LSI adds a transnational dimension to this thesis.<sup>8</sup> While my thesis is not specifically a transnational study, much of Social Democratic political thought and debate was mediated through the LSI.<sup>9</sup>

### **Historiography and Thesis Outline**

One of the motivations for this project was the paucity of studies on interwar Social Democratic ideology. The Second International period (1889-1916) has attracted much scholarly attention. Such studies are constructive and incisive in explicating the formative history of European socialism.<sup>10</sup> They have been particularly productive in

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<sup>6</sup> William Smaldone, "Rudolf Hilferding and the Theoretical Foundations of German Social Democracy, 1902–33," *Central European History* 21, no. 3 (1988): 292.

<sup>7</sup> Ewa Czerwińska-Schupp, *Otto Bauer (1881-1938): Thinker and Politician*, trans. Maciej Zurowski (2017), 15.

<sup>8</sup> For a transnational study of the LSI see Talbot Imlay, *The Practice of Socialist Internationalism: European Socialists and International Politics, 1914-1960* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

<sup>9</sup> Some of the LSI's archives are also held at Amsterdam.

<sup>10</sup> These are just some of them James Joll, *The Second International 1889-1914* (New York: Praeger, 1956); Peter Nettl, "The German Social Democratic Party 1890-1914 as a Political Model," *Past & Present*, no.

illuminating the early history of Marxism. Likewise, the political history of interwar Social Democracy has also attracted attention.<sup>11</sup> In the 1950s and 60s some involved in interwar Social Democracy produced histories of the movement. G. D H. Cole's monumental history of socialist thought constructs a narrative of derivative institutionalism, lacklustre in both its thinking and politicking. Socialist thought in the 1920s was 'indeed the least inspiring of all in the realm of socialist thought' claimed Cole.<sup>12</sup> Meanwhile, the International movement was impotent in shaping its affiliated parties. Domestic politics was likewise disappointing. Social Democratic parties held 'inglorious records', unable to form government.<sup>13</sup> Julius Braunthal, an Austrian Social Democrat, who eventually became assistant secretary of the LSI, published a history of the International in 1967. He argued that Social Democracy's newfound place in Central European democracy, and a general ebbing of revolutionary zeal, meant Social Democracy now concerned itself with lessening international conflict.<sup>14</sup> In each of these narratives socialist transformation took a backseat.

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30 (1965); Georges Haupt, *Socialism and the Great War: the collapse of the Second International* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972); Ernest Mandel, *The place of Marxism in history* (Amherst, N.Y.: Humanity Books, 1999); Manfred B. Steger, *The quest for evolutionary socialism: Eduard Bernstein and social democracy* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Kevin J. Callahan, *Demonstration culture: European socialism and the Second International, 1889-1914* (Leicester: Troubador Publishing, 2010); Marc Mulholland, "'Marxists of strict observance'? The Second International national defence question, and the question of war," *The historical journal* 58, no. 2 (2015); Jukka Gronow, *On the formation of Marxism: Karl Kautsky's theory of capitalism, the Marxism of the Second International and Karl Marx's Critique of political economy* (Leiden: Brill, 2016).

<sup>11</sup> Julius Braunthal, *History of the International, Volume II: 1914-1943* (London: Nelson, 1967); Dick Geary, "Working-Class Identities in Europe, 1850s-1930s," *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 45, no. 1 (1999); Donald Sassoon, "Socialism in the twentieth century: an historical reflection," in *Reassessing Political Ideologies: the durability of dissent*, ed. Michael Freeden (2001); Geoff Eley, *Forging Democracy: The history of the left in Europe, 1850-2002* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); Imlay, *The Practice of Socialist Internationalism*; Dick Geary, *European labour politics from 1900 to the Depression* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Education, 1991); Sheri Berman, *The Social Democratic Movement: Ideas and Politics in the Making of Interwar Europe* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998); *The Primacy of Politics*; Donald Sassoon, *One Hundred Years of Socialism: The West European Left in the Twentieth Century* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010).

<sup>12</sup> G. D. H. Cole, *A history of socialist thought: Volume IV Part 1* (1958), 15.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>14</sup> Braunthal, *History of the International II*, 531-533.



Scholarship in national studies have also been well served.<sup>15</sup> Biographical studies of key thinkers provide useful insight into Social Democratic ideas.<sup>16</sup> However, they are

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<sup>15</sup> For France see Julian Jackson, *The Popular Front in France: defending democracy, 1934-1938* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Nicole Jordan, *The Popular Front and Central Europe: the dilemmas of French impotence, 1918-1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Robert Stuart, *Marxism at Work: Ideology, class and French Socialism During the Third Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Steve Bastow, "Inter-war French fascism and the neo-socialism of Marcel Déat," in *Discourse theory and political analysis: Identities, hegemonies and social change*, ed. Aletta J. Norval David Howarth and Yannis Stavrakakis (New York: Manchester University Press, 2000); Helen Harden Chenut, *The fabric of gender: working-class in Third Republic France* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005); Richard Griffiths, "Fascism and the Planned Economy: "Neo-Socialism" and "Planisme" in France and Belgium in the 1930s," *Science & Society* 69, no. 4 (2005); Peirre Birnbaum, *Léon Blum: Prime Minister, Socialist, Zionist*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015); Julian Wright, *Socialism and the Experience of Time: Idealism and the Present in Modern France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017). For Germany see Lewis J. Edinger, *German Exile Politics: The Social Democratic Executive Committee in the Nazi Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1956); Richard N. Hunt, *German Social Democracy 1918-1933* (Yale: Yale University Press, 1964); Istvan Deak, *Weimar Germany's Left-Wing Intellectuals: A political history of Weltbühne and its circle* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968); Robert A. Gates, "German Socialism and the Crisis of 1929-1933," *Journal of Central European History* 7, no. 4 (1974); Richard Breitman, *German Socialism and Weimar Democracy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981); Harold James, "Rudolf Hilferding and the application of the political economy of the Second International," *The historical journal* 24, no. 4 (1981); Smaldone, "Rudolf Hilferding and the Theoretical Foundations of German Social Democracy, 1902-33."; Donna Harsch, *German Social Democracy and the rise of Nazism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993); Mark Jones, *Founding Weimar: Violence and the German Revolution 1918-1919* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016). For Britain see John Saville, "The ideology of Labourism," in *Knowledge and Belief in Politics: The Problem of Ideology*, ed. Robert Benewick, R. N. Berki, and Bhikhu Parek (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1973); Ross McKibbin, "The Economic Policy of the Second Labour Government 1929-1931," *Past & Present*, no. 68 (1975); Ben Pimlott, *Labour and the Left in the 1930s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977); James Jupp, *The radical left in Britain 1931-1941* (London: Frank Cass and Company, 1982); Gareth Stedman-Jones, *Languages of class: studies in English working class history 1832-1982* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Elizabeth Durbin, *New Jerusalem: The Labour Party and the economics of Democratic Socialism* (London: Routledge, 1985); Gordon Phillips, *The Rise of the Labour Party, 1893-1931* (Routledge: London, 1992); Christine Collette, "The Labour Party and the Labour and Socialist International: the challenge of communism and fascism," *Labour History Review* 58, no. 1 (1993); *The International Faith: Labour's attitudes to European Socialism, 1918-39* (Brookfield: Ashgate, 1998); Richard Toye, *The Labour Party and the Planned Economy 1931-1951* (Suffolk: Boydell, 2003); Andrew Thorp, *A History of the British Labour Party* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Keith Laybourn, *The Independent Labour Party, 1914-1939: The political and cultural history of a socialist party* (London: Routledge, 2020). For Austria see Melvin Croan, "The Politics of Marxist Sovietology: Otto Bauer's Vision," *The Journal of Politics* 21, no. 4 (1959); Raimund Loew, "The politics of Austro-Marxism," *New Left Review* 1, no. 118 (1979); Helmut Gruber, *Red Vienna: experiment in working-class culture 1919-1934* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991); Jill Lewis, *Fascism and the working class in Austria, 1918-1934: The failure of labour in the First Republic* (Oxford: Berg, 1991); Elisabeth

obviously limited in scope, unable to conduct wider analyses on interwar Social Democratic thought. There has been recent interest in the Labour and Socialist International. Talbot Imlay's research on the LSI has provided invaluable context for this thesis.<sup>17</sup> Imlay's book revolves around the institutional machinations of Social Democratic internationalism. 'Practical cooperation between socialist parties' within the LSI concerns Imlay. He concludes that while socialists failed to impart a wider internationalism on global politics, the LSI highlighted the increased determination to be internationalist post-1918.<sup>18</sup> However, most of these studies fall into the category of political history. They fail to consider, and link, the ideological discourses that

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Allgoewer, "Emil Lederer: Business cycles, crises, and growth," *Journal of History of Economic Thought* 25, no. 3 (2003).

<sup>16</sup> See Mark E. Blum, "Otto Bauer and the philosophy of Praxis: Then and Now," *Historical Materialism* 24, no. 2 (2016); Czerwińska-Schupp, *Otto Bauer*; Allgoewer, "Emil Lederer: Business cycles, crises, and growth."; A. W. Wright, *G. D. H. Cole and Socialist Democracy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979); Michael Schneider, *J.A. Hobson* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1996); Peter Lamb, *Harold Laski: Problems of Democracy, the Sovereign State, and International Society* (New York: Palgrave, 2004); Matthew Worley, *Oswald Mosley and the New Party* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); David Howell, *Mosley and British Politics 1918-1932: Oswald's Odyssey* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); Birnbaum, *Léon Blum*; D. K. Buse, "Ebert and the German Crisis, 1917-1920," *Central European History* 5, no. 3 (1972); Douglas D. Alder, "Friedrich Adler: Evolution of a Revolutionary," *German Studies Review* 1, no. 3 (1978); Gary P. Steenson, *Karl Kautsky: Marxism in the Classical Years* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1978); Dick Geary, *Karl Kautsky* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987); Susanne Miller, "Bernstein's political position, 1914-1920," in *Bernstein to Brandt: A short history of German Social Democracy*, ed. Roger Fletcher (London: Edward Arnold, 1987); Smaldone, "Rudolf Hilferding and the Theoretical Foundations of German Social Democracy, 1902-33."; *Rudolf Hilferding: The Tragedy of a German Social Democrat* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1998); Harald Hagemann, "Emil Lederer (1882-1939): Economical and Sociological Analyst and Critic of Capitalist Development," in *The theory of capitalism in the German economic tradition: historicism, ordo-liberalism, critical theory, solidarism*, ed. Peter Koslowski (1999); Magdalena Jáchymová Královcová, "Emil Lederer: On the Sociology of World War," *Central European Papers* II, no. 2 (2014).

<sup>17</sup> See Imlay, *The Practice of Socialist Internationalism*; "Socialist Internationalism after 1914," in *Internationalisms: a twentieth-century history*, ed. Glenda Sluga and Patricia Clavin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017). There has also been a useful study the British Labour Party's relations with the LSI. See Collette, "The Labour Party and the Labour and Socialist International: the challenge of communism and fascism."; *The International Faith: Labour's attitudes to European Socialism, 1918-39*.

<sup>18</sup> Imlay, *The Practice of Socialist Internationalism*, 2, 465.

informed socialist politicking. My study is a nexus of ideological discourses linked with institutional politics, whether it be in the LSI, or within Social Democratic parties.

Historians have downplayed the significance of interwar Social Democratic thought. Scholars like Braunthal, Liebich, and Eley argue interwar Social Democracy lacked intellectual growth. The advent of representative democracy transformed Social Democracy into an ardent defender of the new order.<sup>19</sup> Historians assume that Social Democracy's political failings mirrored ideological malaise. For instance, Hodge assumes the SPD's conservatism originated from an inability to make ideological shifts required after the creation of the Weimar Republic.<sup>20</sup> More than this, the lack of revolution after 1918/1919 stunted intellectual development. Perry Anderson writes 'Marxism advanced in an unending detour from any revolutionary practice... At its deepest level, the fate of Marxism in Europe was rooted in the absence of any big revolutionary upsurge after 1920.'<sup>21</sup> According to Anderson, particularly concerning Marxism, revolutions, and the historical forces they form produce intellectual innovation. Donald Sassoon is also sceptical about developments in Social Democratic thought. 'The Left seldom succeeded in producing novel ideas which would match the economic developments of interwar Europe, particularly the downfall of *laissez-faire* capitalism after 1929.'<sup>22</sup> According to Sassoon, its intellectual facility had run its

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<sup>19</sup> See Geary, *European labour politics*; Berman, *The Social Democratic Movement; The Primacy of Politics*; Sassoon, *One Hundred Years of Socialism*; Horn, *European Socialists Respond to Fascism*. Carl Landauer, *European Socialism: a history of ideas and movements from the industrial revolution to Hitler's seizure of power* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959); Stefan Berger, *The British Labour Party and the German Social Democrats, 1900-1931* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Sassoon, "Socialism in the twentieth century."; Eley, *Forging Democracy*; Patrizia Dogliani, "The fate of socialist internationalism," in *Internationalisms: a twentieth-century history*, ed. Glenda Sluga and Patricia Clavin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

<sup>20</sup> Carl Cavanagh Hodge, *The tramels of tradition: Social Democracy in Britain, France, and Germany* (London: Greenwood Press, 1994), 51.

<sup>21</sup> Perry Anderson, *Considerations of Western Marxism* (London: Verso, 1976), 42.

<sup>22</sup> Sassoon, *One Hundred Years of Socialism*, 59.

course. Despite the destructive landscape of interwar capitalism, Social Democracy was unable to respond to these crises. Sassoon, however, was not entirely wrong to say that the 'Kautskyist straitjacket' loomed large over the movement. Kautsky and others like him, became slavish to a particularly unrefined teleological mode of Marxist thought.<sup>23</sup> This is a reoccurring theme in my study.

These arguments assume that Social Democracy's commitment to institutionalism after World War One, alongside a lack of revolutionary fervour in Europe, ossified Social Democratic thinking. Its pre-1914 frame of reference did not advance. While Sassoon's study is largely a political history, Anderson's *Western Marxism* is a more thorough study of socialist thought. Anderson firmly holds this line,

Western Marxism, as we have seen, was progressively inhibited from theoretical confrontation of major economic or political problems, from the 1920 onwards. Gramsci was the last of its thinkers to broach central issues of class struggle directly in his writings. He too, however, wrote nothing about the capitalist economy itself, in the classical sense of analysing the laws of motion of the mode of production as such. After him, an equivalent silence typically shrouded the political order of bourgeois rule, and the means of overthrowing it, as well. The result was that Western Marxism as a whole, when it proceeded beyond questions of method to matters of substance, came to concentrate overwhelmingly on study of superstructures.<sup>24</sup>

Sassoon echoes Anderson's commentary on Gramsci. There is a tendency to view pioneering socialist thinking during the interwar period as the purview of a handful of Communist thinkers.<sup>25</sup> In some studies, Social Democratic thinking after 1917 is unworthy of mention. For instance, in David McClellan's extended study on Marxist political thought, analysis on Second International socialism ceases at 1914. Case studies on radical thinkers from Luxembourg to Lukács, and involved sections on the

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Anderson, *Considerations of Western Marxism*, 75.

<sup>25</sup> See *ibid.*

Frankfurt school and Gramsci interlace his interwar chapters.<sup>26</sup> The popularity of Gramsci, Lukács, and the Frankfurt School amongst Western leftists is a post-war phenomenon. This has further omitted interwar Social Democratic thought from scholarly attention.

Scholarship on Social Democracy's schism with Communism is similar. The success of Leninism in attaining power drove Social Democratic Marxists further within pre-war orthodoxy; strictly adhering to rigid teleological understandings of history.<sup>27</sup> Marcel Van Linden rightly points to Social Democracy's fixation on 'unilinear' arguments. Social Democratic Marxists became preoccupied with how the Bolsheviks leapt over 'proper' historical stages, rather than considering the revolution within its own context.<sup>28</sup> Studies of specific Marxists have attested to this line as well, particularly in the case of Karl Kautsky.<sup>29</sup> Here, Social Democratic response to Communism reinforced its unimaginative theories. My thesis demonstrates that Social Democracy's relationship with Communism was far more complicated than this. Firstly, there were always elements who were sympathetic with the Bolshevik regime. More importantly, scholarship has underplayed the importance of how the Soviet Union's existence affected Social Democratic ideology. In the later interwar years, some Social Democrats wanted both political and ideological rapprochement with Communism.

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<sup>26</sup> David McLellan, *Marxism after Marx*, 4th ed. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

<sup>27</sup> Bruno Narrden, *Socialist Europe and Revolutionary Russia: Perception and Prejudice 1848-1923* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 297.

<sup>28</sup> Marcel van der Linden, *Western Marxism and the Soviet Union*, trans. Jurrian Bendien (Boston: Brill, 2007), 44.

<sup>29</sup> See McLellan, *After Marx*; Massimo Salvadori, *Karl Kautsky and the Socialist Revolution 1880-1938*, trans. Jon Rothschild (London: NLB, 1979); Steenson, *Karl Kaustky: Marxism in the Classical Years*; Steger, *The quest for evolutionary socialism*, 217-252.

The paucity of scholarship on interwar Social Democratic ideology is a deficiency in labour history. While many of the works listed above are constructive, my study challenges some of their assumptions. Interwar Social Democratic thought must be properly historicised and analysed on its own terms. Surveying Social Democratic thought requires detailed analysis of literature from the period. It also necessitates an expansive approach taking a number of shades of Social Democratic thinking into consideration. Studies on socialist thought tend to concern themselves with particular philosophical strands. Marxists are often separated from other forms of Social Democracy. British thinkers are also regarded as distinct, despite periods of time where Marxism was a guiding influence in their thinking.<sup>30</sup> But as Tony Wright puts it, 'the history of socialism is the history of socialisms.'<sup>31</sup>

Stefan Berger's work on comparative histories on the British Labour Party and the SPD have greatly influenced this project, as has works from Carl Cavanagh Hodge and Gerd-Rainer Horn. Each of these scholars have surveyed the political history of Social Democracy in the interwar years. They have moved beyond fixations with national histories. They have captured the complex history of labour; intertwined in national contexts, but also defined by an international movement.<sup>32</sup> This project expands their methodology into intellectual history and the history of political thought. While my thesis is not a comparative study, its focus on multiple countries, and a European wide movement has meant comparisons are invariably part of my narrative.

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<sup>30</sup> Ben Jackson, *Equality and the British Left: a study in progressive political thought, 1900-64* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008), 93-116. This is an excellent overview of Marxist influence in British political thought throughout the 1930s.

<sup>31</sup> Tony Wright, *Socialisms old and new* (London: Routledge, 1996), 1.

<sup>32</sup> Hodge, *The tramels of tradition*; Berger, *The British Labour Party and the German Social Democrats, 1900-1931*; Horn, *European Socialists Respond to Fascism*.

The following is a chapter outline, explaining the themes my thesis covers and how it fills the historiographical gaps I have listed. I reconstruct Social Democratic thinking in both a thematic and chronological manner. The chapters are ordered chronologically, beginning in 1917/18. Internally, the chapters are divided thematically.

The first chapter explores Social Democracy immediately after the Great War. It also establishes some of the key thinkers this study focuses on. I argue that the rise of democracy emboldened Social Democrats. Inspiration permeated Social Democrats; finally, the democracy they had spent decades struggle for was upon them. In their minds, democratic institutions would necessarily lead to working class political power. Here, my chapter augments and expands upon existing literature. From the 1990s scholars began to reemphasise the importance of democracy as a key theme within Social Democratic theory and practice. The Left's newfound position after the war changed its relationship with the nation. Prior to 1914 most European states treated Social Democracy with great suspicion or outright hostility. The revolutionary period changed this. The Left now was an enthusiastic supporter and beneficiary of creation of the republics. As Eley rightly states,

Thus the war changed the Left's place in the nation... The resulting changes went far beyond the modest parliamentary constitutions that had prevailed in Europe since the 1860s. While parliamentary sovereignty and civil freedoms remained basic to democratic citizenship, other gains were now added, from an emergent package of social rights to changing definitions of the public sphere.<sup>33</sup>

My chapter expands upon this point, taking Social Democratic political economy into consideration. Social Democrats thought that democratisation transformed the state

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<sup>33</sup> Eley, *Forging Democracy*, 221-222.

into a class neutral entity. Victory at the ballot box meant the transition to socialism could begin. This caused a great many Social Democrats to produce works along these lines.

The chapter also deals with the schism with Communism. The polemics produced by Social Democrats after the Bolshevik Revolution was defining. Marcel van der Linden, correctly argues that the Russian Revolution further crystalised Central European Marxism's teleological view of history.<sup>34</sup> I take this a step further, claiming that the divide sharpened Social Democratic dedication to democracy. However, deviating from van der Linden's line, the Russian Revolution also established an internal contradiction within Social Democracy. There was always a solid grouping that accepted the Bolshevik regime. This contradiction became a component of wider ideological divides, particularly in the later interwar years.

The Second chapter explains how Social Democracy soon encountered constraints in the 1920s. Lacklustre economic growth, persistent unemployment and narrow electoral success dulled their ambitions. Social Democratic thinkers turned their attention to solve the most immediate issues besetting capitalism. The pace of change satisfied some older Social Democrats, placing faith in functioning democracies. A younger generation became frustrated with the movement's inaction. The core shibboleths of the movement, like dialectical materialism, were put into question. They rejected Marxism's determinism embracing new conceptions of socialism. Oswald Mosley was part of this new generation in the Labour Party. The stunting of revolutionary fervour, and its impact on Social Democratic ideology has been ignored by scholars. There has been a renewed biographical interest in this younger generation

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<sup>34</sup> Linden, *Western Marxism and the Soviet Union*, Introduction.

of socialists.<sup>35</sup> This chapter contextualises them within the wider history of Social Democratic ideology.

The third chapter investigates how the first years of the Depression shaped Social Democratic thought. After establishing the economic context, the chapter argues that the various crises produced by the Depression exacerbated ideological tensions within the movement. Both left and right flanks began challenging established modes of Social Democratic thinking. This reaction against the hegemony of institutionalism forced new and innovative directions in Social Democratic thought. Sections of the movement began challenging broadly accepted assumptions about macroeconomics, particularly relating to the Gold Standard. These tensions stirred political agitations, some threatening outright splits within domestic parties and the LSI.

The fourth chapter explains how competing visions of Social Democracy formalised into several schisms. This chapter argues that as the crisis wore on, and Nazism became more electorally successful, Social Democratic innovation expanded. Ideas on political economy matured, as did revolutionary fervour from Left Social Democrats. Marxists began questioning assumptions about class politics when confronted with fascism. Stalin's Five Year Plans also challenged Social Democrats, since it seemed to expand the USSR's economy amidst a rapid decline in the capitalist world. These two chapters challenge established scholarship by arguing that the Depression began an innovative surge in Social Democratic thinking. As the movement faced an existential crisis it experienced a period of rapid intellectual innovation.

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<sup>35</sup> See Dan S. White, *Lost Comrades: Socialists of the front generation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992); Griffiths, "Fascism and the Planned Economy: "Neo-Socialism" and "Planisme" in France and Belgium in the 1930s."; Howell, *Mosley*; Tommaso Milani, *Hendrik de Man and Social Democracy: The idea of planning in Western Europe, 1914-1940* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020).

The fifth chapter elucidates how the victory of fascism in Germany radicalised Social Democracy. Specifically, Central European Social Democracy embraced revolutionary politics. Apart of this radicalisation was rapprochement with Communism. The politics of exile was highly contested since many opposed relations with communists. British Labour could not accept these developments. Such nuances have also been missed by scholars. There have been a few studies on Social Democracy in exile,<sup>36</sup> but none have taken an approach that surveys the wider movement and how exile politics transformed Social Democratic thought.

The final chapter argues that the reconfiguring of European geopolitics appreciably affected Social Democratic thinking. Social Democrats had to come to terms with an aggressive Third Reich and an inevitable European war. Sections of Social Democracy continued to radicalise. Some now wanted more than a political settlement with Communism; they wanted ideological reconciliation. The Soviet Union was the only socialist bulwark against an expansionist Germany. However, Social Democrats in established democracies like Britain moderated further. The movement, now in retreat on several fronts, became fractured. The internal dynamics of the LSI reflected this becoming entirely dysfunctional. Finally, the outbreak of war put an end to Second International Socialism.

Through this narrative I demonstrated the complexity and nuance in Social Democratic thought. I argue that there was intellectual innovation through internal contestation. While the systemic crises of the interwar years did not herald socialist

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<sup>36</sup> For a details study on the politics of the exiled SPD see Edinger, *Exile Politics*. For a study on the Popular Front and the politics of exile see Horn, *European Socialists Respond to Fascism*. Imlay, *The Practice of Socialist Internationalism*. Imlay misses the LSI's radicalisation entirely, and does not explain how these pressures effectively split the LSI. Braunthal, though rushes over this point, does admit that the LSI became more fractures after 1933. See Braunthal, *History of the International II*.

revolutions, their deep societal disturbances shaped the ideology of European Social Democracy. The many Social Democracies of interwar Europe were rich and dynamic in their imaginings of the new worlds they hoped to construct.

# Hope amid ruins

The social revolution is a profound transformation of the entire social structure brought about by the establishment of a new method of production. It is a protracted process, which may be spread over decades, and no definite boundaries can be drawn for its conclusion.

Karl Kautsky, 1918<sup>37</sup>

## **Introduction**

Despite horrendous destruction, the last year of conflict and the first years of peace were optimistic for Social Democracy. Republican revolutions on the continent and the expansion of suffrage in Britain reversed Social Democracy's setbacks since 1914. Consequently, socialism was a foreseeable reality for many of the movement's thinkers. The initial democratic successes prompted a flurry of intellectual activity by Social Democrats. Republican democracy intertwined with far reaching visions of socialisation and internationalism were markers of a short period of optimism.

The formation of new republics buoyed pre-war Marxist orthodoxies. Marxists saw great potential in achieving the movement's long-held goals of socialisation. The 'iron law' of Marxist historical development was finally coming to pass. Democratic revolution installed republican governments. Socialist transformation was now possible through electoral support. British socialists and Labourites had reasons for sanguinity as well. Universal suffrage and fast electoral growth of the Labour Party

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<sup>37</sup> Karl Kautsky, *The dictatorship of the proletariat*, trans. H. J. Stenning (National Labour Press, 1918), 55.

afforded confidence. Britain's socialist intellectuals were more diffuse and heterodox than their continental comrades though they too were radical in their imaginings of a socialist future.

Social Democrats advanced conceptions along similar lines. Private enterprise would enter into public hands, either by state coercion, or by democratisation of industrial firms. Internationalism was an important component too. While there were certainly differences in what this entailed, Social Democrats pursued internationalism, both as a geopolitical and an economic goal. If a democratised economy was to succeed it required a democratic international system with unencumbered trading practices.

The creation of the League of Nations gave socialists hope that the anarchic and imperialist international system was tameable.<sup>38</sup> While imperial powers dominated the League, socialists saw potential. It could assuage military conflict and facilitate free trade. The latter was of crucial importance in rebalancing class conflict. This would assure capital could no longer capture local markets driving up prices of food while free trading practices would maintain peace.

Bolshevik victory in Russia gave rise to a socialist party in antithesis to Social Democracy. The success of Lenin's vanguard model of revolution confronted Social Democracy in an existential manner. Social Democrats saw Russia as a dangerous counterpoint to reformism inspiring more radical elements within their own ranks. Consequently, communism became a divergent movement. Social Democrats defined

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<sup>38</sup> For a history on how the newly established LSI dealt with this see Daniel Laqua, "Democratic Politics and the League of Nations: The Labour and Socialist International as a Protagonist of Interwar Internationalism," *Contemporary European History* 24, no. 2 (2015): 175-180.

its distinctness framing Bolshevism as anti-parliamentary and authoritarian in character.

Six themes separate the chapter. The first explains the historical context of the democratic moment. Social Democracy was now at the forefront of a revolutionary surge in the wake of war. The second theme surveys how socialists theorised new relationships with the state. Socialists reimagined the role of the state considering the creation of republican governments. The state, once hostile to the working classes, was now malleable in the new post-war world. Free elections allowed Social Democratic parties the opportunity to bring an end to class conflict; recasting the dialectic that had informed politics in the previous decades. The third theme narrates how Social Democrats envisaged the democratisation of the economy. The transition from capitalism to socialism was an ever-present enquiry for the movement. Now with the means to achieve this transition, questions surrounding socialisation and the transitory epoch it hoped to create dominated Social Democratic thinking. The fourth theme outlines socialist approaches towards the new international order. International questions after the Great War remained as important as they were in 1914. The new international situation following the Paris Peace Conference reinvigorated internationalism. The establishment of the League of Nations presented Social Democrats with a potential vehicle to end imperialism and its bedfellow militarism through international arbitration. The fifth theme investigates how socialists saw free trade as crucial in facilitating international peace. The protectionism and the trade wars it produced were examples of how capitalism destabilised international relations. Finally, the chapter deals with socialist attitudes towards Soviet Russia. Social Democrats met the regime with contention. Many saw it as antithetical to core Social Democratic principles; to Marxists, it was a perversion of 'scientific' historicism. Nonetheless, there was rigorous controversy about how to

interpretate the Revolution. Bolshevism proved simultaneously allusive, alluring, but ultimately threatening to Social Democrats.

### **Social Democracy after the Great War**

The Russian Revolution in 1917, the German Revolution in 1918, and the Austrian Revolution in 1919, saw Europe's most reactionary monarchies fall. Social democrats were at the centre of each of these. In Central and Western Europe, democracy took hold in a surge of revolution, owing to ailing monarchies and, specifically, the war they had wrought upon the continent. It was, in Martin Conway's words, 'Europe's twentieth-century republican moment'.<sup>39</sup> Workers' council sprang up pressing for democracy and oversight of bureaucracies peopled by reactionary and anti-democratic forces.<sup>40</sup> Follow-up radical surges punctuated many of these revolutions. The German Revolution is fundamental to the narrative of interwar Social Democracy.

Extensive organisation on the factory floor by the USPD, and the *Kieler Matrosenaufstand* sparked the German Revolution.<sup>41</sup> The sailors revolt at Kiel gave impetus to wider discontents against the Monarchy, giving credence to more radical forces like the USPD and the Revolutionary Shop Stewards.<sup>42</sup> Workers councils around the country formed spontaneously and on the 9<sup>th</sup> of November SPD member

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<sup>39</sup> Martin Conway, "Democracies," in *Europe's Postwar Period 1989, 1945, 1918: writing history backwards*, ed. Martin Conway, Pieter Lagrou, and Henry Rousso (New York: Bloomsbury, 2019), 130.

<sup>40</sup> Marc Mulholland, *Bourgeois liberty and the politics of fear: from absolutism to neo-conservatism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 167.

<sup>41</sup> See Pierre Broué, *The German Revolution 1917-1923*, trans. John Archer (Brill: Tuta Sub Agide Pallas, 2005), 139-142; William A. Pelz, *A People's History of the German Revolution 1918-1919* (London: Pluto Press, 2018), 53-55.

<sup>42</sup> Hans Mommsen, *The Rise and Fall of Weimar Democracy*, trans. Elborg Forster and Larry Eg (London: University of North Carolina, 1989), 19.

Philipp Scheidemann proclaimed the 'German Republic' at the Reichstag.<sup>43</sup> The executive of the SPD pronounced 'the power of the state rests in the hands of the people...Hail the German Republic'.<sup>44</sup> The imperial Chancellor Prince Max of Baden controversially transferred his powers to the right-wing SPD leader Friedrich Ebert. Ebert hoped the prince would abdicate on his own accord rather than by popular discontent. He was solidly on the right of the party and supposedly said to Scheidemann that he 'hated social revolution, like a sin'.<sup>45</sup> The new constitution was written in Weimar in August the following year.

In January 1919, the KPD, Spartacus league, The USPD, and other revolutionary elements, in response to Ebert dismissal of Berlin's Police Chief, USPD member Emil Eichhorn, launched an uprising. Shoddily organised with spontaneous haste, the uprising yearned for a Soviet republic. The workers' council model would replace the liberal democracy in-making. After talks between the revolutionaries and Ebert broke down, Ebert cracked down on the insurgency. Using both the military and the newly formed anti-democratic *Freikorps* the revolt was brutally suppressed. The leaders of the revolt, Karl Leiknecht and Rosa Luxembourg, both towering figures in European socialism, were summarily murdered.<sup>46</sup> In 1919 the short-lived Bavarian Soviet Republic was also quashed by the *Freikorps*. While the MSPD kept the liberal democratic republic intact, they had relied on anti-democratic and reactionary forces to do so.

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<sup>43</sup> Scheidemann's proclamation was heavily influenced by wild cat strikes. He feared that if the SPD did not back the movement then it would 'overtake' the party. Philip Scheidemann, *Memoirs of a Social Democrat*, vol. II (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1929), 567.

<sup>44</sup> "The executive committee of the German Social Democratic Party, the workers' and soldiers' council, Berlin, 9 November, 1918," in *The Political Institutions of the German Revolution 1918-1919*, ed. Charles B. Burdick and Ralph H. Lutz (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1966), 44.

<sup>45</sup> Scheidemann, *Memoirs of a Social Democrat*, II, 545.

<sup>46</sup> Eric Waldman, *The Spartacist Uprising of 1919* (Barakaldo, 2020), 285.

The breakdown of the Hapsburg dynasty and the establishment of the First Austrian Republic put the SDAP in a similar position as their German comrades. While revolution did not come to Britain, its liberal government, foreseeing potential social unrest, particularly by increasing rancour amongst striking workers, enacted universal male suffrage in February 1918 and lowered the voting age to 21.

Developments in British politics from 1917 onwards defined much of the socialist world. The rapid growth of the Labour Party, both in membership and electoral muscle, restructured Britain's party system. Between the years 1918 and 1924 the Labour Party displaced the Liberal Party in working-class constituencies.<sup>47</sup> By 1922 it equalled the Liberals and in 1923 it came close to government.<sup>48</sup> Labour went from having 42 MPs in 1914 to 191 in 1923.<sup>49</sup> People like Arthur Henderson became prominent socialists outside Britain; Henderson was instrumental in establishing the Labour and Socialist International.<sup>50</sup>

Importantly for socialists, the Second International was reconstituted into the Labour and Socialist International (LSI) in May 1923. However, it took several years and considerable manoeuvring to do so. The end of the war bolstered internationalist aspirations of socialists. Henderson began to press French and Scandinavian socialists into reorganising the Second International in time for Paris Peace Conference in January 1919. The socialist conference was eventually held in Berne France in February 1919. While initially supportive of the conference, Belgian socialists became

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<sup>47</sup> Phillips, *The Rise of the Labour Party*, 36.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 34-38.

<sup>49</sup> Thorp, *A History of Labour*, 32-33.

<sup>50</sup> Braunthal, *History of the International II*, 264-271; Imlay, *The Practice of Socialist Internationalism*, 140-146.

sceptical since both wings of the divided German Social Democrats had enthusiastically taken up Henderson's invitation. The Belgians wanted German socialists to acknowledge their own folly for supporting Germany's war effort.<sup>51</sup> At the conference itself the Belgians refused to meet face to face with Germans. Open arguments ensued between the two SPD groups over the question of support for the war. There was also significant tension between the French SFIO and German socialists over blame for the war.<sup>52</sup> The British pushed for a resolution that, according to Talbot, 'shunted' the issue, nullifying it for rest of the congress.<sup>53</sup> The Berne International went some way into reforming the socialist international but significant strains between various parties demonstrated the difficulty in this.

There was an attempt to formerly reconstitute the Second International in July 1920 in Geneva but the issue over how to deal with Bolshevism inhibited success. The Austrians, the French, the Swiss, and the Independent German Social Democrats formally broke away. The Independent Labour Party attended Geneva but broke away soon after. They opposed the Second International's all-out rejection of Bolshevism. They saw potential in a united international with both Social Democrats and communists. These parties soon came together to form their own international in the hopes to unite the divided socialist camps. The Vienna International (officially titled the International Working Union of Socialist Parties, whimsically known as the two-and-a half International), created in 1921, was greatly influenced by Austro-Marxism.

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<sup>51</sup> *The Practice of Socialist Internationalism*, 50-52.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 57-60.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 59. Also see Independent Labour Party, *International Socialism and World Peace: Resolutions of the Berne Conference, February, 1919* (London: Independent Labour Party, 1919).

After 4 years of wrangling between the Austrian-led Vienna international and the British-led London International, the LSI formed uniting the splintered movement. The Austrian Social Democrat Friedrich Adler, secretary of the Vienna International, was eventually goaded into opening dialogue with the London International. The Vienna International's main objective was to unite the Comintern with Social Democracy. Since the USPD was an important member, once it reunited with the MSPD at the Nuremburg conference in November 1922, there was little force left in the Vienna International.<sup>54</sup> In early December 1922 the Vienna International conceded to reconcile the Social Democrat camps; its executive voted in favour six to three.<sup>55</sup> Here too British Labour showed its clout, since Arthur Henderson was so important in the creation of the LSI. He had been lobbying for unifying the two internationals since 1919. At its first congress in Hamburg (May 1923), the resolution noted the importance of the rise of British Labour and its influence on the international movement.<sup>56</sup> Otto Bauer's address reemphasised this,

The British Labour Party in recent years lead us to hope that England will infuse fresh strength into... breaking down the international forces of reaction.<sup>57</sup>

Soon after the failed Spartakus uprising, the Communist International held its first congress. It called for workers to overthrow liberal parliaments replacing them with soviets. Initially, optimism pervaded due to the formation Soviet republics in Hungary, Bavaria, and Slovakia. The Comintern reached out to leftist Social Democratic Parties in the USPD, the SFIO, while the Italian Socialist Party, and Bulgarian Social

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<sup>54</sup> Imlay, *The Practice of Socialist Internationalism*, 92-93.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 98-99.

<sup>56</sup> Labour and Socialist International, *The Resolutions of the Hamburg Congress*, Labour Party Archives: Labour and Socialist International, LSI 12-14, 4/12/1, 1923, People's History Museum, Manchester.

<sup>57</sup> Otto Bauer, *International action against international reaction: Speech to Hamburg Congress*, Labour Party Archives: Labour and Socialist International, LSI/12-14, 12/9/1, 1923, People's History Museum, Manchester.

Democrats affiliated. However, the Comintern became the rival socialist International after its second congress in July/August 1919 when it drafted the 'Twenty-One Conditions' document. Parties wanting to join the Comintern had to agree to these conditions vowing to purge all reformist elements from their ranks. It also forced budding members into illegal organisation with the goal of formenting revolution.<sup>58</sup> Reformist parties like the USPD and SFIO thus rejected membership, ultimately drawing them into the LSI a few years later.

### **Democracy, State, and possibilities in peacetime**

Socialists wanted to take advantage of Europe's democratic moment and the epochal transformations taking place. Many thought democracy was entirely dependent on the interruption of war rather than longer term processes. To many socialists, popular discontent had little to do with long-ailing monarchies. It was first and foremost the war that corroded the old regimes. Despite the downfall of monarchy being contingent on mass uprisings, socialists treated popular mobilisation as a symptom of wartime deprivation. In Eduard Bernstein's account workers were responding to an exogenous shock to the system.<sup>59</sup> Austrian Marxist Max Beer thought the same of both revolutions in Germany and Austria; 'the victory of the revolution was merely the fruits of the military collapse'.<sup>60</sup> Heinrich Ströbel, a left Social Democrat, described power 'falling in the hands of workers through the collapse of Militarism'.<sup>61</sup> Central

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<sup>58</sup> Kevin McDermott and Jeremy Agnew, *The Comintern: A history of international communism from Lenin to Stalin* (London: Macmillan, 1996), 1-40.

<sup>59</sup> Eduard Bernstein, *Die Deutsche Revolution* (Berlin-Fichtenau: Verlag Gess, 1921), 12-13.

<sup>60</sup> M. Beer, *Social Struggles and Modern Socialism*, trans. H. J. Stenning (London: Leonard Parsons, 1925), 202.

<sup>61</sup> Heinrich Ströbel, *The German Revolution and After*, trans. H. J. Stenning (London: Jarrolds, 1923), 7.

Europe's revolutionary spirit was something thought to be inorganic but productive. For socialists of the Second International period, their visions of a republican and democratic state were at hand. Representative democracy had transformed the state. As leading Austria theorists Max Adler put it, 'our social ideal is no longer a dream'.<sup>62</sup> Now that democratisation had taken place, the breadth of the state could be recast to empower the proletariat. Non-Marxist socialists shared this same view.

Harold Laski's (British theorist) optimism for the awesome opportunities the state offered the working classes is artfully captured in *The State in the New Social Order*;

War always transforms the foundations of national thought and the scale of our last experiment has been vast enough to leave no institution or doctrine untouched... Just as the Napoleonic struggle freed the commercial classes from remnants of aristocratic control... the recent conflict will bring the working classes to a new position in the state.<sup>63</sup>

Laski's book encapsulated the predominant theme in socialist thought; it also marked a key break in his own thinking. Before the war Laski had been sceptical of state power, seeing it as an obstacle or weapon used against workers.<sup>64</sup> State controls instituted during the war changed his mind. Laski was not the only socialist who saw vast possibilities within the recently transformed state.

Traditionally, Marxists thought the state would 'wither away'. Smashing the state would end capitalist relations. Communists thought soviets would replace the bourgeoisie state. Since the 1890s, Social Democrats became more accommodating towards the state contingent upon its democratisation. For German and Austrian Marxists after the war, the state had taken on new class dimensions. Under a republican system the state became a class neutral institution ruled by whichever class

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<sup>62</sup> Max Adler, *Neue Menschen: Gedanken über sozialistische Erziehung* (Berlin: Laub, 1924), 85.

<sup>63</sup> Harold J. Laski, *The State in the New Social Order* (Westminster: Fabian Society, 1922), 3.

<sup>64</sup> Lamb, *Laski: Problems of Democracy*, 94-98.

won the right to govern through suffrage. The now old-time revisionist Eduard Bernstein had such thoughts. The notion of a 'people's state' was now a reality. The state was no longer a weapon of the upper class, it 'received its character from the majority of people by virtue of universal suffrage.'<sup>65</sup> Bernstein reminded people that Lassalle, a key forefather of German socialism, always believed the state would be indispensable in bringing forth socialism.

The state is basically granted a transitory or temporary role as an oppressive or suppressive force – that is what Lassalle calls the role of a night watch for the ruling classes. When a different social class exists and takes control of the state, class contradictions cease. <sup>66</sup>

Historically the state thwarted working class agency. Now, under republican government, the social basis of the state was fluid.

Through universal suffrage the state received its contours through whichever social grouping was victorious at elections. Bernstein probably did not believe the state would 'wither away'. It was an unavoidable institution. The evolution of capitalism had determined its agency. Particularly in the case of Germany, the state had been the driving force behind capitalist expansion. Lassalle (now long-dead) and Bernstein noted how the ruling classes wielded the state's bureaucratic power. If the working class was going to wield power, the state was its best tool to do so. Democracy gave the working class an opportunity to conquer the very institution that had laid them in chains. Steger rightly claims that Bernstein's *Der Sozialismus einst und jetzt* was an 'Aristotelian ideal of a "middle way" to socialism'. It avoided 'the extremes of both metaphysical utopianism and instrumentalist reformism'.<sup>67</sup> The primacy of the state and the need to keep it intact was Bernstein's answer to radical forces within the German movement who wanted workers' councils to replace it. Democratisation of

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<sup>65</sup> Eduard Bernstein, *Der Sozialismus einst und jetzt* (Berlin: Buchhandlung Vorwärts, 1922), 88.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>67</sup> Steger, *The quest for evolutionary socialism*, 226.

the state gave it new historical force, reifying working class emancipation. Bernstein could not conceive of socialism without it.

Bernstein insisted that unification between the MSPD and the USPD was the only way the German working class could conquer the state within the new Republic. He soon split with the USPD when it came to support the Räte system re-joining the MSPD. Bernstein pushed for collaboration with bourgeois parties to form coalition governments. His faith in Weimar's republican system assured him that Social Democracy would benefit from this.<sup>68</sup>

Karl Kautsky, a towering figure in the movement, took a similar view to Bernstein. The democratic state was malleable and contested by competing classes. Class struggle would endure within democratic institutions.

Every class will...shape the new form of the State in a manner corresponding to its particular interests. This attempt is especially manifested in the struggle over the character of the Parliament, that is in the fight for the franchise... Not only the wage-earner, but the small peasant and the lower middle classes have an interest in the franchise.<sup>69</sup>

The franchise had given German politics a new character, one that gave agency to previously ignored classes. The real threat to socialist conquest was communism.

In his opposition to the Spartacus Uprising, Kautsky outlined his views in *Driving the Revolution Forward* (1918). He admitted that the German Revolution of 1918 was contingent on a compromise between elements of the old regime and proletarian democracy. This compromise diluted the powers of the worker councils born out of the revolution.<sup>70</sup> In order to avoid civil war the two groups agreed upon a settlement.

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<sup>68</sup> Miller, "Bernstein's political position," 99-100.

<sup>69</sup> Kautsky, *The dictatorship of the proletariat*, 27.

<sup>70</sup> Breitman, *German Socialism*, 68-69.

A civil war would render Germany moribund. Kautsky believed socialism would be impossible under such circumstances.<sup>71</sup> It would destabilise both the economy and the new republic. Socialism could not thrive under such conditions. The Junker-dominated army was one such institution socialists had to accept in the new Germany. The army was reactionary and authoritarian character; it was insurmountable without significant loss or worse, the destruction of the republic itself through putsch.<sup>72</sup> Nonetheless, Kautsky's new Germany was ambitious.

Yet this situation could only be temporary. The state must be completely refashioned. The bureaucracy must be stripped of its power and many of its functions must be placed under the supervision/control of the democratic representatives of the people... At the same time the Reich must be made more united, the preponderance of Prussia must be broken by splitting it up from one federal state into something like three petty statedoms.<sup>73</sup>

Kautsky's vision was extensively democratic. Once workers were firmly established, a more open democracy would necessarily follow. Their uncomfortable settlement with conservative forces was transient though necessary. If the working class was to attain the reins of state power through elections, then those institutions required protection. If liberal institutions prevailed it would mean victory for the working class. Such institutions created opportunities to overhaul the machinery of government, legislating Germany's reactionary elements out of the system. The Spartacus League threatened this future with its visions of revolutionary workers' councils; another contradiction threatening civil war. Violent reaction loomed from right-wing elements. It was only within a bourgeois democratic state that a worker's revolution was realistic. Despite this, he warned of the potential capitalists had in undermining

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<sup>71</sup> Karl Kautsky, "Driving the Revolution Forward," *Freiheit* 79, no. 29 (1918): 27.

<sup>72</sup> In 1919 Kautsky went into some detail about how the military should be reformed into a 'people's militia'. This would replace a permanent standing army. See *Richtlinien für ein sozialistisches Aktionsprogramm* (Berlin: J. Sittenfeld, 1919), 2-3.

<sup>73</sup> "Driving the Revolution Forward," 1-2.

a socialist parliamentary majority. They could use their monopoly over the means of production to bring a workers' government to heel. Nonetheless, a 'social revolution' was impossible without democratic institutions.<sup>74</sup> The Weimar Republic offered this prospect.

For Otto Bauer, the new Austrian Republic represented a dilemma. The liberal republican order had created a situation of 'class equilibrium'. Seeds of self-destruction lay in its path. Through parliamentary contestation no one class dominated, making coalitions inevitable. However, the threat classes had over one another still existed. Capitalists continued to exploit workers and the middle class was still afraid of losing its right to private property; expropriation was what they feared most from proletarian power. This political deadlock was a superstructural example of class equilibrium. He pointed to a general loss of faith by the public in the newly established republic.<sup>75</sup> Bauer thought that this had two possible dangers. First was the Italian case. Mussolini's takeover was an example of the Bonapartism, akin to France in 1851, where an 'adventurer' usurped power over all classes, replacing the bourgeoisie which had abdicated their own political powers because of this political stalemate. The other road was the Bolshevik one. The proletariat had taken power but due to underdeveloped economic conditions, a dictatorship arose in a similar style to fascism. The Soviet Union was balancing workers, peasants, the new Nepmen, and bureaucrats. In each of these two cases, the dictatorial regimes had to balance differing classes. Italy and Russia rested on maintaining class equilibrium and Bauer was afraid that this deadlock necessitated the rise of undemocratic regimes.<sup>76</sup> Bauer's interpretation of post-war political economy was novel. It offered new totalising

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<sup>74</sup> *The dictatorship of the proletariat*, 6-9.

<sup>75</sup> Otto Bauer, "The Equilibrium of Class Strengths, *Der Kampf*, 17 January, 1924," in *Austro-Marxism: The ideology of unity*, ed. Mark E. Blum and William Smaldone (Boston: Brill, 2016), 339-348.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

frameworks explaining the peculiarities brought on by the end of the war and democratisation.

John A. Hobson presents an interesting contrast. Hobson, who began as a radical liberal, had by the 1918 joined the Independent Labour Party.<sup>77</sup> He admired Marxism's intellectual rigour; nonetheless, he was sceptical of its determinism.<sup>78</sup> He too saw the end of war as a moment where the state could shed its reactionary traits from the previous century. 1914 signalled the destruction of the nineteenth-century political order. Hobson detested bourgeois sanguinity. 'Smooth bourgeois optimism' infected political thought, distorting how theorists interpreted various political institutions born out of historical forces of the previous century. The emancipatory and democratic powers these institutions offered were 'flawed'. 19<sup>th</sup> century nationalism offered 'liberative' promises 'on a varying blend of racial, religious, linguistic and territorial community, [giving] force and nourishment to the new national structure'.<sup>79</sup> Nationalism came to bear little relation to democracy. Its emphasis on racially and territorially defined frameworks had the consistency of 'tyrannous domination of a dynasty'.<sup>80</sup> The 19<sup>th</sup> century political order lay on false promises of democracy. For Hobson, the war destroyed monarchy and the 'Liberal' system it had built. Writing less than a year before the end of the war, Hobson already outlined the importance republican forms of government would have in post-war Europe.<sup>81</sup> Even constitutional monarchies were 'injurious' to 'genuine' democratic orders.<sup>82</sup> He made

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<sup>77</sup> Schneider, *J.A. Hobson*, 12.

<sup>78</sup> J. A. Hobson, *Free-Thought in the Social Sciences* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1926), 29, 147, 153-154.

<sup>79</sup> *Problems of a new world* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1921), 15.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> J. A. Hobson, *Democracy After the War* (New York: Macmillan, 1918), 60.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

a clarion call for democrats (by this he probably meant leftists) to prepare themselves for the inevitable counterattack by right-wing forces.<sup>83</sup>

With the 19<sup>th</sup> century bourgeois order in ruins, the question that arose was what would replace it? Harold Laski supposed the end of war realised the democratic promise from the previous century. Democracy was now such common sight in Western Europe that the novelty of and angst spent fighting for it had elapsed. The question now would be how the use of this newfound power be devoted.<sup>84</sup> Kautsky made the same inquiry in 1919. With the formation of the German republic, the construction of a 'socialist republic' awaited.<sup>85</sup> It was this task, surely that garnered the most attention from socialists. For their newfound position in many of Europe's political systems meant they now had to make good on decades of promises to transform capitalism into socialism.

### **Socialisation and the transition to socialism**

For the first time since the beginning of labour movements in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, socialism seemed attainable. The embrace of suffrage and representative democracy required escalation into fully formed socialist society. Transformations in the political sphere were to precede steps towards economic democracy. Writing in 1919, Otto Bauer saw the Austrian Revolution as incomplete; 'a half revolution'. Without socialist transformation capitalist domination would continue. Bauer asked, 'Have we overthrown the omnipotence of the Emperor in order to remain subject to the all-

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 190.

<sup>84</sup> Harold J. Laski, *A grammar of politics* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1925), 15-19.

<sup>85</sup> Kautsky, *Richtlinien für ein sozialistisches Aktionsprogramm*, 1-2.

might of capitalism?’<sup>86</sup> This question and the kaleidoscopic answers it produced became an essential component in Social Democratic thinking.

In summarising European socialism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Donald Sassoon claims that while socialists aimed at transforming society by abolishing private property. The ‘profound paradox confronting’ historians was that socialists, who had little notion of managing ‘market societies... all ended up doing so’.<sup>87</sup> Sassoon’s point is a valid one; however, there were a great number of intellectual contributions that socialists produced outlining, in detail, accounts of how socialist transition would happen. Most understood that socialist transition would take decades and that capitalist relations would continue for some time.<sup>88</sup> This happened broadly across the spectrum, from rigorous scientific Marxists to British guild socialists. Nonetheless, there were vast differences between how to attain such lofty objectives. Some still felt threatened by the state’s coercive powers. Empowering the state over national economies laid paths to illiberal tyranny. For others, political representation in parliament needed extension to an industrial legislature. Views on how to manage relations between labour and capital also varied. Some wanted wholesale expropriation of the means of production. Others sought a more conciliatory approach, establishing harmonious class relations via institutions consisting of organised labour and capital independent of political machinations of legislatures. What was common was that transformation would take place. Industry would be democratically governed. This was almost always based, broadly, on enlightened scientific planning. Industrial life necessitated rationalisation, either in a centralised technocratic form or in a decentralised manner.

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<sup>86</sup> Otto Bauer, *Der Weg zum Sozialismus* (1919), 2.

<sup>87</sup> Sassoon, "Socialism in the twentieth century," 53.

<sup>88</sup> Karl Kautsky, *The Labour Revolution*, trans. H.J. Stenning (London: Ruskin House, 2002), 151.

Socialisation became a key point of tension between Social Democrats, and industrialists wanting to make peace with Weimar. A socialisation commission investigated nationalising large parts of the German economy. It amounted to little. The commission was a tokenistic gesture by right-wing SPD members and collaborative captains of industry to placate more radical elements of the German labour movement. The commission's calls for large-scale nationalisation were completely ignored by the SPD-led government.<sup>89</sup> Heinrich Ströbel, a member of the SPD left, rightly saw the failure to socialise lay in the lack of cohesion on the subject within the SPD. There was no unified view on the 'details of a socialisation scheme'.<sup>90</sup> Nonetheless the commission and the debates surrounding socialisation were important in shaping socialist thought.

SPD members, including Hilferding and Kautsky, comprised the commission. Academics closely aligned with the wider German labour movement were also present, most notably Emil Lederer the Social Democratic economist as were representatives from the unions such as Paul Umbreit. Captains of industry and their academic allies represented capital. Walter Rathenau, an influential banker, industrialists, and founder of AEG, was a prominent member of the commission. He went on to be a senior politician in the Deutsche Demokratische Partei. The anti-socialist Austrian economist Joseph Schumpeter also sat on the commission. When

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<sup>89</sup> Charles S. Maier, *Recasting Bourgeois Europe: Stabilization in France, Germany, and Italy in the decade after World War I* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 140. Also see Hans A. Frambach, "The First Socialization Debate of 1918: Was the Socialization Commission Doomed to Failure Right from the Start?," in *The First Socialization Debate (1918) and Early Efforts Towards Socialization*, ed. Ursula Backhaus, Günther Chaloupek, and Hans A. Frambach (Cham: Springer, 2019), 8.

<sup>90</sup> Heinrich Ströbel, *Socialisation in theory and practice*, trans. H. J. Stenning (London: P. S. King, 1922), 6.

asked why he was a member, he answered sardonically that 'if somebody wants to commit suicide, it is a good thing if a doctor is present'.<sup>91</sup>

Efficiency was a subject the commission deliberated on, particularly in the coal industry. The inefficiencies of nationalisation were key points levelled against socialist elements of the commission. If Germany was going to recover from war, industries required productive management. Technological questions were important here.<sup>92</sup> Social Democracy's case for socialisation also rested on efficiency. Bauer in particular saw socialisation as important in making mining efficient. German trade unions lobbied the commission to reduce the eight-hour workday to six hours. Since coal mining was arduous, reduced hours benefited both workers and efficiency.<sup>93</sup>

Karl Kautsky laid out his plans for socialisation in *Guidelines for a Socialist Action Programme* (1919). The structural aim of the 'social republic' was not just to ameliorate class struggle but to 'remove the foundation of class struggle'. Socialisation would end class war. The 'main tool' of socialisation was nationalisation (note the distinction between the two). He called for large-scale nationalisation of all mines, forests, and estates over 100 acres.<sup>94</sup> Entire branches of industry required nationalisation. Independent bodies would preside over the new state enterprises. They would include three groups of elected representatives: workers, consumers, and state administrators. Kautsky thought having industrialists on councils would facilitate

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<sup>91</sup> Quoted in Jr William A. Darity and Bobbie L. Horn, "Rudolf Hilferding: The Dominion of Capitalism and the Dominion of Gold," *The American Economic Review* 75, no. 2 (1985): 363. For a list of the full membership see *Sozialisierungs Kommission*, vol. 1 (Berlin: Hans Robert Engelmann, 1920), VII.

<sup>92</sup> Quoted in J. Ronald Shearer, "Talking about Efficiency: Politics and the Industrial Rationalization Movement in the Weimar Republic," *Central European History* 28, no. 4 (1995): 490.

<sup>93</sup> Christian Seidl, "The Bauer-Schumpeter controversy on socialization," *History of Economic Ideas* 2, no. 2 (1994): 486-487.

<sup>94</sup> Kautsky, *Richtlinien für ein sozialistisches Aktionsprogramm*, 7.

class conflict. They would clash with workers' interest and could mislead economic planning to enrich themselves. Kautsky also saw an enlarged role in consumer cooperative societies on the municipal level. They required socialisation (not nationalised) and be put in charge of things like bread production. Pharmacies and other services would also face socialisation.<sup>95</sup> Kautsky believed that once socialism was complete there would be no distinction between producer and consumer.<sup>96</sup>

Kautsky's fiscal objectives are noteworthy. He was aware of the enormous economic and financial demands the Reich was facing. Along with a reduction in military spending, he called for fiscal and financial reforms that would keep Germany afloat, balancing a vast socialist program with reparation demands he was expecting from the Entente. First, he denounced the printing of copious paper money. 'Producing paper money will not do. It would simply drive up prices and increase instability in the monetary system to 'unbearable levels'.<sup>97</sup> Kautsky was aware of Germany's rising inflation problem. He knew a highly inflated economy would wreak havoc on a government trying to implement vast and transformative legislative agenda. Given Germany's need to maintain productive output, he wanted a smooth transition from cartels to state enterprises. He offered capitalists government bonds at a 'moderate rate of interests' as compensation for expropriating their businesses. Outright confiscation would 'alarm' productive elements of capital. If productive forces ground to a halt, then it did not matter how much tax the rich paid. If the economy tanked socialism would be impossible. In Kautsky's view, the state would raise revenue by three main avenues of direct taxation from income, wealth, and inheritance.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 10-11.

<sup>96</sup> Kautsky, *The Labour Revolution*, 109-110.

<sup>97</sup> Richtlinien für ein sozialistisches Aktionsprogramm, 8.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 4-5.

Kautsky's economic orthodoxy was unshakeable. Socialism was only possible in a mature and expanding capitalist economy.

Eduard Bernstein's views were similar to Kautsky but he took a more long-term approach. He had seen the false starts of the Socialisation Commissions.<sup>99</sup> The SPD's right wing was never serious about their implementation, yet he remained optimistic of potentials the republican system offered. In his summary of the 1918 revolution, immediate socialisation was unfeasible given Germany's class structures. A large peasantry and petit-bourgeoisie, and the dominance of industrialists made this impossible.<sup>100</sup> Bernstein became convinced of socialisation not long after. Writing in 1922 when Germany's economy was booming due to inflation, Bernstein thought socialisation could avert potential crisis. He thought Germany's full employment and relatively high exports were temporary in an increasingly anarchic post-war capitalism. Due to the imposition of tariffs by wealthier victor states, Bernstein worried Germany's advantage would quickly diminish. It would no longer be able to get its hands on foreign currency to pay for raw materials it did not produce. The depreciation of the currency was beneficial for large firms and taxation was not enough to cover expenses of the Reich. The only way out of this was rapid socialisation of industry.<sup>101</sup>

Bernstein placed significant faith in Weimar's worker's councils.

The Works Council Act has high claims. This law... inspired by the November Revolution, gives the workers and employees rights... that Karl Marx would have thought to be impossible.

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<sup>99</sup> Large elements of the German labour movement and the more left-wing elements of the social democracy were frustrated by this. Contemporaries noted this in the 1920s. See A. Ellinger, "Socialization Schemes in the German Building Industry," *International Labour Review* 1, no. 7 (1921).

<sup>100</sup> Bernstein, *Die Deutsche Revolution*, 197-198.

<sup>101</sup> *Der Sozialismus einst und jetzt*, 139-141.

It is not perfect... But one thing is certain... it is a piece of social policy that, like no other, gives the workers and employees the opportunity to become partners.<sup>102</sup>

Without mentioning it, Bernstein believed the republic should promote class equilibrium. More so than others, he placed faith in institutions established by the German Revolution to build a society free of class antagonism.<sup>103</sup> By 1922 Bernstein believed socialism was still possible. However, collaboration with capital was essential and would take decades to accomplish.<sup>104</sup>

Otto Bauer was cognisant of the mammoth task following the formation of the Austrian Republic. In the mayhem following the Hapsburg collapse, Bauer emerged as a key thinker within the SDAP on socialisation.<sup>105</sup> His works garnered attention in Germany as well.<sup>106</sup> The destruction of the Austro-Hungarian Empire left Austria a rump state.<sup>107</sup> The decoupling from Hungary and the war left the country impoverished. This shaped Bauer's thinking on socialisation; his particular concern was a malnourished labour force. Bauer saw socialism as needing a two-pronged strategy. Its first objective was obvious; to change the distribution of goods. Equity in the distribution of goods was paramount in fighting poverty, but this did not mean paying workers equal incomes. Working hours would still determine income

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Eduard Bernstein, "The German Works Council Act and its Significance," *International Labour Review* 1, no. (1921): 175-184.

<sup>104</sup> After the German Revolution Bernstein repeatedly came to blows with much of party leadership, particularly over its backpedal on socialisation. As the 1920s wore on he became increasingly isolated from the party. See Steger, *The quest for evolutionary socialism*, 233-244.

<sup>105</sup> Gruber, *Red Vienna: experiment in working-class culture 1919-1934*, 22. – Before the war he was already a towering figure in Austro-Marxism. His most famous work was on socialism and the national question.

<sup>106</sup> Emmy Freundlich, "Das neue arbeitsverhältnis," *Die Gesellschaft* (1927): 522-532. For a detailed secondary account of this see Günther k. Chaloupek, "The Austrian debate on the economic calculation in a socialist economy," *History of Political Economy* 22, no. 4 (1990).

<sup>107</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes: the short history of the twentieth century 1914-1991* (London: Abacus, 1995), 32-33.

distribution.<sup>108</sup> Productivity was vital. The second and more telling objective was to improve the current output of goods at high quality. If socialisation occurred without these changes Austrian workers would be worse off than under capitalism. He warned against violent seizures of the means of production. If there were upheavals on factory floors, a destructive civil war would ensue obliterating the means of production. He feared it would invite intervention from the Entente powers on the side of capital. To this end, Bauer thought Austria's path to socialism had to be 'gradual' and 'systemic... progressing purposefully from one step to another'.<sup>109</sup> Industry had to be 'mature' for socialisation.<sup>110</sup> The parallels with the Russian Civil War raging at the time are undeniable. Bauer ended chapter one of *Der Weg Zum Sozialismus* with a telling quote.

For the political revolution can only, as Marx said, "release the elements of the future society"; but to build the new society out of these elements is a task that cannot be accomplished in street fighting, not in civil war, but only in creative legislative and administrative work.<sup>111</sup>

Bauer thought heavy industry should be socialised first. The cartelisation of these industries would make it easy for the government to 'expropriate'. In 1926 he extended this to banks as targets for expropriation.<sup>112</sup> A 'capital levy' on 'capitalists and landlords' would compensate captains of industry and shareholders for their losses. Bauer then came to his most interesting view; the rejection of state management.

Who should now manage the socialized industry? The government? Not at all! If the government dominated... it would become all too powerful ... Such an increase in government

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<sup>108</sup> Bauer, *Der Weg zum Sozialismus*, 1-5.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Chaloupek, "The Austrian debate on the economic calculation in a socialist economy," 660.

<sup>111</sup> Bauer, *Der Weg zum Sozialismus*.

<sup>112</sup> "The Transition from the Capitalist to the Socialist Society', in *Einführung in die Volkswirtschaftslehre, Werkausgabe (1927-28)*, Volume 4, pp. 344-77."

power would be dangerous to democracy. And at the same time, the government would badly manage the socialised industry; nobody manages industrial companies worse than the state...Social democrats have never demanded nationalisation, always just the socialisation of industry.<sup>113</sup>

Bauer's distinction between nationalisation and socialisation was a recurring theme among socialists.

Bauer wanted 'industrial associations' to run every branch of industry. These would replace cartels and industrial federations, but workers would not dominate them. Bauer made this last point emphatically. He rejected syndicalist notions of worker management; while admirable, they would not 'satisfy the needs of society'.<sup>114</sup> 'Board of Directors' comprised equally of four groups would control these 'industrial associations'. The first would be representatives of the state. The Secretary of Industry and Trade would choose their leader, and the legislative body would choose the rest. They would represent the overall interests of the state to ensure targets would meet national interests guaranteeing the country's immediate economic demands and long-term objectives. Consumer organisations made up the second group. They would elect their own representatives. The third group would be workers elected from unions and other employee organisations. Finally, industrialists and entrepreneurs needed representation, very much unlike Kautsky. Bauer wanted no class dominating management of the economy.<sup>115</sup> He charged the associations with a wide range of responsibilities. They would promote a reduction in the cost of production by investing heavily in what we would now call research and development. Product specialisation would drive down costs and keep competition at bay; competition was destructive. Technical proficiency was important. Technically 'imperfect factories'

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<sup>113</sup> *Der Weg zum Sozialismus*, 10-12.

<sup>114</sup> "The Transition from the Capitalist to the Socialist Society," 347.

<sup>115</sup> *Der Weg zum Sozialismus*, 9-12.

faced closure.<sup>116</sup> A socialist economy was a highly rationalised economy. Bauer's theory of class equilibrium was clearly an influencing factor. His ideas were hugely popular throughout Europe. *Der Weg zum Sozialismus* was reproduced in 12 languages within two years of publication.<sup>117</sup> Importantly, Bauer's notions of industrial democracy were strongly influenced by G.D.H Cole's pre-war work *The World of Labour* (1913).<sup>118</sup>

Arthur Henderson had been a key figure in British socialist circles since the turn of the century. He was the Labour Party's leader from 1914 to 1917. Writing in 1918, he saw Labour's support for war being contingent on a promise to transform Britain in its aftermath. In a similar vein to many Social Democrats, 1914 represented a break with the past capitalist order.

It will not be a democratic victory if it results merely in the restoration of the capitalistic regime... Victory for the people means something more than the continuance of the old system of production for the profit of a small owning class, on the basis of wage-slavery... The status of the workers will be revolutionised... the economic insecurity and social miseries of the past will have no place.<sup>119</sup>

In a more comprehensive publication, *The Aims of Labour* (1918), Henderson outlined Britain's road to socialism. He rebuked any notion of popular uprising. Revolution was 'alien to the British character'.<sup>120</sup> A 'quiet revolution' through parliamentary processes was the British way.<sup>121</sup> The aim of this 'quiet revolution' was 'democratic' control of society. This contained four overarching objectives; a universal national

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Czerwińska-Schupp, *Otto Bauer*, 225.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 261. – The Webbs' pre-war work also influenced Bauer's thoughts on socialisation.

<sup>119</sup> Arthur Henderson, *Towards a new world; being the reconstruction programme of the British Labor Party; together with an introductory article by Arthur Henderson, the leader of the party, and a manifesto to the labor movement from the English Fellowship of Reconciliation* (New York: W.R. Browne, 1918), 3.

<sup>120</sup> *The Aims of Labour* (New York: Labour Party, 1918), 57.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

minimum standard of living, democratic control of industry, a 'revolution' in national finances, and a 'surplus wealth in the common good'. These were broad euphemisms for a nationalised economy. Railways, mines, canals, and power plants were to be immediately nationalised if Labour were to come to power. Power plants and coalmines were a particular priority for Henderson since expensive electricity was unaffordable for much of working class.<sup>122</sup>

Henderson outlined plans for fiscal reform. Henderson viewed taxation as the prime lever of redistributing wealth while balancing budgets. Direct taxation would raise revenue from the well-heeled. Henderson wanted indirect taxes abolished, though taxes on luxury items would remain. A capital levy would pay off Britain's wartime debt. Finally, through ever-increasing budget surpluses that nationalisation and direct taxation would provide, the government would invest in 'public provisions for the sick and infirm'. Henderson guaranteed public investment in scientific research alongside public access to music and literature.<sup>123</sup> Henderson envisaged a vastly expanded democracy where legislation kept class cleavages to a minimum.

Not all British socialists saw parliament as important to transition. Guild socialism held significant sway within elements of British socialism. Their commitment to decentralised, craft-oriented democracy saw them follow a distinct vision. G. D. H. Cole, guild socialism's most prolific writer, took centre-stage. Cole did not fixate on Marxism, though saw his work as a logical extension of it.<sup>124</sup> He detested the commodification of workers; he saw the price of labour determined by market forces

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 99-102.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 105-106.

<sup>124</sup> Wright, *G. D. H. Cole*, 208-210.

as repugnant.<sup>125</sup> The democratisation of industrial life was more than a 'scientific' question for Cole; it was a moral one.

Let us look at industry, not as a science apart, but as a vital function of communal life. If we do this we shall at once see Labour, not as an abstraction in relation to other abstractions, but as men cooperating in a common service... Is this system, we must ask ourselves, consistent with our theory of life? Is it rational or just or tolerable? Is it even efficient according to its own narrow standards? Surely to employ Labour in industry in such a way as to ignore its humanity.<sup>126</sup>

From 1920 to 1924 Cole published several books and articles on how socialism should progress. His analysis began with how the wartime economy fundamentally altered British capitalism. Cole saw wartime state intervention as having quashed 19<sup>th</sup> century 'private capitalism'. Before the war, there were clear delineations between the state and market operations. Private capitalism was *laissez faire*, untouched by the state. With the end of this old-style capitalism came an end to various alternative collectivist visions. The contours of both the state and its politics had altered significantly.<sup>127</sup> 'State capitalism' was the new order of things. 'Private capitalism and profiteering would continue with the moral and physical support of the state'.<sup>128</sup> Cole was weary of the new status quo. State capitalism stealthily endangered workers. Workers could be 'acquiesced' into the new system. He thought labour would agree to lower hours, higher pay, and better conditions at the expense of its collective power.<sup>129</sup> He worried union leaders would mistake state direction in the economy for socialisation. State capitalism maintained the wage system by placating certain demands of organised

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<sup>125</sup> G. D. H. Cole, *Labour in the Commonwealth: A book for the Younger Generation* (London: Swarthmore Press, 1919), 15-20.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>127</sup> It is unclear what Cole means by other forms of collectivist visions. But we can assume that it is a reference to forms of anti-state socialism.

<sup>128</sup> G. D. H. Cole, *Self-Government in Industry*, 5th ed. (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1920), 278.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 276-277.

labour. In the long run this would weaken both workers and their unions. For Cole, the only way to end state capitalism was the development of the 'guild idea' amongst workers.<sup>130</sup> He agreed with Marx and Lenin that the state reflected the ruling class.<sup>131</sup>

... clearly laid down in modern Marxist teaching, and most clearly of all by Lenin, is that the present political machine is definitely an organ of class domination.<sup>132</sup>

State capitalism's domination meant that the state was now the only institution that could initially wrest control of industry. The state was an unavoidable tool in the initial stage of nationalisation.

Those who, like Syndicalists, are content to oppose every extension of State action are merely disarming in face of the inevitable: powerless to stop nationalisation, they are leaving the State to stew in its own 'juice'.<sup>133</sup>

This was particularly true for certain industries like mining and railways. Once nationalisation occurred, guild control would grow out of the trade union movements operating within those industries.<sup>134</sup>

But war had another effect on working class attitudes. The new capitalism war had created 'increased consciousness of its [the working class] strength'. Cole attributed this to revolutions in Germany and Russia.<sup>135</sup> He viewed Britain as having the capacity for such change albeit in a different, probably more peaceful form.<sup>136</sup> It was the Guildsmen's task to outline a clear plan for when this would happen. The system Cole

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 280.

<sup>131</sup> G. D. H. Cole, *Guild Socialism Re-stated* (London: Leonard Parsons, 1920), 187-188.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 122-123.

<sup>133</sup> Cole, *Self-Government in Industry*, 175.

<sup>134</sup> "The Guild Movement in Great Britain," *International Labour Review* (1922): 185-186.

<sup>135</sup> *Guild Socialism Re-stated*, 22-24.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

articulated was a highly decentralised arrangement of National Guilds.<sup>137</sup> Localisation was essential for Cole.<sup>138</sup>

The Guild system would also cover banking and consumer groups. Cole's major work in this period came in 1922 in *Chaos and Order in Industry*. In a comprehensive manner, he outlined his vision for a society free from class conflict. Capitalism no longer seemed perpetual. The guild solution would avoid violent revolution warning radicals that this would destroy the expertise needed in modern economies.

Immediately, Guildsmen press for the nationalisation or municipalisation of the ownership of every industry or service which can be regarded as ripe for public ownership, and especially of such great public services as mines, railways and other transport, shipbuilding and electricity. At the same time... they aim at the immediate establishment of a form of workers' control.<sup>139</sup>

Guilds would mean democratic ownership and management by workers run according to their local workplace. Cole's policy on coal was remarkably similar to Bauer. Elected councils composed of equal representation of workers, industrialists, government officials, and consumers would manage the industry.<sup>140</sup> Cole thought that the instability of capitalism was solvable if industry was in public hands. The class conflict created by this chaos would force workers into voting for the Labour Party, allowing it to win government and implement Guild socialism. Guild socialism's democratising ethos would end class conflict.

Harold Laski saw the Reform Act of 1918 as the harbinger of the 'slow destruction' of economic privileges that halted 'access of workers to the moral assets of the state'.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Though he admitted that some industries would necessitate centralisation, like railways. *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>139</sup> G. D. H. Cole, *Chaos and Order in Industry* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1922), 59.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 62-85.

<sup>141</sup> Laski, *The State*.

Laski, a Fabian socialist, had developed a far more agreeable view to the state than Cole. In *Grammar of Politics* (1925) Laski argued that no matter the form, management of the means of production must be 'vested in the state'.<sup>142</sup> He directly contradicted Cole's view that municipal forms of socialisation could not cope with organising industry on a national scale.<sup>143</sup> How could industry plan for the needs of a nation if it remained localised in both its organisation and temperament? The state and community stood intertwined. Only the state could guarantee the public's interest if it ran industry. Laski, like most other serious thinkers, knew nationalisation would take years, and that a quick, all-encompassing move would be 'catastrophic'. While he was purposefully vague about how the setup of these industries would look like, he did envisage broad participation from industrialists and the like. Laski wanted them to settle pay, working hours, and factory management. 'They must be free, in a word, to make their vocation an effective function in the same way as the doctor or lawyer'.<sup>144</sup>

Laski envisaged a hierarchical structure for nationalised industries. At the 'apex' of every industry would be a 'governing board' empowered by parliament to implement industrial policy. Its membership would consist up of three groups, managers/technical experts, workers, either manual or clerical, and representatives of the public. Interestingly, board member appointments would last several years and could have their terms extended without limit. A system of committees would exist, from the governing board down to work committees on the factory floor. Laski felt that work committees would allow workers a sense of ownership within the factory. Given the hierarchal nature of these proposals, he worried that a sprawling

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<sup>142</sup> *A grammar of politics*, 439.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, 440.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*

bureaucracy would overwhelm workers.<sup>145</sup> Work committees would mitigate bureaucratic alienation while bringing a certain amount of democracy to the workplace. Laski saw the state as the central agent in transforming Britain into a socialist country with a meticulous industrial hierarchy running from the top of industry to factory floors.

Sidney and Beatrice Webb, the Fabian socialist wife and husband, thought the democratic moment allowed for a total reimagining of the parliamentary system. In their vision, two parliaments would coexist guiding Britain to socialism. There would be one parliament for political legislation, the other for social, industrial, and economic policy.<sup>146</sup> The second 'social parliament' would nationalise major industries and oversee their operation. Each industry would have a permanent standing committee reporting to it.<sup>147</sup> For them, the separation of political decision-making from 'the social', facilitated economic democracy. A formal separation of power from the political parliament was important since the vast responsibility of governing an economy was too much for a single institution to handle. The two parliaments would need to coordinate legislation between each other. An executive body would be setup for the two parliaments to send representatives too. While they would coordinate affairs, economic planning needed a separate sphere since 'political considerations' could impinge upon the tasks of economic organisation.<sup>148</sup> Parliamentary forms had to evolve and expand for socialist transformation to take place. Their socialism conceptualised reconstruction of the political and economic apparatus of the state.

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 458.

<sup>146</sup> Sidney Webb and Beatrice Webb, *A constitution for the socialist commonwealth of Great Britain* (London: Longmans, 1920), 111.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 160-175.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 122-124.

German socialist Max Cohen forwarded a similar proposal at the SPD congress in 1919 but was met with little support.<sup>149</sup>

In the cases listed above the transition to socialism would be a decades-long process coinciding with radical reformation of state and governmental structures. Republican government created the opportunity to transform society into an economic democracy. German Social Democrat Emmy Freundlich thought 'Bourgeois democracy has created the ideal of the democratic republic'.<sup>150</sup> From Marxists to liberal socialists, it was clear capitalism's time had come. In one form or other, socialists believed that the war had transformed capitalism and the state. The transformation made socialism possible, either by allowing revolutionaries to establish republics that would lead to socialism, or by a revolution within existing parliamentary structures. For most socialists, the expansion of industrial democracy would end class antagonism. For socialists, the historical moment upon them was unique. While some of their notions are traceable prior to 1914, never had socialists entertained the possibility of socialism with genuine hope. The novelty in new political structures allowed for this.

Socialist transformation within national boundaries was only the first step. A common belief across the various spectrums was that the breakdown of capitalist international order caused war. Capitalism and imperialism were intimate bed fellows. Imperialism needed blunting if capitalism was to be overcome. If socialism were to succeed than the international scene, like its domestic locales, required democratisation. Ironically

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<sup>149</sup> Maier, *Recasting Bourgeois Europe*, 143. For an abridged version of his ideas see Max Cohen, "Deutscher Aufbau und die Kammer der Arbeit," in *Theorie und Praxis der direkten Demokratie: Texte und Materialien zur Räte-Diskussion*, ed. Udo Bernbach (1973). Originally published in 1920.

<sup>150</sup> Freundlich, "Das neue arbeitsverhältnis," 522.

but self-aware, socialists lay their hopes for peace in the newly established League of Nations where victorious imperial powers dominated.

### **The International Situation and the League of Nations**

The war reinforced assumptions about the incestuous relationship between capitalism and imperialism. Socialists believed imperialism was a direct result of the ruling class desire to extend their market reach. Nationalism was a by-product of the political machinations of the ruling class to mould public opinion to obtain their own ends. For most Social Democrats the League of Nations was an opportunity to annul imperialism. The League could be a court of arbitration between nations, eliminating the need for open conflict. However, socialists remained sceptical of its structure.<sup>151</sup> Being conceived by President Wilson and dominated by European powers, it needed both democratic reform and power over other states for its decisions to be binding. F.G. Gould summed up the League's dilemma for many socialists by saying it was the 'best of a bad situation'.<sup>152</sup>

In October 1918 Bernstein published *Völkerbund oder Staatenbund: eine Untersuchung* (League of Nations: An Investigation). Bernstein feared that despite immense destruction caused by the war, capitalism, and the 'friction' it produced between countries made another outbreak of barbarism likely. Wilson's call for a League did not satisfy Bernstein. If capitalist powers ran the League, then inherent contradictions within capitalism would continue to make war probable.

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<sup>151</sup> For how the Labour and Socialist International dealt with the League of Nations see Laqua, "The LSI as a Protagonist of Interwar Internationalism," 178-180.

<sup>152</sup> F. J. Gould, "Socialist and the League of Nations," *Justice*, January 13 1921, 1.

As long as the state is founded on a capitalist economic system and pursues imperialistic tendencies, can one expect that the league of states will bring lasting peace? It is thoroughly uncertain. The security proposals put forth by Wilson and other bourgeois pacifists—freedom of the seas, equality of trade relations, open door, and so on—will not suffice to remove imperialistic rivalries.

Bernstein thought Wilson's ambition for the League would come to no avail if the states involved were not socialist. Socialism had to curtail imperialism. He ended with a very republican plea. With the recent creation of the German Republic, the ideals of the League were more of a reality. 'The Kaiserreich was war, the Republic will be peace'.<sup>153</sup>

Like Bernstein, Kautsky joined the USPD in 1916 opposing the war.<sup>154</sup> The League was a chance to curb the militarism that he and Bernstein had spent their lives opposing.<sup>155</sup> In Kautsky's *Action Programme* he vocalised a vague call for a creation of a 'league for all the people's'.<sup>156</sup> In 1924 he outlined, in detail, his perspective. Given the war was over the League had a chance to evolve beyond a tool for the Entente. Kautsky's reasoning behind his hopes for the League were novel, albeit one within strict Marxist framework. He pressed socialists to view the League like they viewed the state. Once the state was a tool for bourgeois domination; now universal suffrage gave workers the chance to use the state to instil socialism. He wanted socialists to treat the League in the same light.

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<sup>153</sup> Eduard Bernstein, *Völkerbund oder Staatenbund: Eine Untersuchung* (Berlin: Paul Cassirer, 1918), 29.

<sup>154</sup> Steger, *The quest for evolutionary socialism*, 222. - Bernstein opposed the war and was heartbroken by the SPD's capitulation to German militarism. He however remained sceptical of revolutionary elements of the splinter group. There was also a growing anti-Semitism in the SPD too that Bernstein obviously was directly affected by.

<sup>155</sup> For more on socialist responses to German militarism before the war, with a particularly emphasis on Kautsky and other major German thinkers, see Nicholas Stargardt, *The German idea of militarism: radical and socialist critics, 1866-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

<sup>156</sup> Kautsky, *Richtlinien für ein sozialistisches Aktionsprogramm*, 16.

At first the state was our most powerful adversary, the upholder of middle-class domination... Thus, also, we must not judge the League of Nations according to its present state and actions, but according to what could be made of it if the Socialists of the world took the greatest interest in it and set out for it a programme, to the carrying out of which they would employ all their efforts.

The League was the only 'rational' mechanism that would halt conflict between nations.<sup>157</sup>

Across the channel, there were British socialists who felt the same. Belfort Bax (someone who Kautsky thought little of since he thought him to be unscientific) saw great potential in the League of Nations despite its setbacks. The lack of 'material power' in enforcing its mandates was a significant hurdle the League would have to surmount.<sup>158</sup> Bax's conclusion was markedly similar to Kautsky;

All political and social change is facilitated when there is a framework within which the elements of change may nest themselves under cover of older and already established forms, even though this framework was meant by its originators to harbour quite other elements and to subserve quite other ends... The old feudal institution, the Estates General of France, became the seed ground of the French Revolution... As social democrats... we cannot fail to welcome even the present imperfect institution of the League of Nations... [it] is destined, we may hope, to become powerful instrument for the cause of progress.<sup>159</sup>

The League, despite its capitalist and imperialist contours, could serve as a vehicle for peace.

G.D.H. Cole was far more sceptical about an institution run by capitalist powers. Writing in 1919, he expressed great concern at what this may entail. A 'League of Capital' would be conceivable since war may not be a 'paying proposition'. Instead,

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<sup>157</sup> "The League of Nations," *Justice*, April 10 1924, 4.

<sup>158</sup> E. Belfort Bax, "The League of Nations," *Justice*, June 22 1922, 4.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*

capital may choose to unite and share in the exploits of the world's markets, keeping the working class of capitalist nations subjugated.<sup>160</sup> The League was nothing more than capital formalising itself into an international institution to coordinate anti-worker activities.

There were concerns about the effectiveness of an institution dominated by the victorious powers. Exacting revenge on Germany was destructive. In outlining the Labour Party's foreign policy, Henderson thought that the Entente's domination of the League was counterproductive to peace. It had been 'degraded to an instrument of allied policy'.<sup>161</sup> The structure of the League and its exclusion of other nations, particularly Germany and Russia, were also problematic. For Henderson, all nations that agreed to the League's covenant should become members. He rejected the executive powers of the Council. The League's impetus should have been firmly centred in the Assembly of the League.

[The council] reduces the League to futility, for one or two States may successfully flout the opinion of the overwhelming majority of States and use the League for selfish purposes. *It is obvious, I think, that the League of Nations will never become a great organ of internationalism if the will of its members may be thwarted by the opposition of a few States.*<sup>162</sup>

Furthermore, the Covenant would need to be redrawn to make all states that signed up agree to the League's rulings in binding terms. Henderson also made the point that member-countries would have to submit to arbitration when in dispute with another state before resorting to military action. If countries faced unjustified invasion, other members would intervene on the side of the invaded country.<sup>163</sup> Henderson envisaged a radically redesigned League, decentralised, and infinitely more democratic.

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<sup>160</sup> Cole, *Labour in the Commonwealth*, 54.

<sup>161</sup> Arthur Henderson, *Labour and Foreign Affairs* (London: Labour Party, 1922), 9-10.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*

The left-wing journalist and ILP member, H. N. Brailsford took a more sceptical approach. He saw the root problem as an ideological one. At the heart of the League lay a liberal ideology whose only concern was to construct an international body 'purely on a political foundation'.<sup>164</sup> The concerns of the League were the regulation of state boundaries and mediation of military confrontation. It neglected issues of commerce, industry, and banking. This left the League impotent in solving the world's most pressing issues. Brailsford pondered whether the League could regulate economic matters. The institution would be truly empowered: 'no state would dream of defying it'.<sup>165</sup> While the League attempted to ease the flow of trade through a variety of committees with an array of impressive specialists attached, the results were negligible.<sup>166</sup> Brailsford envisaged a highly empowered institution that regulated trade in a free and fair manner. Nations would rely on one another through trade networks and would not defy the League out of fear of severe economic repercussions. Without economic power, the League's authority rang hollow.

The economic potentials Social Democrats saw in the League was a marker of wider held beliefs concerning world trade. Hilferding figured the League could counter the 'tendencies of monopolistic organised capital'.<sup>167</sup> State sovereignty required regulation by the League to not only curb rearmament efforts, but to assure free trade as well. Hilferding wanted to restrict economic sovereignty.<sup>168</sup> Trade barriers would no longer protect the interests of cartels, strengthening the bourgeois' hold on

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<sup>164</sup> H. N. Brailsford, "The socialist road to peace: cutting the roots of imperialism," *New Leader*, April 24 1925.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

<sup>166</sup> See Patricia Clavin, *Securing the World Economy: The Reinvention of the League of nations, 1920-1946* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 1-11.

<sup>167</sup> Rudolf Hilferding, "Realistischer Pazifismus," *Die Gesellschaft* 2, no. 8 (1924): 97-114.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

power.<sup>169</sup> Carrying on from pre-1914 conceptions that protectionism was conflict inducing, socialists wanted to reconfigure the post-war order to promote free trade.

### **Free Trade and Capitalism**

Socialists considered the question of tariffs as inseparably tethered to class antagonism. Trade barriers protected the landed elite at the expense of cheap produce. Socialists wanted to assure working class consumption. Indeed, moderating prices for basic necessities was vital to working class livelihood. Social Democrats also blamed protectionism for the leadup to the war. Trade wars easily lent themselves to open conflict. As the 1920s wore on, protectionism and economic nationalism became *de-rigueur* across Europe. Trade barriers overshadowed the promotion of free trade promised by the League in its early years. When it became clear that European governments were going to regress into economic nationalism, socialists became concerned that a new round of trade-wars would lead to another Europe-wide conflict.

At the LSI's first congress protectionism was unanimously opposed. 'Unrestricted protectionism balkanised European economies'.<sup>170</sup> At its second congress in 1925 the LSI called on the ILO to setup up a 'National Boards of Imports and Exports' to empower an international institution to further encourage free trade'.<sup>171</sup> Widely held

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<sup>169</sup> Smaldone, "Rudolf Hilferding and the Theoretical Foundations of German Social Democracy, 1902–33," 278-280.

<sup>170</sup> The Resolutions of the Hamburg Congress, LSI 12-14.

<sup>171</sup> *Resolution for International Congress*, Labour Party: Labour and Socialist International, LSI 12-14, 13/2/3, 1925, People's History Museum,

ideas about capital's compulsion to capture and expand markets by controlling trade through protectionism informed such notions.

Bernstein drew from pre-war SPD debates in conceptualising ideas on trade barriers. The coalition between industrialists and the Junker gentry pushed for trade protection to control domestic markets. Subverting free trade and evading foreign competition pushed up prices. Workers bore the costs of expensive produce. Capturing local markets and making them exclusive to domestic landowners perpetuated hostile social relations. Bernstein saw this as an indirect attack on workers and ultimately part of wider class struggles.

...the majority of the population is made up of consumers, not entrepreneurs in production resulting in further class struggle. The fight of farmers against consumers, consumers against producers, tradesmen against and large industry, all these are class struggles.<sup>172</sup>

Tariffs produced unremitting contradictions amongst various social groupings. Since cessation of class antagonism was how Bernstein conceptualised a socialist Weimar, protectionism directly sabotaged the republic's mission. The imposition on tariffs by other European countries also worried Bernstein since it potentially undermined German exports. In 1921-22 Germany's high inflation and low currency value propped up exports. Knowing the situation could change quickly, Bernstein called for free trade to rectify this prospective disaster.<sup>173</sup>

Hobson regarded the importance of free trade both in moral and material terms.<sup>174</sup> In *The Morals of Economic Internationalism* (1920), he described the power dynamics of the

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<sup>172</sup> Bernstein, *Der Sozialismus einst und jetzt*, 66.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

<sup>174</sup> Hobson was the first major thinking to outline a theory linking capitalism and imperialism in his work *Imperialism: a case study* (1902). While not Marxist the work set the stage for future theoretical frameworks influencing Hilferding, Kautsky, Luxembour and Lenin. See Murray Noonan, *Marxists theories of imperialism: a history* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2017), 15-19.

international order, which made most countries reliant on one another for survival. The exception was the United States, arising from the war as the world's foremost creditor. It had potential to sustain autarky; the US could afford to withdraw from world affairs and follow a policy of 'America for Americans'.<sup>175</sup> For European countries in ruin this was impossible. Hobson suggested a kind of 'European Consortium', led by Britain, and other rich neutrals who could provide financial support for poorer nations.<sup>176</sup> As the title suggests, internationalism was the only course for Europe that would lessen the chance of another war. At the heart of this was free trade. Protectionism, tariffs, trade barriers and nationalistic foreign policies weakened bonds between nations and increased the likelihood for conflict. While Hobson was deeply liberal in conviction and temperament, he was also concerned with how class relations affected a country's trading practices. Governments pushing protectionist methods would unleash animosity between protected and unprotected sectors of industry. This created further antagonisms between labourers, consumers, and producers. Hobson additionally feared nationalistic trade policies would make smaller nations suffer. They would become 'economic bond slaves, at the mercy of the master states for their food' and other life necessities.<sup>177</sup> Austria was a prime example. It was rump state whose population centred on a singular cultural and political hub, Vienna. Vienna was without 'free access to its former sources of supply and markets'.<sup>178</sup> The conclusion of such protectionism would result in a handful of nations and empires monopolising large tracts of world resources. Hobson ultimately viewed free trade as equalising smaller nations, allowing them access to world markets

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<sup>175</sup> J. A. Hobson, *The Morals of Economic Internationalism* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1920), 26. Hobson viewed America as the great democratic experiment. While he preferred US's involvement in European affairs, he was sympathetic with its isolationist traditions, since they protected foreign influence from the 'great experiment'.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, 55-56.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

without fearing monopolistic tendencies of large empires. Protectionism favoured the ruling class, jacked up food prices for workers, and contributed to trade wars. Hobson, like Hilferding and Bernstein, saw monopolistic tendencies inherent in capitalism as detrimental to class conflict and ultimately global security.

Socialist intellectuals and their parties pushed for free trade. The SPD and France's SFIO emerged from the war convinced tariffs and other forms of protectionism led to conflict. As Brian Shaev puts it, many socialists came out of the war with liberal notions that free trade promoted peace.<sup>179</sup> Such thinking, however, was an essential part of Second International socialism, particularly surrounding the extensive debates on imperialism and militarism. The war augmented socialist free traders. First, socialists felt that the war had proven them correct. Unchecked imperialism, in which protectionism played a part, laid the foundations of rivalry among powers. Of increasing concern was the price of food and life essentials. Rising economic nationalism prompted further calls to reduce trade barriers. Working-class consumption was indispensable. Although unspoken, there lay electoral calculations here as well. Free trade undoubtedly made food cheaper and this was politically useful to socialists. A policy promising cheap food had obvious electoral remunerations. Nonetheless, class politics and class antagonism were important factors. For many socialists, protectionism propped up much of the ruling class, particularly in Germany. Free trade was a way to further democratise Europe and its economies.

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<sup>179</sup> Brian Shaev, "Liberalising Regional Trade: socialists and european economic intergration," *Contemporary European History* 27, no. 2 (2018): 261.

## Social Democracy and the Russian Revolution

In October 1917, the Bolsheviks overthrew the Provisional Government of Russia. The first communist regime in the world was born. The subsequent civil war cemented the new Soviet government as it defeated White counterrevolution. The Russian Revolution sent reverberations throughout the socialist world. Leninism and his model of professional revolutionarism had succeeded in ways other parliamentary forms of socialism had not. Leninism fused political thought and action into a 'quicken unity'.<sup>180</sup> Russia defied standard Marxists interpretations of revolutionary conduct. Russia presented a theoretical conundrum for Social Democracy.<sup>181</sup> Why did revolution succeed in a European backwater? What did this mean for socialists in highly developed capitalist countries? The veterans of German Social Democracy met the new regime with scepticism, as was the case with much of Social Democratic Europe. Nonetheless, the Communist government could legitimately claim to be the world's only socialist state. Not all viewed Bolshevism as a perversion. Some took into consideration Russia's backwardness begrudgingly accepting the barbaric and authoritarian tendencies of the regime, particularly Otto Bauer.<sup>182</sup> Bauer typified the larger SDAP, since it attempted, as one historian put it, 'to walk a fine line between reformism and bolshevism'.<sup>183</sup> Socialist commitment to internationalism further complicated this quandary. Soviet Russia had withstood foreign intervention from Allied powers who then banned it from joining the League of Nations.<sup>184</sup> However critical socialists were towards the Soviet state, they fervently argued for Russia's

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<sup>180</sup> Anderson, *Considerations of Western Marxism*, 14.

<sup>181</sup> Czerwińska-Schupp, *Otto Bauer*, 226.

<sup>182</sup> Salvadori, *Karl Kautsky*, 294-295.

<sup>183</sup> Berman, *The Primacy of Politics*, 99.

<sup>184</sup> In reality Allied military intervention was limited since governments were reluctant to commit resources to another war. Evan Mawdsley, *The Russian Civil War* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2011), 164-168.

involvement in world affairs and opposed any kind of intervention to displace the regime.

From 1918, Kautsky launched an ideological crusade against Bolshevism and the Russian Revolution.<sup>185</sup> At the beginning of *The Dictatorship of the proletariat* (1918) he began his campaign. The exclusion of other socialists from government defined Bolshevism and Social Democracy as two distinctive movements. They were 'fundamentally' divergent in their methods; one was democratic, the other dictatorial.<sup>186</sup> Kautsky was fully aware of the significance of the Russian Revolution, and its potential to affect change outside Russian borders. The rest of the book was spent explaining the importance of democratic governance in the socialist cause. The Bolsheviks at best only represented a small fraction of Russia's working class. A government with such slim support would lead to civil war as the only means of 'adjusting social antagonisms.'<sup>187</sup> For Kautsky, Lenin's regime was necessarily barbaric. Violent coercion was the only method for forging a social basis of support for the regime.

Kautsky expanded these arguments in *Terrorism and Communism* (1919). By taking advantage of war-ravaged Russia, with its starving worker-soldiers and disorganised peasantry, Kautsky thought Lenin had cynically brought the Bolsheviks to power without Marxist scientific considerations.<sup>188</sup> For Kautsky, Lenin's lack of scientific

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<sup>185</sup> Salvadori, *Karl Kautsky*, 251.

<sup>186</sup> Kautsky, *The dictatorship of the proletariat*.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

<sup>188</sup> Karl Kautsky, *Terrorism and Communism: A contribution to the Natural History of Revolution* (Berlin: National Labour Press, 1919), 162-163. The Bolsheviks officially began calling themselves the Communist Party in 1918. The party went through various name changes, in 1918 it was called the Russian Communist Party, from 1925 to 52 All-Union Communist Party, and from 1952-91 Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

rigour hung over every major turn of events. Kautsky met Lenin's rapid abolition of Russian capitalism with serious misgivings.

It is not so easy to organise as it is to expropriate. A capitalist organisation is complex, which finds its intelligence in the capitalist himself. If it is desired to abolish capitalism, some form of organisation must be created, which should function as well without an industrialist at its head. This is not so simple... it demands a proletariat, which is conscious of its duties, not only towards its own neighbours, and comrades, but also towards society as a whole — a proletariat, moreover, which has become accustomed to voluntary discipline and self-administration through long years of mass organisation; and which, finally, is intelligent enough to distinguish the possible from the impossible, and the scientifically educated leader from an ignorant demigod without a conscience.<sup>189</sup>

Russia was not ready for socialism. Capitalism had not matured. The lack of technical knowhow and working-class experience in controlling the means of production was a disastrous omen for the revolution. Interestingly, Kautsky laid the blame on the Soviet masses. He accused them of being impatient with Russia's economic progress; Lenin simply took advantage of this. Like the Paris Commune in 1871,<sup>190</sup> the Russian Revolution was striving for goals it had no chance of achieving. It violated too many Marxian shibboleths. Though Kautsky's accusations seem hasty, writing no more than seven months after the October revolution, he rightly pointed to the real threat of a burgeoning and oppressive bureaucracy. To gain control of Russia's chaotic and war-torn industries, a new bureaucratic class would have to emerge nullifying 'workmen's councils'. Arbitrary rule would dictate the direction of the revolution.<sup>191</sup> *Terrorism and Communism* had a far-reaching impact. Trotsky even felt compelled to counter it by

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<sup>189</sup> Ibid., 164-165.

<sup>190</sup> French Revolution was consistently used as analogies in Social Democratic debate, particular in its polemics against communism. See Jean-Numa Ducange, *The French Revolution and Social Democracy: The transmission of history and its political uses in Germany and Austria, 1889—1934*, trans. David Broder (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 130-137.

<sup>191</sup> Kautsky, *Terrorism and Communism*, 202.

publishing *Terrorism and Communism: a reply to Karl Kautsky* (1922).<sup>192</sup> Polish-born communist (now member of the KPD) Karl Redek did the same in his book *Proletarian Dictatorship and Terrorism* (1922).<sup>193</sup> Kautsky's anti-Bolshevism was further inflamed by the Soviet invasion of Georgia in 1921. Kautsky spent several months visiting the Menshevik republic in late 1920. The Social Democratic administration impressed him. The invasion demonstrated to Kautsky that the Russian Revolution was in its 'Bonapartist' phase.<sup>194</sup>

Despite the regime surviving White counterrevolution, Lenin's death in 1924, not to mention the success of the New Economic Policy, Kautsky remained unconvinced of the USSR's (USSR from 1922-1991) viability. It was 'already showing signs of impending collapse'. The power struggle following the death of Lenin in 1924 proved to Kautsky that internal divisions threatened the regime's existence.<sup>195</sup> Kautsky ended his article arguing that internal rancour was a sign that the party had lost its 'backbone' amongst the rank and file.

It is a colossus with feet of clay, which can no longer survive any serious crisis, which is additionally incapable of any regeneration from within. The first deep-seated crisis that it meets must end in catastrophe for it.<sup>196</sup>

Bernstein dedicated an entire chapter of *Der Sozialismus einst und jetzt* to Soviet socialism. He, like Kautsky, saw Lenin as 'bastardising' Marxism. Violence and state centralisation exacerbated Russia's backwardness. Bernstein thought Lenin's entire

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<sup>192</sup> See Leon Trotsky, *Dictatorship vs. Democracy (Terrorism and Communism): A reply to Karl Kaustky* (New York City: Workers Party of America, 1922).

<sup>193</sup> See Karl Radek, *Proletarian Dictatorship and Terrorism*, trans. P. Lavin (Detroit: Marxian Educational Society, 1922).

<sup>194</sup> See Karl Kautsky, *Georgia: A Social-Democratic Peasant Republic: Impressions And Observations*, trans. H. J Stenning (London: Internatinal Bookshops, 1921).

<sup>195</sup> "Die Lehren des Oktoberexperiments," *Die Gesellschaft* 1, no. 4 (1925): 374.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*, 379.

doctrine was solely derived from Marx's conclusions in the *Communist Manifesto*. Bernstein followed this with criticising Lenin's vulgar interpretation of *Das Kapital* missing its subtle points about capitalists being the driving force of oppression. Lenin had ignored Marx's point about capital; that despite destructive forces it unleashed, it was 'an important factor in promoting progress... and human society'.<sup>197</sup> Similar to Kautsky, Bernstein thought Lenin had not let capital modernise Russia. Without technical knowhow (something only attained from capitalists) the country was condemned to backwardness. In Lenin's ignorance of capitalist development, (Bernstein openly agreed with Kautsky, he called him a 'true Marxist') the historical conditions for socialism in Russia were nowhere near met.

Lenin and his party lacked the 'scientific socialism' of their western counterparts. Bernstein wrote that the Bolsheviks were more 'in the image of primitive Tsarism than the image of Marxism; from the latter they are only a caricature'. The regime had propelled the working class to control the means of production prematurely. They lacked the skill and technical knowledge to properly manage the economy. 'The workers were simply unable to guide them independently; they were not ... entrepreneurs'.<sup>198</sup> From Bernstein's perspective, Bolsheviks were directly to blame for Russia's hungry cities and dilapidated industries. Bernstein did not mention the brutal civil war the Soviet regime grappled with. This probably mattered little to him; too many Marxist oversights made the regime viable. Unscientific doctrine historically determined the regime to fail. One scholar calls this the 'unilinearism schemata'.<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> Bernstein, *Der Sozialismus einst und jetzt*, 119.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*, 118-123.

<sup>199</sup> Linden, *Western Marxism and the Soviet Union*, 36.

Not all adhered to such rigid determinism. Austrian socialists were much more amenable towards Soviet Russia. After all, the Vienna International, spearheaded by the SDAP, wanted a unified international with the Comintern.<sup>200</sup> Otto Bauer is particularly noteworthy here. In a pamphlet published in 1920, *Bolschewismus oder Sozialdemokratie* (1920), Bauer laid out an alternative view. He agreed with Kautsky that Lenin's model of revolution was unapplicable outside of Russia. However, the revolution was not a lost cause. Bauer considered the Bolshevik revolution a divergent road to socialism more suited to Russia's distinct historical conditions than those of Western Europe.<sup>201</sup> The regime, however primitive and brutal, could lay the basis for a modernised economy. Socialist transition would come later. Bauer queried Kautsky's claim of a coup d'état. Bauer accepted there was a basis of support amongst sections of the Russian proletariat. There needed to be some kind of mutual understanding between the two strands of socialism. In a 'final analysis', Bauer thought the Russian Revolution was a progressive force in history, modernising Russia's backwardness. This precipitated a quarrel between Kautsky and Bauer. Kautsky could not accept any kind of legitimation of the Soviet Republic.<sup>202</sup>

The émigré leader of the Mensheviks Raphael Abramowitch took a similar view to Bauer.<sup>203</sup> In his book *Die zukunft Sowjetrusslands* (1923) Abramowitch accredited the revolution with 'destroying' feudalism in the countryside, liberating peasant farmers from landlords.<sup>204</sup> However, the state of the countryside remained bleak. He doubted

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<sup>200</sup> Imlay, *The Practice of Socialist Internationalism*, 79-81.

<sup>201</sup> Otto Bauer, *Bolschewismus oder Sozialdemokratie?* (Wien: Wiener Volksbuchh, 1920), 4-5.

<sup>202</sup> Salvadori, *Karl Kautsky*, 297.

<sup>203</sup> Abramowitch was in fact second in command to party leader Fyodor Dan. See *ibid.* He was also involved in the LSI where he organised funds to defend the Social Revolutionaries put on trial by the Soviet government after the Civil War.

<sup>204</sup> Raphael Abramowitch, *Die zukunft Sowjetrusslands* (Jena: Thüringer Verlagsanstalt und Druckerei G.m. b. H, 1923), 9-10.

that there would be any support for the regime in rural regions having been hit hard by grain requisitioning during the civil war. More importantly, Abramowitch doubted the regime could increase peasant living standards. This was a dangerous contradiction for the Soviet government.<sup>205</sup> The condition of the urban proletariat was little better in Abramowitch's eyes. Through wartime measures (this was likely a reference to War Communism), factory conditions were abysmal. Industrial output, Abramowitch calculated, had fallen well below 1914 levels (recent studies have shown he was correct about this).<sup>206</sup> In the face of this, workers' support for the government was minimal. The Soviet regime had failed to make good on its promises and had failed in its industrial policy. Most pertinently, the Soviet dictatorship had established a centralised bureaucracy that, in Abramowitch's words, had 'nothing to do with theoretical self-government... resembling czarist bureaus'.<sup>207</sup> He still saw hope that Russian Social Democracy could triumph over Bolshevik 'Bonopartism'.<sup>208</sup>

For Bauer and Abramowitch, despite various crimes committed by the Bolsheviks there was something still progressive lying within the revolution. Bauer saw the brutality of the revolution as a result of Russia's economic and political backwardness. The ensuing dictatorship was ugly, but its socialist experimentation needed acknowledgment. Abramowitch, having directly been involved in the Revolution and the Civil War was more sceptical and critical of the new regime. Despite this, he admitted that the revolution with the Bolsheviks at the helm had done away with Russia's reactionary past. For Bernstein and Kautsky the original sins of suppressing social democracy and ignoring historical materialism remained unforgivable.

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<sup>205</sup> Ibid.

<sup>206</sup> R. W. Davies, *Soviet economic development from Lenin to Khrushchev* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 23-25.

<sup>207</sup> Abramowitch, *Die zukunft Sowjetrusslands*, 21-22.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid., 52-55.

In 1925 the editor of the Independent Labour Party's newspaper *New Leader* published a piece on Lenin. 'Of Lenin, I am sure... he will be considered a man of great action'.<sup>209</sup> Marxist-Leninism, stripped of liberal culture allowing it to be easily understood by the 'simple mind' of the peasant and soldier. According to the *New Leader*, after January 1917 another revolution in Russia was unavoidable. Lenin gave it direction, purpose, and order.<sup>210</sup> The more mainstream British Labour Party was far more sceptical. Thomas Kennedy, a Labour MP, was extremely critical of this type of thinking. Lenin and the Bolsheviks were brutal autocrats. He came down very strongly against the ILP for such sympathetic opinions.<sup>211</sup> H. N. Hyndman saw 'Bolshevist control of Russia' as demonstrating the pitfalls when revolutionary zeal rules the day. A dictatorship of the proletariat gave 'expression to an insignificant minority of middle-class doctrinaires.'<sup>212</sup>

Socialist wanted Russia involved in global affairs despite Bolshevik dictatorship. Any kind of foreign interference against the new regime was imperial overreach. Even when there was significant tension between the LSI and Comintern, the LSI remained steadfast in this commitment, as did intellectuals within it. Otto Bauer, during his speech at the LSI's first congress in Hamburg in May 1923 said;

In reality this policy of intervention on the part of the capitalist government is not directed against the Soviet Republic but against the Russian Revolution itself... Whatever may separate us from the Bolsheviks, the defence of the Russian Revolution against counter-revolutionary intervention remains one of our great tasks.<sup>213</sup>

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<sup>209</sup> Editor, "Lenin - The man and his work," *New Leader*, April 3 1925, 11.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>211</sup> Thomas Kennedy, "The New International," *Justice*, May 31 1923, 2.

<sup>212</sup> H. M. Hyndmann, *The Evolution of Revolution* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1921), 390.

<sup>213</sup> International action against international reaction: Speech to Hamburg Congress, LSI/12-14.

Henderson's pamphlet on the Labour Party's foreign policy echoed a similar position, though couched in terms of national interest. He called for Britain to end the policy of 'cold hostility'. Full diplomatic recognition would soon follow. 'Russia should be brought into the community of nations'. Similar sentiments echoed throughout the British movement.<sup>214</sup>

Social Democrats took keen interest in Lenin's New Economic Policy (NEP). Lenin introduced the NEP at the 10<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in March 1921. In the face of a ruinous economy and the Kronstadt Rebellion, it oversaw limited market socialism, with particularly attention paid to the countryside. It replaced forceful (and violent) grain requisition with a tax; surplus grain could be sold on the market. In the industrial sphere, state-owned firms paid workers differing rates according to skill and productivity. Market forces were to dictate prices of small goods.<sup>215</sup> The Anglo-Russian Trade Treaty signed in 1921, ending British blockade and normalising trade relations, was a part of this new turn by the regime. Tactical retreat to limited capitalism instigated rancour amongst the left of the Bolsheviks. The NEP caused somewhat of a commotion within the LSI as well. The Independent Labour Party thought the NEP was proof the regime had moderated. It was now time for unification of the LSI and the Comintern, or at least an opening of dialogue to that end. The ILP forwarded the proposal at an executive meeting of the British section of the LSI in

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<sup>214</sup> Henderson, *Labour and Foreign Affairs*, 8. Macdonald made the same argument in J. Ramsay Macdonald, *The foreign policy of the Labour Party* (London: Cecil Palmer, 1923), 43-44. Also see Norman Angell, "The danger from France," *New Leader*, February 2 1923, 9.

<sup>215</sup> Mark Edele, *The Soviet Union: a short history* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2018), 77-78.

February 1926.<sup>216</sup> Both Labour and the wider LSI leadership, particularly Friedrich Adler, refuted this.<sup>217</sup>

The NEP's ideological backpedal gave Social Democrats further ammunition against the regime. *Justice* was particularly critical about the new turn.

[The NEP] is being realised in a disorderly and clumsy fashion. Private initiative has not been nibbed and is the bait of concessions to foreign capitalists. Co-operative organisation has been done away with... The leaders themselves are obviously beginning to lose their heads... International capital will never come to Russia.<sup>218</sup>

A year later, *Justice*, had a 'correspondent' report back of the disastrous outcomes of the NEP.<sup>219</sup> The mixture of communism with capitalistic elements led to only a 'few wily speculators'; no class had benefited beyond this. Industrial output came nowhere near to satisfying the population. High unemployment was thought to be a direct result of the NEP. High inflation of the rouble was just another example of Bolshevnik incompetence.<sup>220</sup> To Kautsky, the NEP was an inevitable outcome of the Bolshevniks' hasty abolition of Russian capitalism. In one tract he gave a mock quote from Lenin;

I have ruthlessly beaten capitalism to the ground. But it will not let go of me, and now we both lie there interlocked, and if I want to stretch my limbs again I must help my opponent to his feet.<sup>221</sup>

Otto Bauer viewed the reintroduction of capitalism in Russian countryside in strict Marxian terms, though refracted through his theory of class equilibrium. Under the

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<sup>216</sup> *Executive Committee of the LSI: British Section, February 17*, Labour Party: Labour and Socialist International, LSI/12-14, LSI/14/20/1, 1926, People's History Museum.,

<sup>217</sup> Friedrich Adler, "The organisation problems of working class unity II," *Labour Magazine* V, no. 2 (1926): 63-66.

<sup>218</sup> "Bolshevism & World Capitalism," *Justice*, November 10 1921, 2.

<sup>219</sup> It is highly doubtful that *Justice* had sent a correspondent to Russia.

<sup>220</sup> 'From a correspondent', "Unemployment and wages in Soviet Russia," *Justice*, July 6 1922.

<sup>221</sup> Kautsky, *The Labour Revolution*, 163.

NEP a class of Nepmen had emerged creating new antagonisms and societal contradictions. Bauer thought that a fascist-style dictatorship was an inevitable outcome preserving the balance between 'workers, farmers, and nepman', the latter being the new bourgeoisie. The preservation of all three classes guaranteed the regime's survival. Authoritarian rule was the only way to balance these classes.<sup>222</sup>

Marxist-Leninism had shown itself highly capable of attaining and cementing power. Social Democrats, despite democratic victories, were far from the levers available to Lenin and the Communist Party. After the October Revolution what followed was a vast bureaucratic state, highly militarised in nature. Russia was an anathema to Social Democrats' understanding of socialism. Nonetheless, there was, at times, a relativistic approach to the regime. Some accepted its brutality considering the historical circumstances it arose from. People like Kautksy could not forgive the double Marxist sin committed by Lenin. Oppressing fellow socialists and skipping proper historical stages of Marxist development doomed the revolution. But across the spectrum of Social Democracy, there was an almost unanimous acceptance of the international legitimacy of the regime.

### **Conclusion**

The democratic moment saw a flurry of intellectual outputs from socialist thinkers. The contours of Second International socialism remained but the new epoch emboldened them. Marxist theories took on new dimensions. Many believed that dialectical relationships had altered with democratisation. The kind of politics produced prior to 1914 had changed. There was now a distinctive rapport between

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<sup>222</sup> Bauer, "The Equilibrium of Class Strengths, *Der Kampf*, 17 January, 1924," 334.

class and state since suffrage was achieved. The extension of democracy into the industrial sphere was thought possible in one form or another. The creation of the League of Nations offered socialists an international institution, in need of reform and empowerment, but could nonetheless combat destructive imperialism and militarism. The success of Marxist-Leninism in Russia was a new development for socialists and was the most significant challenge to orthodoxies established during the Second International period. Bolshevik Russia confronted Social Democratic orthodoxy with far more force than the Revisionist debate did. Socialist responses to it were largely critical nevertheless complex, but in the spirit of internationalism, saw it as the legitimate government of Russia.

# Malaise

Immediately after the close of the war, the workers in almost every country were swept forward by a surge of revolutionary will...The demand of the Communist Manifesto, "Workers of all lands unite," seemed, for a moment, near to fulfilment. International ties, which had been severed during the war were revived; and the international organisations were revived, not only with a larger membership than they had had before the war, but animated with a new spirit. There was, however, no change in the structure of the international organisations, or in tactics or strategy. There was more insight, a more vigorous will to war, a livelier international class consciousness-but, as of old, the fight was still narrowly national... There was nothing more than an exchange of programs, the joint discussion of problems, the formulation of directives, and, when a conflict arose between workers and employers, the provision of financial support. In very few instances was the fight of the workers in one country aided by solidarized activity on the part of the workers in other countries.

Edo Finmen, 1925<sup>223</sup>

## Introduction

Social Democrats were confronted with the stabilisation of bourgeois politics and society.<sup>224</sup> By the mid-1920s the democratic moment was stunted. Its crescendo had played and enthusiasm for seemingly possible futures were sobered. The new republics survived potentially fatal crises but were still fledgling. Universal suffrage did not yield the electoral dominance needed for socialist construction. The

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<sup>223</sup> Edo Finmen, *Labour's Alternative: The United States of Europe or Europe Limited* (Labour Publishing Company: London, 1925), 100.

<sup>224</sup> See Maier, *Recasting Bourgeois Europe*.

transitional period, the anchor of so much socialist discourse, had fallen short. Capitalism's post-war fragility had complex and paradoxical effects on socialist thinking. Deflation caused persistent unemployment and unstable wages in much of Europe. For many socialist thinkers capitalism's contradictions were plain to see but a final crisis was not on the horizon. New threats to republican democracy were also emerging. Fascism in Italy, and beginnings of Nazism in Germany, made some fearful for the safety of their hard-fought for institutions. Attempting to cope with inertia on multiple fronts, socialist thinkers produced works endeavouring to solve these crises. Social Democracy's intellectual fixation passed from futuristic imaginings to presentism.

Marxists began reflecting on the viability of both socialism and capitalism, confronting the former's stagnation and the latter's permanency. Democratic revolutions meant to empower workers tended to do so only in coalition with bourgeois parties. What did this mean for the future of socialism? Some Marxists interrogated their long-held determinism. The new reality empowered workers though could potentially weaken their revolutionary zeal. Hilferding weighed these contradictions pondering if improved hours and higher pay promoted capitalism amongst workers.<sup>225</sup>

Social Democracy's frustrations did not go unnoticed by the Front generation. For certain socialists who served in the war, Marxism's scientific pretensions were lay bare. Its determinism predisposed it to weak politicking. Though this new generation was yet to be influential, its ideas were nascent.<sup>226</sup> Henry De Man's *The Psychology of Marxism Socialism* (1925) was the first major intervention. Some within British socialism were going through an analogous journey. Oswald Mosley's book

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<sup>225</sup> Rudolf Hilferding, "Problem de Zeit," *Die Gesellschaft* 1, no. 1 (1924): 2-3.

<sup>226</sup> White, *Lost Comrades*, 55.

*Revolution by Reason* took aim at what he regarded as the meagre leadership of the Labour Party.<sup>227</sup>

This chapter elucidates the malaise that set in amongst Social Democracy through six themes. The first theme explains the stunting of democratic moment. Unstable economics together with a determined effort to deradicalise labour put an end to the revolutionary surge. The second theme discusses how Social Democrats dealt with the stalling of the democratic surge. Limitations of electoral democracy forced socialist to contemplate the future of their movement. Democratic revolution did not inevitably translate to working class ascendancy. These complications precipitated ideological challenges from a younger generation exasperated with the movement's lack of success. The third theme discusses how socialists thought to tackle persistent economic crises. Struggling economies mixed with deflationary government policy brought on industrial conflict. British thinkers in particular turned their attention to facilitate industrial peace. The fourth theme deals with threats from the right. By 1923 fascism had come to Italy. Mussolini's fascists made quick work of Italian labour sending warning signs to the wider movement. While the Nazi Party was still small, the Ruhr crisis alerted socialist to its threat. The fifth theme highlights persistent elements of the initial post-war vigour. There had been some successes. Red Vienna was Europe's most impressive Social Democratic experiment. Likewise, socialists greeted the Labour Party's 1929 triumph. Despite the hung parliament it was a much-needed victory for socialism. Finally, the survival of Soviet Russia further complicated attitudes towards Bolshevism. Its improving economy convinced some that the Russian Revolution was a worthwhile experiment. Others still worried about its dictatorial tendencies, particularly with the rise of the 'Bonapartist' Stalin.

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<sup>227</sup> "Reconsidering European Socialism in the 1920s," *Journal of Contemporary History* 16(1981): 265.

## Unstable Economics and Politics

Depressed economies, lacklustre electoral results, and a general rightward trend to deradicalise working class rancour blunted the democratic moment. Social Democracy's turn away from futurism resulted from these uneven experiences.

After 1918 there was a short surge in the world economy. The initial boom was met with a rapid downturn. In 1919 governments desperately attempted to re-establish domestic normality by lifting price controls, but as one economic historian put it, the boom and bust cycle of capitalism in 1919-1921 was the most extreme in history until 1929.<sup>228</sup> Frustrated demand and an increasing money supply drove up prices. This, for the short term created booming conditions in much of Europe. European trade seemed to return to pre-war conditions. In 1920 circumstances rapidly deteriorated. By the middle of the year income began a downward spiral in most countries, except for those experiencing high inflation.<sup>229</sup>

For Central European countries experiencing high inflation the boom persisted. Inflationary conditions allowed governments, struggling with domestic political upheaval, room to defer collecting tax revenue. Relaxed access to credit gave businesses a chance to rebuild. Social cohesion required full employment. In Hungary, for instance, 600 new companies emerged between 1921 and 1923 in an atmosphere of

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<sup>228</sup> Barry Eichengreen, *Golden Fetters: The Gold Standard and the Great Depression, 1919-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 100.

<sup>229</sup> Charles H. Feinstein, Peter Temin, and Gianni Toniolo, *The World Economy between the World Wars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 42.

easy credit feeding opportunities to build assets and quickly pay back depreciated loans.<sup>230</sup> Weimar Germany used inflation to ease many of its political and economic conundrums. By 1921 Germany was operating at full employment because of inflationary conditions.<sup>231</sup>

With goods in short supply and populations living in wartime austerity, pent up demand unleashed a torrent of inflation across Europe by 1923.<sup>232</sup> Inflation hit central European republics the worst. Germany was the most industrial country affected. The burden of reparations and its political ramifications inflicted a near-mortal blow to the Weimar Republic. The reparations crisis began Germany's descent into hyperinflation.<sup>233</sup> The occupation of the Ruhr in January 1923 turned inflation into hyperinflation. Once France and Belgium expropriated the most productive areas of Germany, the Reichmark became utterly worthless. In November 1923, \$1 American dollar was the equivalent of 42 million Reichmarks.<sup>234</sup> There were legitimate fears the occupation would result in another war.<sup>235</sup> Anxieties proliferated that the crisis could whip up support for Social Democracy's enemies on the far left and far right bringing an end to the Weimar Republic.<sup>236</sup>

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<sup>230</sup> Patricia Clavin, *The Great Depression in Europe, 1929-1939* (London: Macmillan Press, 2000), 32.

<sup>231</sup> Richard Bessel, "Unemployment and demobilisation in Germany after the First World War," in *The German Unemployment: experiences and consequences of mass unemployment from the Weimar Republic to the Third Reich* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 25.

<sup>232</sup> Clavin, *The Great Depression*, 20-22.

<sup>233</sup> Gerald D. Feldman, *The Great Disorder: Politics, Economics, and Society in the German Inflation, 1914-1924* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 419.

<sup>234</sup> Ivan T. Berend, *An Economic History of Twentieth-Century Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 51.

<sup>235</sup> Adam Tooze, *The Deluge: The Great War, America and the Remaking of the Global Order, 1916-1931* (New York: Penguin, 2014), 415.

<sup>236</sup> Conan Fischer, *The Ruhr Crisis, 1923-1924* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 49.

Stabilisation of the mark checked inflation and arrested political instability. The cost was relatively high unemployment.<sup>237</sup> Due to industry's excess capacity from the inflation years, stabilisation brought on unemployment. With the introduction of the new Rentenmark came tough austerity measures. The German government cut deep into social spending. In late October 1923, the government dismissed 300,000 public servants.<sup>238</sup> Unemployment became a persistent issue. Inflation had also wiped-out local capital; personal savings had all but disappeared. International loans substituted a dearth of local investments.<sup>239</sup> The Dawes plan, drawn up by the US further stabilised Germany's economy. Inflation was now in check and a steady flow of American credit fed a now expanding economy. American loans made Berlin glitzy and glamour. In the background however, unemployment persisted, directly affecting Germany's working classes. Stabilisation hurt the petty bourgeoisie too. Credit restrictions stunted small and medium business, something the Nazis would capitalise on in years to come.<sup>240</sup> The average unemployment rate from 1923 to 1928 was 10.8 per cent. In 1928 it shot up to 18 per cent.<sup>241</sup>

Britain's post-war experience was not quite as extreme but nonetheless grim. The war ended Britain's financial hegemony. The 'threads of world trade' that had run through London were 'torn'.<sup>242</sup> The post-war boom saw high employment, despite demobilisation and the end of wartime production. This created a false sense of

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<sup>237</sup> Bessel, "Unemployment and demobilisation," 39.

<sup>238</sup> Mommsen, *Weimar Democracy*, 145.

<sup>239</sup> Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes*, 90.

<sup>240</sup> Zara Steiner, *The lights that failed: European International History 1919-1933* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 239.

<sup>241</sup> Deduced from statistics in B. R. Mitchell, *European Historical Statistics, 1750-1970* (London: Macmillan, 1970), 167.

<sup>242</sup> E. J. Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire: from 1750 to the present day* (London: Penguin, 1999), 105.

security.<sup>243</sup> Britain experienced a slump in 1920-21. A collapse in world trade hurt its staple industries. Long-term structural changes in international trade were beginning to bear down too. Since the war disrupted Britain's trade, other countries filled the gap. In 1918 unemployment was at 0.2 per cent, an effective rate of full employment. In 1921 it had skyrocketed to 14.8 per cent. In the following year it went past 15 per cent.<sup>244</sup> The government, following established orthodoxy, went ahead by bringing Britain back on the Gold Standard – something the up-and-coming economist John Maynard Keynes famously disagreed with.<sup>245</sup> The government, directed by the Bank of England and Treasury, candidly in the interests of capital, overvalued the pound at its pre-war level and slashed budgets. General deflation ensued<sup>246</sup>

Miners had their wages reduced in 1921. In a controversial move, union leaders decided not to strike against the wishes of the miners themselves. Tensions in industrial relations remained high. Britain pursued economic growth through deflation and an overvalued pound, attempting to return to the Gold Standard and re-establish London as a financial centre. In 1925 the Gold Standard was reintroduced. The coal companies announced wage reductions and increased hours for miners. The Trades Union Congress (TUC) rejected this eventually calling a general strike attempting to force the British government into making the owners backdown. From May 4-12, 1926, roughly 1.7 million workers around the country struck.<sup>247</sup> It was Britain's largest single industrial action in history. The strike fell on deaf ears. The

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<sup>243</sup> S. Howson, "Slump and Unemployment," in *The Economic History of Britain Since 1700*, ed. R. C. Floud and D. N. McCloskey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 265.

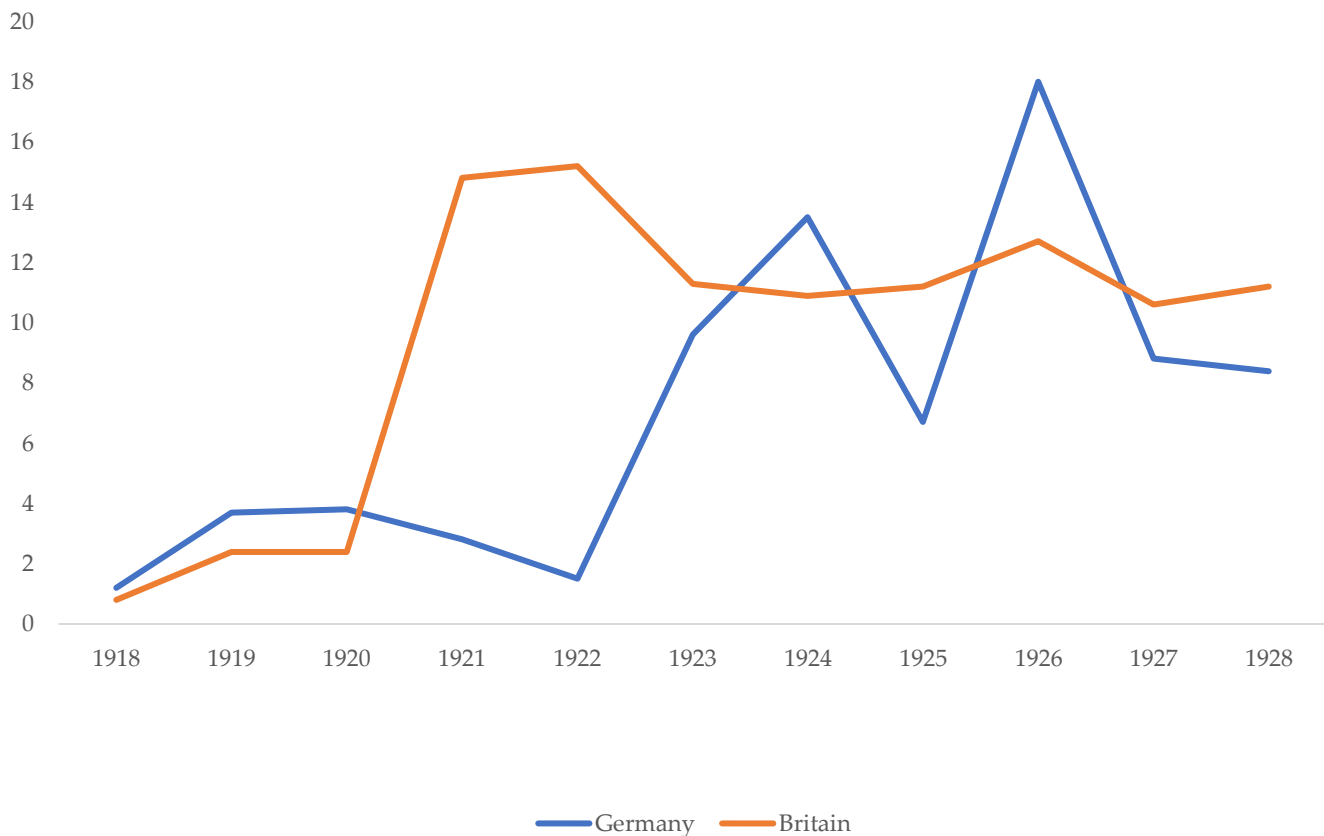
<sup>244</sup> Mitchell, *Historical Statistics*, 168.

<sup>245</sup> See John Maynard Keynes, "The economics consequences of Mr Churchill (1925)," in *John Maynard Keynes: The Essential Keynes*, ed. Robert Skidelsky (New York: Penguin, 2015).

<sup>246</sup> Alan Booth, "Unemployment and Interwar Politics," in *The Road to Full Employment*, ed. Sean Glynn and Alan Booth (London: Allen & Unwin, 1987), 44-45.

<sup>247</sup> G. A. Philips, *The General Strike: The politics of Industrial Conflict* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1976), 218.

dispute within the mining industry went on for another 6 months. Bosses locked out workers. Eventually union leaders were powerless to prevent a return to work. Wage reduction and longer hours had won.<sup>248</sup> As in Germany, unemployment continued throughout the decade. Britain's average unemployment from 1921 to 1928 was 12 per-cent.<sup>249</sup>



Unemployment in Germany and Britain, percentage of labour force. Data from B R. Mitchell. *Historical Statistics*, 166-168.

Austria too suffered from high unemployment. Like Germany, it also used inflation to stimulate economic activity. From 1921 to 1923 it built up a large amount of

<sup>248</sup> See *ibid.*

<sup>249</sup> Derived from figures in Mitchell, *Historical Statistics*, 168.

productive industrial capacity. By 1925 it was operating at about 75-80 per cent of its pre-war industrial output.<sup>250</sup> Once currency stabilisation kicked in unemployment surged. In 1924 127,000 were jobless. In 1927 the number rose to 200,000.<sup>251</sup>

France's experience with unemployment was nowhere near as severe as that of Britain or Germany. In 1921 unemployment was at about 280,000, a relatively small number given its population.<sup>252</sup> France's most industrial areas suffered from war. Nonetheless its recovery was impressive. France emerged bankrupt from the war with a heavy debt owed to the United States. The franc lost 50 per cent of its pre-war purchasing power. Reconstruction was rapid with large assistance from the government on the assumption that German reparations would pay for it. The depreciated currency helped exports. By 1926 exports had risen 56 per cent from their 1913 levels. As one economic historian put it, France was one of the few countries in Western Europe to benefit from inflation and a depreciated currency.<sup>253</sup>

The unstable economy corresponded to a turbulent political scene. The politics of coalition building resulting from lacklustre electoral performances inhibiting socialist transformation. Dreams to control the means of production quickly faded. Nonetheless, coalition governments afforded some reform.

Throughout the 1920s the SPD consistently won plurality at elections, but never enough to guarantee government. Its electoral height was at Weimar's first election in January 1919 when it received just over 37 per cent of votes. The USPD received just

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<sup>250</sup> Derek H. Adlcroft, *The European Economy 1914-2000*, 4th ed. (New York: Routledge, 2001).

<sup>251</sup> Mitchell, *Historical Statistics*, 166.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid.

<sup>253</sup> Adlcroft, *The European Economy*, 36-37. Belgium also had a similar experience.

under 8.<sup>254</sup> Even with the unification of the two parties, the united SPD never attained such heights again. The newly formed KPD became a contender for working-class votes. The failure of the USPD turned the relatively small Communist Party into a mass organisation with over 300,000 members.<sup>255</sup> In the three elections from 1924 to 1928 the KPD averaged 10 per cent.<sup>256</sup> The SPD shared power with two centrist parties; the Centre Party and the German Democratic Party. After 1923, however, it did not take part in government until a short stint at the end of the decade

The SPD was able to pass limited reform. Between 1918 and 1920 were the most productive years for Social Democracy. Several Social Democratic policies became law; the eight-hour day, unemployment benefits, and a system of wage regulation and arbitration.<sup>257</sup> The most important social policy legislated in Weimar was unemployment insurance. The fourth Marx cabinet passed it in 1927. The SPD was not a part of the government but voted in favour of the bill. The wider German labour movement had strenuously lobbied for it. When unemployment skyrocketed in 1929, demands on the insurance became massive. This bitterly divided the Republic and was part of the political gridlock that led to its breakdown.<sup>258</sup>

British Labour's experience was one of growing influence and electoral significance. It too failed to attain a majority. Labour saw minority government briefly in 1924 for 9 months. In 1929 Labour came into minority government again only months before

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<sup>254</sup> Daniele Caramani, *Elections in Western Europe since 1815: Electoral results by constituencies* (Macmillan: London, 2000), 425-426.

<sup>255</sup> Eric D. Weitz, *Creating German Communism, 1890-1990: From popular protests to socialist state* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 78-80.

<sup>256</sup> Caramani, *Elections in Western Europe*, 430-434.

<sup>257</sup> Hunt, *German Social Democracy*, 30-35.

<sup>258</sup> Young-Sun Hong, *Welfare, Modernity, and the Weimar State, 1919-1933* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 209.

The Crash. Both times it relied on support from the Liberal Party. The 1924 minority government had little in the way of legislative achievements but was politically important. It proved Labour could govern. Apparently, the Prime Minister Macdonald thought the government had few long-term prospects seeing its role as an exercise in public relations. The Labour government also further entrenched anti-socialism in British politics. It undermined the Liberal Party as the progressive alternative to the Tories.<sup>259</sup> Many Liberal voters subsequently voted Conservative; it seemed voting socialist was a step too far. The defeat of the Labour government in the House of Commons in October 1924 saw a swift victory by the Conservatives.

In Austria, Social Democrats struggled to lead governments despite their impressive Viennese stronghold. They received 40 percent of votes in 1919 and 42 percent in 1927 but only saw time in government in 1919.<sup>260</sup> The rival Christian Social Party could command more support than the German centre parties. Together with the nationalist parties (wanting unification with Germany), the right could easily dominate Social Democrats. Coalition building was fraught with difficulty: Karl Renner was the only Social Democratic chancellor of the First Austrian Republic.

French socialists fared decently, seeing their votes surge from before the war. They too did best in the first election after the war. In 1919 they gained just over 20 per cent of the vote. They remained an oppositional party until 1924. At the 1924 election the SFIO, through a pact with the Radical Party, won power under the Cartel Des Gauches. The Prime Minister, Edouard Herriot, was a Radical. The socialists, led by Léon Blum, tried to balance their radicalism with their attachment to parliamentarism. They would support the Radical-led government with votes but not participate in

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<sup>259</sup> Ross McKibbin, *Parties and People: England 1914-1951* (Oxford University Press, 2010), 60-61.

<sup>260</sup> Caramani, *Elections in Western Europe*, 107.

cabinet. Once the government broke down Blum began to change tract, something that would be fortuitous when it came to the Popular Front government in the next decade.<sup>261</sup>

By the late 1920s a semblance of a kind of bourgeois normality triumphed. Centrist and rightist parties dominated elections. High unemployment and economic orthodoxy continued whilst Social Democracy fell short at the polls. Total victory remained elusive. Grand visions of socialisation did not materialise, as the Right arrested the democratic moment.

### **Reflecting on revolution, democracy, and the future of socialism**

Social Democracy was in an ambiguous position. The democratic institutions it had struggled for were, for the moment, functioning. Their bourgeois coalition partners could be cajoled into supporting reform on working hours, pay, and workers sitting on company boards. Wholesale socialisation was a different matter. The stalling of the transitional period, the heart of so much thought and debate, burgeoned questions regarding the future of socialism. This particularly had theoretical implications for Marxism. Was a socialist revolution within democratic structures historically determined?

Karl Kautsky redrew his conceptions on the German Revolution. Kautsky's book *The Labour Revolution* (1925) focused on a teleological analysis of the revolutions of 1918/19. For Kautsky, hastened revolution caught workers unprepared to properly

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<sup>261</sup> Birnbaum, *Léon Blum*, 78.

seize power. The war unleashed by Kaiser Wilhelm II quickened the erosion of his monarchy. If there was no war the workers' movement would have come to full Marxist maturation. A more complete socialist revolution would have eventuated. The war, Kautsky argued, undermined this Marxist schema. It accelerated historical processes determined to create socialism. The split in Social Democracy meant the movement lacked the 'maturity' to build a united democratic politics to confront capital and seize the means of production. Bourgeois subversion of a socialist republic was a side effect of the stunted revolution. Fast-tracked historical forces made the revolution unfinished:

Thus its [Weimar] achievements did not amount to more than the abolition of the military, the monarchy and the introduction of a few social reforms, particularly the eight-hour day.<sup>262</sup>

Weimar was a democracy, but it was not a socialist one.

Weimar did allow the workers' movement a chance to mature and grow in its organisational and morale capacities. Consequently, Kautsky thought Germany was in an elongated transitional period. Socialists had to participate in coalition governments both to strive for socialism and keep middle-class parties in check. The small but important reforms gained by the revolution could be lost; at worst, democracy itself could be destroyed. This was particularly the case in Germany since socialists had little influence over the armed forces, quiet unlike Austrian Social Democracy. Coalitions protected democracy. The levers of powers could not be left to the bourgeois alone.<sup>263</sup> However, Kautsky did not think all bourgeois parties were reactionary. There were always 'reformist' elements that Social Democrats could ally

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<sup>262</sup> Kautsky, *The Labour Revolution*, 31.

<sup>263</sup> *Ibid.*, 50-57.

with to instil elements of their program. Coalitions were now a historical necessity given the underdeveloped tenor of the revolution.<sup>264</sup>

Kautsky warned that democracy had only the potential to overturn capitalism. Workers did not automatically give electoral allegiance to socialist parties. Kautsky fell back on Engels's concept of false consciousness to explain this.

If voters are shiftless persons who only live by the favour of the rich, or wage-earners whose mentality is such that they regard the capitalists as "bread givers," such workers will certainly not capture political power through the votes they cast. So far as they possess the vote at all, they will rather be inclined to sell political power to whomever is the highest bidder.<sup>265</sup>

Kautsky's most voluminous text was *The Materialist Conception of History* (1927). It was an extended study exploring 'the uniformity of the process of nature of society... and the development of society' through historical materialism.<sup>266</sup> Suffice to say, it was an extended survey of 'Western Society'. Much of the book recapitulated familiar arguments, some of which he simply quoted from previous publications. However, the chapters on contemporary conditions bore telling markers of a discernible intellectual journey that cut against standard Marxist teleology. Now, working class political action needed to focus on safeguarding democracy:

Today the chief question for the Social-Democratic Party is not how it is to come to power, but rather how it is to hold fast to power in order to accomplish so much with the available material means and the available men that from them forms of life emerge that are superior.<sup>267</sup>

The holdfast mentality was obvious. More telling was his outlook on the future of capitalism and socialism.

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<sup>264</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>266</sup> Karl Kautsky, *The Materialist Conception of History* (London: Yale University Press, 1988), Ixvii.

<sup>267</sup> Ibid., 410.

The transition from capitalism to socialism would not be the same as the transition from feudalism to capitalism, Kautsky contended. In a manner not so dissimilar from his once ideological nemesis, Bernstein, reasoned that capitalism's contradictions were no longer inevitably self-destructive. Through democratic empowerment, social reforms lessened working-class suffering in the 'midst of capitalist production'. Even the intellectual freedoms Marx promised workers under socialism were partially realised in the current system by better health services, transport, and the labour movement's general growth. Antagonistic social relations would wither away under a new era of reform.

We therefore can no longer say today that the capitalist mode of production ...is bringing about its own end through its mere economic development.<sup>268</sup>

Kautsky's conclusion caused him to interrogate Marx's theories on capitalism's determined self-destruction, particularly referring to the overproduction schema. Marx reasoned capital's drive for greater profit margins and efficiency led to ever-increasing efforts to lower wages and reduce the cost of production. This would have two important effects. Firstly, it would undermine the consumptive powers of the working classes; a large section of the population. Secondly, factories would produce a glut of produce that could not be sold due to degraded pay of much of the population. Such contradiction Marx believed, would be a fatal crisis in the capitalist mode of production. Kautsky thought this no longer applied. Social Democratic reform guaranteed working class consumption even in periods of unemployment. Unemployment insurance in particular made Marx's crisis of overproduction redundant. Even during cyclical downturn adequate demand was possible.

There is no longer any basis for the expectation that the crisis caused by lack of demand will someday reach such an extent and duration that they render the continuation of the capitalist

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<sup>268</sup> Ibid., 419.

mode of production impossible and make its replacement with a socialist mode of production inevitable.<sup>269</sup>

Kautsky did not shy from the logical conclusions of his judgements. If there was no crisis, then perhaps the transition to socialism was redundant? Kautsky came to a potentially painful supposition. Socialism, as set of ideas and goals, reified in the movement to which he had tirelessly dedicated his life, was potentially impotent. In terms of historical materialism, it no longer served its purpose. He pondered whether socialism was a spent force. If material emancipation of workers was attainable under the current system, there was little need for future agitation. Further sacrifices were needless.

Today we see only *one* possibility of reaching this goal: the bringing about of socialism. If, however, the same end could be achieved within the framework of the present mode of production, then that would mean that our goal could be reached more easily, more simply, and with smaller sacrifices than we socialists previously thought... Should it prove to be the case that the advance of capitalism of necessity brings forth spontaneously a moderation of class antagonisms. So that the workers feel more secure and more content under capitalist leadership, then we would have to admit that openly and renounce our socialist goals; we could do so without betraying the cause of the emancipation of labour.<sup>270</sup>

Heinrich Ströbel, a journalist on the left of the SPD, came to similar conclusions on the deficits of the German Revolution. He was more sober in his reflections. An organic popular uprising did not overthrow the Kaiser, it was the collapse of the military effort. The revolutions were merely a reaction against war, not a united uprising against the ruling class and its institutions. The lack of a united socialist party, aggravated by communist influence, undermined the working class's opportunity to

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<sup>269</sup> Ibid., 421.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid., 427.

overturn capitalism.<sup>271</sup> Worse still, the success of centre and right-wing parties to form governments without Social Democratic support posed a grave threat to Germany's republican system. If socialists did not reformulate their tactics, particularly in the face of the new electoral system, Ströbel thought democracy was endangered.<sup>272</sup>

Hilferding, now a member of the Reichstag and an off-and-on member of cabinet, altered his views considering the state of Weimar democracy and the socialist transition. He outlined a number of these revisions in his famous speech to the 1927 SPD congress in Kiel, a speech judged by some historians to be his most significant theoretical contribution since *Finance Capital* (1910).<sup>273</sup> Here he updated his views on capital and the waning of free trade. The extension of state powers in the republic meant that socialist governments could direct cartels towards socialism in a gradual manner.

we are moving towards a capitalist organisation of the economy, hence the movement is from the economy of the free play of forces to the organised economy... The endeavour to organise capitalism means that it has given up its main objection to socialism, and the last psychological obstacle to socialism thereby falls away. Organised capitalism means the replacement of the capitalist principle of free competition by the socialist principle of planned production. This form of economy, planned and directed deliberately, is much more open to the possibility of conscious intervention by society, which is nothing other than the intervention of the sole conscious organisation of the society with the power to compel, namely intervention by the state. Our generation has the task, with the help of the state, and conscious social regulation, of transforming this economy directed and organised by the capitalists into an economy directed by the democratic state.<sup>274</sup>

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<sup>271</sup> Ströbel, *The German Revolution and After*, 7-8.

<sup>272</sup> Ibid.

<sup>273</sup> See William Smaldone, *Confronting Hitler: German Social Democrats in Defense of the Weimar Republic, 1929-1933*, vol. II (Plymouth: Lexington, 2009); James, "Rudolf Hilferding and the application of the political economy of the Second International."

<sup>274</sup> Rudolf Hilferding, "1927 Speech on 'Organised Capitalism'," in *The German Left and the Weimar Republic: A selection of Documents*, ed. Ben Fowkes (London: Brill, 2014), 298-299.

Still optimistic about the potentiality of socialism, Hilferding now conceded the socialist revolution would now be a process of slow reform. Most significantly, the cartel, an institution Hilferding had seen as both the tool of capitalist expansion and domination more than a decade before, was now something that was reformable by its own impulse to rationalise. German cartels were taking on a new, more organised form. They were embracing rationalisation instead of free market doctrines. For Hilferding, socialist transition was now a more a question of technocracy on behalf of workers. As Smaldone notes, in 1927 SPD leaders thought the stabilisation of the economy meant socialism could be gradually implemented. Hilferding, the most senior SPD theoretician, very much captured the prevailing mood. Less than a year later, however, German capitalism become fragile again and the SPD abandoned socialisation.<sup>275</sup>

Otto Bauer's work *The Austrian Revolution* was a sombre account of the Austrian experience. Published in German in 1923 and then in English in 1925, his book read as both a work of historical reflection and a warning for the future of Austrian socialism and the Austrian Republic at large. Bauer also felt that the initial revolutionary surge of 1918-19 had petered out. He likewise subscribed to the 'rushed revolution' thesis. Workers' strikes and organisation counted for little in Austria's revolution. War caused the hastened downfall of the monarchy.<sup>276</sup> From 1919 to 1921, he described as the period where bourgeois transformed the 'People's Republic into a bourgeois Republic'.<sup>277</sup> After the initial revolution, even with the limited success in parliament, Social Democrats held sway in the army and key transport unions. This forced

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<sup>275</sup> Smaldone, *Confronting Hitler: German Social Democrats in Defense of the Weimar Republic, 1929-1933*, II, 12-14.

<sup>276</sup> Lewis, *Fascism and the working class in Austria, 1918-1934: The failure of labour in the First Republic*, 50-51.

<sup>277</sup> Otto Bauer, *Die Österreichische Revolution* (Wien: Wiener Volksbuchhandlung, 1923), 278.

bourgeois parties into coalition with Social Democrats to placate working class radicalism. This first period, Bauer described as one of class equilibrium. Now with time to reflect, this period would soon pass.<sup>278</sup>

Bauer, concerned with immediate economic quandaries, rightly pointed to Austria's inflation crisis as undermining both the Republic and Social Democrats. The experience of close to full employment by Austria's working class, and a meagre but discernible increase in living standards, brought a near-fatal crisis when torn asunder by hyperinflation. Bauer explained that when bourgeois parties imposed currency depreciation and budget balancing policies, the working classes lost control of the institutions they had built. It was, however, not a total defeat. Vienna was still firmly in the hands of workers, and Social Democrats in parliament could limit right wing supremacy over the republic.<sup>279</sup> Melancholy pervaded Bauer's conclusion.

The 1918 revolution is now ended. For the present the task of the working class is limited to defending the achievements of this revolution, and endeavouring to restore the balance of power between classes...<sup>280</sup>

Marxists were not the only ones reconsidering their socialism. G. D. H. Cole, went through a similar process of disillusionment, followed by a reformulation of his socialism. Cole published *The Next Ten Years in British Social and Economic Policy* in early 1929. The book 'revised' many of his assumptions on Guild socialism.<sup>281</sup> 'I wrote this book because whether I liked it or not, I have been compelled to think afresh my social and political creed.'<sup>282</sup> Cole's thesis was novel. Socialism (including Guild

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<sup>278</sup> Ibid.

<sup>279</sup> Ibid., 273-275. He cited the dismissal of 100,000 civil servants as an example such brutal cuts.

<sup>280</sup> Ibid., 283.

<sup>281</sup> Wright, *G. D. H. Cole*, 114.

<sup>282</sup> G. D. H. Cole, *The next ten years: in British social and economic policy* (London: Macmillan, 1929), vii.

socialism) was an artefact of a highly functioning capitalism. Prior to 1914, capitalism was thriving and unemployment minimal. Socialisation assumed healthy and productive industries. Post-war capitalism, despite attempts to recreate pre-war conditions, was fragile. Industries were struggling to sell produce and unemployment was high. Cole cited the Labour Party's attempts before the war to legislate the right to work as a symptom of outdated socialist rational. This was impossible if private industry could not sustain jobs on its own. 'Can we really guarantee the right to work and a minimum wage without dislocating industry?' he asked.<sup>283</sup> Cole shied away from socialisation. He envisaged worker councils with limited control over industry overseeing the grievances of workers. Cole wanted a more coordinated relationship between the state and industry to raise capital for ailing sectors of the economy.<sup>284</sup> It was a far cry from his previous Guild socialism, one that was concerned with an immediate policy of a Labour government, not long-term socialist transition.<sup>285</sup>

For many who had cut their teeth during the zenith of the Second International, socialism was at a kind of dialectical crossroads. The base-super structure dialectic, whereby the means of production dictated the shape of politics, continued. For the most part, capital continued to command the premise of politics. This was something the democratic moment promised to overturn through socialisation. Social Democrats thought the radicalising effects of war had prematurely thrust power onto workers. Due to the hasty and inorganic course of the revolutions, all that could be established were republics without socialist economies. Bourgeois stabilisation ensured capitalism's survival. This outcome did not disappoint all. Clearly Kautsky thought the arrangement had the potential to benefit labour. Second International Socialism

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<sup>283</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>284</sup> Ibid., 48-50.

<sup>285</sup> Wright, *G. D. H. Cole*, 118-119.

had reached a juncture. All it could offer was a defence of democratic institutions, socialism had to wait. For some, this was not enough.

Henri De Man, a member of the Belgium Labour Party, was one of the first to respond to Second International Socialism's predicament. Historian Dan White describes him as a leftist transformed by their wartime experiences. De Man, a little-known figure in the early 1920s, moved to Germany in 1922 to be with his new wife. In 1926 he published *The Psychology of Marxian Socialism*, though its French name was a more apt summary of its content: *Au-delà du marxisme*, meaning beyond Marxism.<sup>286</sup> De Man took aim at the limitations of Marxist orthodoxy, paying particular attention to Germany.<sup>287</sup> Written just after the war, but published in 1926, it became widely recognised by the end of the decade.<sup>288</sup> Square in its sights was De Man's thoughts on Marxism's pacifying and mechanistic determinism. They were artifacts of the bygone era of 19<sup>th</sup> century philosophy:

Marxism is a child of the nineteenth century. Its origins go back to the period when the regime of...the rationalist way of thinking climaxed... Champions of this method look upon rational thought as the law of all human volition and all social happenings.<sup>289</sup>

Marxism's teleological reading of history and politics lent itself far too easily to concessions and coalition building with parties opposing socialism. 'Logically, a policy of class collaboration can invariably be justified by a doctrine of class struggle'.<sup>290</sup> De Man thought this weakness, stemming from a weak 'bridge' between

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<sup>286</sup> White, *Lost Comrades*, 59.

<sup>287</sup> Henry de Man, *The Psychology of Marxian Socialism*, trans. Eden and Cedar Paul (London: Transaction, 1985), 8.

<sup>288</sup> White, *Lost Comrades*.

<sup>289</sup> Man, *The Psychology of Socialism*, 330.

<sup>290</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

theory and practice, had in fact been an issue for Marxism for decades. Having to contend with other political parties illuminated this flaw. Marxism's justifications for various setbacks and concessions were perhaps understandable but were not going to be received well by the very workers socialists claimed to represent. 'The rank and file' would easily lose confidence in its leaders and undermine the movement's agency for political change. Simply waiting for the correct circumstances to implement socialism while couching arguments in highly theoretical abstractions yielded few results for the proletariat. Worse still for De Man, was Marxism acted as a kind of conservatising force, akin to reactionary clericalism. It relied on an 'arsenal' of defunct formulas merely as a show of propaganda. Marxism became puritanical when trying to defend itself against 'vulgar' communism. Unable to respond to the most basic political criticism, it could only defend itself through 'textual' interpretation. Abstract principles were its only concerns. It was unable to confront politics on a daily level.

Whenever it is concerned with actual practice, it denigrates into casuistry, always trying to justify the action by the system, and never trying to vivify the system by impregnation with the living fact.<sup>291</sup>

De Man questioned Marxist assumptions about how workers conceived of their politics. Material interests and rationality were not necessarily factors in human decision making. Emotional motives were far more powerful agents in working class political action and thought. The psychological element of the book centred around how Marxism misinterpreted what drove workers towards socialism. Its mechanistic tendencies ignored working-class mentalities concerning their daily lives. Its abstractions could not comprehend how the working classes interacted with the world around them. The war confirmed this. Workers ignored socialist appeals for international solidarity. Internationalism was out of touch with the 'inner personality'

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<sup>291</sup> Ibid., 21.

of workers. De Man thought socialists were blind to the very real psychological affect patriotism had on workers. Furthermore, the war made workers more assertive, bringing out their 'animal combative instinct'.<sup>292</sup> The influence of De Man's combat experience in reshaping his political thought was clear to see. His work was not immediately well known but there were responses to it.<sup>293</sup> Kautsky drew first blood in the pages of *Die Gessellschaft*.

In his characteristic fashion, Kautsky derided De Man's unscientific approach. De Man's moralism and physiological analysis lacked proper intellectual rigour.<sup>294</sup> More interesting was Kautsky's worried remarks on his references to the 'front' mentality:

The war has filled the generation that grew up under it with great aversion and contempt for systematic work. They all want to apply and be something, just for the sake of their being, not their ability. It is one of the causes of fascism and the swastika.<sup>295</sup>

De Man's war experience defined his point of reference. Kautsky prophetically saw reactionary potential in this. He warned that such thought threatened linkages between workers and intellectuals. These notions were dangerous to socialism.<sup>296</sup> According to Peter Dodge, *Die Gessellschaft* banned De Man from publishing further in their pages.<sup>297</sup> The editorial staff worried that his heterodox non-Marxist views posed a threat to the ideological complexion of the movement.

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<sup>292</sup> Ibid., 275.

<sup>293</sup> There is some evidence to suggest De Man's book was aimed at Kautskyism rather than Marxism at large. Particularly when taking into consideration De Man's critique of socialist concessions justified by the inevitable emancipation of the working class. This was something that pervaded Kautsky's works. White, *Lost Comrades*, 60.

<sup>294</sup> Karl Kaustky, "De Man als Lehrer: Eine Nachlese," *Die Gesellschaft* 1, no. 1 (1927): 62-77.

<sup>295</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>296</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>297</sup> Peter Dodge, *Beyond Marxism: The faith and works of Hendrik De Man* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1966), 84.

Reaction against established socialist ideas also occurred in non-Marxian milieus. Oswald Mosley's *Revolution by Reason* (1925) was an attempt to push the British Labour Party into more radical action. 'We hold that evolutionary socialism is in itself not enough', he exclaimed.<sup>298</sup> Taking aim at the short-lived Labour government in 1924 he berated 'Recent experience tells us Socialist administration is nigh impossible'.<sup>299</sup> *Revolution by Reason* reconceptualised Labour's socialist objectives. Mosley directed the party away from nationalised industries to an enlarged state and a planned economy; 'socialist planning'.<sup>300</sup> He was more interested in seizing the levers of economic power. If socialism was to succeed, it needed to disarm the financial powers of capital. Mosley's target was a radical overhaul of Britain's financial system.

'Banks of the People', Mosley exclaimed, had to be the principal focus of socialist attack.<sup>301</sup> Nationalising banks would prop up the consumption of Britain's working class. These 'People's Banks' would give workers easy access to credit. 'The great paradox' of the day, Mosley explained, was that workers were 'crying out for commodities of everyday necessity while men, machines, and raw materials ready to produce those commodities' were kept idle.<sup>302</sup> 'Credit expansion' would guarantee working-class material fortune. *Revolution by Reason* redefined socialist conceptions on social contradictions. The main conflict occurred between the financial and productive classes, not workers and capital—'Between the parasitic and the useful', as one historian described it.<sup>303</sup> Working-class credit allowed the most able people in the

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<sup>298</sup> Oswald Mosley, *Revolution by Reason: An account of the Birmingham proposals. together with an analysis of the financial policy of the present government which had led to their great attack upon wages* (London: Blackfriars Press, 1925), 7.

<sup>299</sup> Ibid.

<sup>300</sup> Howell, *Mosley*, 79.

<sup>301</sup> Mosley, *Revolution by Reason*, 8.

<sup>302</sup> Ibid.

<sup>303</sup> Howell, *Mosley*, 80.

economy to realise their full potential. Mosley's pamphlet called for the establishment of an 'Economic Council' to direct Britain's economic affairs. The council would equilibrate supply and demand while also managing wages. Mosley's parting message very much echoed De Man's language of sacrifice and hardship gleaned from wartime experience:

We must recapture the spirit of rapturous sacrifice. That immoral spirit evoked by war between men of many common interests for purposes still obscure or frustrated. Why cannot a greater spirit be summoned fourth by threat of all mankind against poverty and slavery? In our hands is the awakening trumpet of reality.<sup>304</sup>

Mosley's intervention met with much less criticism than De Man's. Elements within both the Labour Party and ILP were comfortable with harsh criticism towards the short-lived MacDonald government. When Mosley put these proposals to the Birmingham Burrough Labour conference in 1925, they passed by 64 votes to 14.<sup>305</sup>

Some within traditional Marxist circles reacted with similar dismay to the theoretical and tactical retreats of Second International socialists. The Polish economist Henryk Grossman was one. Grossman sat at a fascinating intersection between Social Democracy and Communism, and between theory and practice. He was politically blooded in Galicia, Poland as a key leader in the Jewish Social Democratic Party. After the party merged with the larger and more influential Jewish Labour Bund he continued as an important regional leader and thinker. The Bund, though rejecting Bolshevism, found it hard to come to terms with Second International Socialism's intuitionism. It initially refused LSI membership, joining only in 1930.<sup>306</sup> In 1920 he

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<sup>304</sup> Mosley, *Revolution by Reason*, 29.

<sup>305</sup> Howell, *Mosley*, 81.

<sup>306</sup> Mario Kessler, "The Bund and the Labour and Socialist International," in *Jewish Politics in Eastern Europe: The Bund at 100*, ed. Jack Jacobs (New York: Hampshire, 2001), 183-192.

joined the Communist Party of Poland.<sup>307</sup> Like many Bundists of his generation, the Bolshevik revolution radicalised Grossman. According to Jack Jacobs, the transition from Bundist to Communist was 'a well-trodden path'.<sup>308</sup> In 1925, the newly established Frankfurt School offered Grossman a position as a political economist. He was close with a number of KPD faculty members and was known to support the party, though he did not formally join.<sup>309</sup> Grossman's book *The Law of Accumulation and Breakdown of the Capitalist System* (1929) was his most influential tract. Scholarship does not consider it part of the great pantheon of texts from the Frankfurt School, but soon after publication it made quite an impact in both Social Democratic and Communist publications. Nick Kuhn believes it was the most widely read book to come out of the Frankfurt School in the 1920s and 30s.<sup>310</sup>

Grossman had been working on this theory for over a decade, first outlining it in a lecture in 1919.<sup>311</sup> His thesis recapitulated the case for Marx's original theory on the breakdown of capitalism. Published just months before the Crash, many after 1929 saw it as a Marxist foretelling of the crisis.<sup>312</sup> The book was a direct attack on Second International Socialism's contemporaneous phase.<sup>313</sup> Taking aim at Kautsky, Bauer,

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<sup>307</sup> Rick Kuhn, *Henryk Grossman and the Recovery of Marxism* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 98.

<sup>308</sup> Jack Jacobs, *The Frankfurt School, Jewish Lives and Antisemitism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 40.

<sup>309</sup> Kuhn, *Henryk Grossman*, 154.

<sup>310</sup> *Ibid.*, 124.

<sup>311</sup> Henryk Grossman, "The Theory of Economic Crisis," in *Henryk Grossman Works Volume 1: Essays and Letters on Economic Theory*, ed. Rick Kuhn (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 44-49.

<sup>312</sup> Kuhn, *Henryk Grossman*, 138. Also see "Economic crisis and socialist revolution: Henry Grossman's law of accumulation, its first critics and his responses," in *Responding to Neoliberalism in crisis, accumulation, and Rosa Luxemburg's Legacy*, ed. Paul Zarembka and Susanne Soederberg (London: Elsevier JAI 2004), 144.

<sup>313</sup> *Henryk Grossman*.

and Hilferding, Grossman denounced them as 'neo-harmonists'.<sup>314</sup> While these thinkers had refuted Bernstein's revisionism before the war, their own change of heart towards capitalism's inevitable crisis post war was deeply flawed. Targeting Kautsky's remarks in *The Materialist Conception of History*, Grossman launched his offensive:

Kautsky is not content simply with abandoning Marx's theory of the final economic collapse of capitalism. He becomes an unconditional admirer of capitalism... Kautsky's faith in the economic future of capitalism, his optimistic enthusiasm for it, are carried so far, like Bernstein, he concludes that capitalism is always capable of surmounting all obstacles...It is quite sad to watch a thinker of such exceptional merit, towards the closing stages of his active life, rejecting his entire life's work at a single stroke.<sup>315</sup>

Grossman rejected Social Democracy's compulsion to accept capitalism as transformable through reform.<sup>316</sup> He insisted Marx's original prediction about capital accumulation crisis was inevitable, albeit delayed. Grossman attributed increases in productivity through technological innovation deferred the breakdown of the capitalist mode of production. Profits thus rose further. This would only stave of the accumulation crisis for so long:

The more a movement of rationalisation spreads and penetrates into a whole series of new industries, the more the boom gains in intensity because improvements in one sphere on industry mean an expanding mass of surplus value in another.

Every crisis precipitates a general attempt at reorganisation which, among other things, attacks the existing level of storage costs. The time during which capital is confined to the form of commodity capital tends to become progressively shorter. That is, the annual turnover of

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<sup>314</sup> Henryk Grossman, *The law of accumulation of breakdown of the Capitalist system: Being also a theory of crises* (London: Pluto Press, 1992), 62.

<sup>315</sup> *Ibid.*, 55-56.

<sup>316</sup> Grossman was also dismayed with the lack of Marxists within the Communist camp who upheld Marx's breakdown theory. See Ted Reese, *The End of Capitalism: The Thought of Henryk Grossman* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2022), 53.

capital is speeded up. This is a further means of surmounting crises. Marx says that: 'the scale of reproduction will be extended or reduced commensurate with the particular speed with which that capital throws off its commodity form and assumes that of money, or with the rapidity of the sale'.<sup>317</sup>

Foreign trade and colonial markets also extended capitalism's lifeline. Like Marx, Grossman believed foreign trade added little theoretically difference to the question of capitalism's breakdown. The circumstances leading to crisis were the same. The only difference foreign trade and colonial expansion made was in the increase in surplus value. Capital's access to new markets and cheap labour 'injected' much needed surplus value staving off an accumulation crisis. Grossman added that when advanced economies expand, they become increasingly difficult to 'valorise its enormously accumulated capital'.<sup>318</sup> Foreign trade and imperial growth become necessities for capitalist nations to transcend accumulation crises. Foreign trade was particularly important in times of depression when there were gluts of produce in national markets. It became a 'valve for overproduction on the domestic market'.<sup>319</sup> Grossman thought Germany was in the middle of such a period. The boom year of 1927 was followed by a tempered 1928. A 'retreat in domestic demand' corresponded with an 18.5 percent increase in exports from the previous year, from January to April. It is worth noting that the unemployment rate and the increase in exports for 1928 were at 18 percent and 15 percent respectfully.<sup>320</sup> Grossman was astute with this observation. 'Although a depression was still to come', Germany had temporarily compensated for the crisis in valorisation.<sup>321</sup> A crisis was still on the cards, it was simply deferred.

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<sup>317</sup> Grossman, *The law of accumulation*, 139, 142.

<sup>318</sup> *Ibid.*, 172.

<sup>319</sup> *Ibid.*, 173.

<sup>320</sup> Mitchell, *Historical Statistics*, 494.

<sup>321</sup> Grossman, *The law of accumulation*, 173.

To conclude, Grossman rejected Hilferding's conclusions on the importance of banks in industry. Grossman admitted that at an intermediate stage of capitalist development, industry's thirst for credit empowered banks. But in advanced stages of capitalism banks become superfluous. Industry, through vast expansions, would increasingly rely on its own 'independent credit flows' generated from its own reserves. The German company AEG was an example of this. It did not need banks for credit, due to its own massive savings accounts. A final crisis of accumulation would have its routes in industry, not in banking.

The historical tendency of capital is not the creation of a central bank which dominates the whole economy through a general cartel, but industrial concentration and growing accumulation of capital leading to the final breakdown due to over-accumulation.<sup>322</sup>

As Reese rightly points out, Grossman's conclusion rejected reformist Social Democracy since capitalism's contradictions were intractable.<sup>323</sup>

The political landscape of the 1920s forced Social Democratic thinkers to re-evaluate ideological and political assumptions. While the democratic moment augmented pre-war thinking, the malaise that set in soon after equivocated these frameworks. The expansion of democracy did not yield the transition to socialism. Nor had it put working class parties firmly in the halls of power. Marxists began to question the expectations made by the materialist conception of history. Capitalism, it seemed, might not collapse under its own contradictions after all. Social Democratic reform supposedly alleviated these pressures. In response to socialists 'waiting for history', came a new generation frustrated with the inaction of the movement. Younger intellectuals, having seen combat on the front, wanted radical action to seize back

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<sup>322</sup> Ibid., 200.

<sup>323</sup> Reese, *End of Capitalism*, 68.

capital's initiative. The older generation's pendant for coalition building justified by theoretical abstraction required re-examination. Grossman stands out because his intervention was a Marxist reaction to Social Democracy's retreat. He was more than flirting with the Communist camp and did not identify with Second International Socialism. Ideological considerations were not the only thing pressuring Social Democracy towards presentist leanings. Persistent unemployment forced Social Democrats to confront immediate economic concerns.

### **The Unemployment Crisis**

Unemployment was a dominating issue from the early 1920s. As French socialist economist Edgard Milhaud noted at the time, a 'general economic disequilibrium' caused 'the unemployment crisis of 1923-24 and beyond'. The war had ravaged victors and vanquished alike.<sup>324</sup> As a result of stabilisation and deflation unemployment directly affected Social Democracy's constituency. Persistent joblessness led to large scale industrial unrest, particularly in Britain. The general strike in 1926 was a pertinent example of this. Socialist thinkers proposed plans to maintain industrial peace. Capitalism needed to stabilise before socialism was possible. Unemployment was its most dire affect. An LSI resolution at its second congress in 1925 captured this conundrum:

The tremendous world conflict has thrown out of order the whole mechanism of economic life. A considerable part of the equipment of industry, commerce and transport has been destroyed; an enormous number of consumers have to a great extent lost their purchasing power... All

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<sup>324</sup> Edgard Milhaud, "Peace, cooperation, and economic agreements between states " *The Annals of Collective Economy* 1, no. 2 (1925): 272-273.

the ordinary channels of world traffic have been profoundly disturbed... Political troubles intensify... capitalism has such a heavy responsibility.<sup>325</sup>

As early as 1922 socialists began to tackle problems of unemployment. Hobson's *The Economics of Unemployment* (1922) revisited his theory of underconsumption.<sup>326</sup> Hobson focused on idle capital as an explanation for low consumption. Governments failed to use idle savings to transfer powers of consumption to Britain's working class:

If the surplus income of the rich which produces this congestion and these stoppages were absorbed. Either by the increasing share of the workers, or by the needs and uses of an enlightened State, or by both, this economic disease would be remedied.<sup>327</sup>

Hobson attributed the severity of the crisis to a pending cyclical downturn prior to 1914. According to Hobson, the war postponed depression, as did the 'artificial' boom directly succeeding the Armistice.<sup>328</sup> Capitalism was crisis prone because the market had a finite parameter of growth: 'There does not appear to enough world-market to take all or nearly all that can be produced.' Limitations of the sale of goods obstructed capitalist expansion. Everywhere he looked, goods were not sufficiently in demand. He termed this the 'limited market.' An expansion of the consumer base would solve this. Hobson wanted workers to consumer more. Schneider rightly claims that suggestions of greater material equality as a 'solution to underconsumption' interspersed Hobson's works.<sup>329</sup>

Workers' fear of unemployment, Hobson clarified, worsened the situation. If they exerted 'their full productive energy', then 'labour power' would be in full supply.

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<sup>325</sup> *Second Congress of the Labour & Socialist International: at Marsaeilles, August 22nd to 27th*, (London: Labour Party, 1925), 289.

<sup>326</sup> Schneider, J.A. *Hobson*, 12.

<sup>327</sup> J. A. Hobson, *The Economics of Unemployment* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1922), 8-9.

<sup>328</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>329</sup> Schneider, J.A. *Hobson*, 68.

This would create a glut of products forcing prices downward, leading to 'underemployment'.<sup>330</sup> This was not a far-cry from Marx's accumulation crisis. Withholding their full productive potential was in the interests of workers. One way out of this conundrum was public works. Projects such as the 'erection of electric stations, or the building of a channel tunnel', would give workers greater purchasing power and eliminate the glut of goods. Public works would add to general productivity, but not in a crisis-fulfilling manner. Since such works were in public hands their productivity would not add to 'another glut.'<sup>331</sup>

Upper-class' savings was another feature of the limited market. The wealthy, Hobson explained, tended to 'chronically over save'. The common economic 'checks' applied to such situations were redundant. Simply keeping the rate of interest down did nothing to stimulate consumption. Once their consumer desires were met, they no longer bought more produce. This is something contemporary economists have proven to hold true. The ruling class's relationship between consumption and wealth had limited correlation. The wealthy had a pathological drive to over-save. A 'better distribution of income' would overcome the situation:

If state socialism, or Guild Socialism, or Consumers' Co-operation, or any form of Communism can achieve this better distribution, without unduly letting down production, we may look for salvation along any of these paths.<sup>332</sup>

Hobson's call for socialism was vague but explicit in its principal aim. Income required equal distribution in a manner that sustained consumption without undermining general production.

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<sup>330</sup> Hobson, *The Economics of Unemployment*, 17.

<sup>331</sup> *Ibid.*, 81-82.

<sup>332</sup> *Ibid.*, 151.

Unemployment dominated the British election in 1929. The Labour Party targeted the government's record of high unemployment, tailoring much of their campaign to the issue. Ramsay MacDonald, the soon-to-be Prime Minister, outlined a plan aimed at bringing unemployment under control. *How to Conquer Unemployment* guided Labour's policy. Though primarily an election manifesto rather than a work of research and rigour, its polemical call echoed similar thoughts that had been a part of general socialist discourse. It was strongly anti-capitalist in rhetoric, but its socialist objectives were vague.<sup>333</sup> It envisaged massive public works to soak up joblessness. 'Public ownership' would rationalise key industries. Terms such as nationalisation and socialisation were left out. The booklet accentuated the role of the state in combatting unemployment through better management of industry.

The State, in these and other depressed industries, must play its part in the work of reorganisation, not by uniform measures applied to them all, but by a variety of steps designed to eliminate waste and wasteful competition, to improve and coordinate methods of marketing, purchase of materials, and production, and to adapt business structure to the changed economic conditions of the post-war world.<sup>334</sup>

Social Democrats in Central Europe were less anxious about the problems of unemployment. Both Germany and Austria legislated unemployment insurance. Hilferding saw this as a 'colossal achievement of the workers' movement'. Though capitalism still existed, the reform made it less 'unpleasant.'<sup>335</sup> Nonetheless, socialists contemplated how to solve persistent joblessness. Their long-term analysis of European capitalism lay in classic Marxist analysis, though solutions eluded them. Like their British counterparts, they too saw disconnection between industrial expansion without a corresponding growth in purchasing power.

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<sup>333</sup> J. Ramsay MacDonald, *How to Conquer Unemployment* (London: Labour Party, 1929), 4.

<sup>334</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>335</sup> Hilferding, "Problem de Zeit," 24.

SPD economist Fritz Naphtali thought Germany's unemployment crisis arose from a mismatch of production and consumption. The 'disturbance' of war and the 'rupturing' of international markets were to blame for unemployment. The reorganisation of industry for military purposes and its subsequent technological developments led to a rise in prices. Naphtali claimed that this put further pressure on unemployment. He rightly saw the rise of both protectionism and the lost savings of Germans from hyperinflation as increasing prices while reducing the consumer base. A reduction of international trade barriers and a greater rationalisation of 'production costs' would 'expand markets.' The solution to the crisis lay in balancing production and consumption.<sup>336</sup>

Wladimir Woytinsky an exiled Menshevik economist, moved to Germany in 1921. He worked for the Allgemeiner Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund and the International Labour Organisation. Woytinsky postulated that unemployment was not a crisis. A crisis was a short-term shock. Unemployment was a long-term feature of post-war capitalism. Responding to the imminent World Economic Conference in Geneva in 1927, he urged representatives of workers to come up with a plan to tackle unemployment plaguing the continent. In Woytinsky's opinion unemployment stemmed from Europe's industrial sector's propensity to purchase and produce goods faster than it could sell them. The war exasperated these tendencies. As a result, Europe's internal market 'narrowed.' Such phenomenon undercut workers' purchasing power and 'ruined' the middle class:

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<sup>336</sup> Fritz Naphtali, "Probleme der Krise," *Die Gesellschaft* 2, no. 8 (1926): 111-123.

The old disproportion between production and capacity to purchase has been greatly increased. Can this disproportion be lessened, and if so, how? That is the most important question before the World Economic Conference.<sup>337</sup>

Woytinsky thought the build-up of this disproportion was not just caused by war, but in Europe's 'over industrialisation'. Rapid industrialisation did not 'correspond to a rise in purchasing power.' No doubt Marx's theory on the limits of capital accumulation loomed over his conclusions.<sup>338</sup>

Woytinsky also took protectionism to task. Cartels' proclivity to protection was not just increasing prices, but increased unemployment as well. He laid blame partly on the favourable balance of trade. Protectionist countries could export more than they imported. To Woytinsky, this was reactionary. It drove up domestic prices lowering the purchasing power of workers. Though he admitted solutions were not within the purview of his piece he did argue that nationalisation would help rebalance production with consumption. He called on the conference to abolish trade barriers. His final word pressed another cure socialist had for Europe's predicament: 'The recognition of the economic unity of Europe is but the first step towards a United States of Europe.'<sup>339</sup>

A year before Woytinsky published an article called *Die Weltmarktentwicklung*. Taking into consideration the growth of populations and potential markets, he concluded that without European unification the general post-war trend of high unemployment and depressed markets would continue.<sup>340</sup> A united Europe would overcome these

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<sup>337</sup> W. Woytinsky, "The World Economic Conference," *The Socialist Review*, no. 15 (1927): 31-33.

<sup>338</sup> *Ibid.*, 32-33.

<sup>339</sup> *Ibid.*, 36. Also see Wladimir Woytinsky, "ur Weltwirtschaftskonferenz," *Die Gesellschaft* 1, no. 3 (1927).

<sup>340</sup> "Die Weltmarktentwicklung," *Die Gesellschaft* 1, no. 1 (1926): 67.

problems with a combined purchasing power. Intra-European free trade would make Europe an economic powerhouse.

Inspired by Woytinsky's piece, Naphtali envisaged a European free trade block. He thought Europe was at a critical stage in its history. Its cities were growing, soon overtaking rural populations. Europe would have to import large quantities of resources to maintain urban growth with a weakening agricultural sector. Living conditions, particularly for the working classes, would collapse.<sup>341</sup> To remedy this, Naphtali called for a 'United States of Europe.' The first move would be to establish a European Customs Union facilitating free trade across the continent. The customs union would evolve into a European Union. He foresaw complications with integrating the British Empire and Soviet Union but maintained it was in the interests of European nations and their workers to have a free trade zone.<sup>342</sup>

Hobson turned his attention again to underconsumption in *Conditions to Industrial Peace*; published just one year after the General Strike in 1927. Hobson used underconsumptionism to solve industrial disputes spawned by a continuous cycle of low growth in wages and consumption. It was moderate in its appraisal of Britain's economic situation and in its solutions to labour/capital relations. Hobson designed a legal framework to equalise the clout of both workers and business. The beginning of the book took great pains to outline the financial stress reaped on large elements of the middle class, not just workers, since the end of the war. Hobson thought that the 'professional middle classes' were unable to raise their prices in proportion to the general level of prices. Their 'invested savings' also 'suffered from the depreciated

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<sup>341</sup> Fritz Naphtali, "Die Einigung Europas," *Die Gesellschaft* 2, no. 10 (1926): 334-343.

<sup>342</sup> *Ibid.*

value of their investments.’<sup>343</sup> Hobson thought the cartel to explain these developments.

The formation of cartels, with what we would now call vertical integration, changed capitalism in the new century. Their ability to produce huge amounts of goods affected wages. This drove down prices, but not at the same rate as wages. Wages were effectively driven down by cartels pricing goods too high.<sup>344</sup> In light of this, any kind of ‘worker capitalism’ was well nigh impossible.<sup>345</sup> Low wage rates made this difficult to foresee since ‘large accumulation of savings’ by the working class was, at best, slight. The result of this imbalance was industrial conflict. ‘Organised labour and capital... confront one another with a more conscious mentality.’<sup>346</sup>

Hobson wanted government boards set up to oversee conditions and payment in various industries. He thought individual firms, having a free hand in setting their own wages were prone to industrial conflict. The solution to the disequilibrium between prices and wages was in autonomous boards setting wages. Hobson also questioned the very nature of these conflicts. Referring to the General Strike of the previous year, Hobson’s concern was that the ‘private quarrel’ in one industry bled over to others affecting the economy at large.<sup>347</sup> There needed to be ‘regulation of the industrial system in virtue of its social and organic unity.’ Both strikes and lockouts needed abolition. Allowing such actions affected too many people who were parties to the dispute. To Hobson, such spill over was ‘inhuman.’<sup>348</sup> An ‘Arbitration tribunal’

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<sup>343</sup> J. A. Hobson, *The Conditions of Industrial Peace* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1927), 15.

<sup>344</sup> *Ibid.*, 15-17.

<sup>345</sup> Hobson’s reference to worker capitalism was a response to arguments in favour of cartels and their claim to bring better wages and hours to workers.

<sup>346</sup> Hobson, *The Conditions of Industrial Peace*, 18.

<sup>347</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>348</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

was his solution. A strong state would arbitrate between labour and capital. While Hobson had moved into the socialist camp, *Conditions for an Industrial Peace* had all the trappings of a radical liberal. Hobson saw the grievances of both workers and business as equally legitimate. Hobson's solution was moderate, and to a certain extent unsocialist. Both labour and capital had to take responsibility for their roles in Britain's crisis. Labour's general strike was destructive, as was big business's role in unemployment and depreciation.

### **Threats of Reaction**

The threat of reaction played a secondary, but nonetheless important role in socialist discourse. Even before the formal establishment of the LSI, there were worries that socialism's enemies from the right could destroy newfound democratic institutions. Reactionary threats to democracy made up important themes in socialist thinking. Some socialists attempted to understand fascism as distinct from other right-wing forces. Italian fascism's quick victory over socialists and the labour movement sent shivers down the movement's spine. And while Nazism was still in its nascent stage, socialists took notice of this violent and anti-democratic organisation. Social Democrats became anxious about safeguarding democracy reflecting on the rise of anti-democratic forces.

When the LSI was organising its first congress in 1923, Germany was undergoing the Ruhr crisis as Italian democracy was lost to Mussolini. Amid these events, Social Democrats worried for their fledgling republics. The Labour Party's Thomas Shaw

was sent to the Ruhr to give a full report to the LSI executive in June.<sup>349</sup> He outlined fears that occupation could not only result in war but bring about the collapse of the Weimar Republic, pushing workers into the arms of reaction or Communists.<sup>350</sup> SPD members shared this fear. Otto Wells penned an anxious letter to the LSI's executive that the crisis made workers 'amenable' to irrational political thought. He concluded that a disintegration of the German state could have worse consequences than the Russian Revolution.<sup>351</sup> The Russian Menshevik exile Raphael Abramovitch, who personally witnessed the Russian Revolution, also worried that 'fascist demagogues would attract despairing workers.'<sup>352</sup>

Ströbel saw Weimar as a fragile institution. Even before hyperinflation he detected the stark threat of impoverishment had on Social Democracy. He was afraid dire economic conditions paradoxically turned workers against socialism. Depressed conditions stoked support for reactionary politics:

The impoverishment of the proletariat, as well as of broad sections of the middle class and of the intellectuals, has a peculiar result. It does not lead to the growth of revolutionary sentiments among those sections of the middle class which have been overtaken by economic disaster, but to a revival of old reactionary monarchical and nationalist ideas, to an increasing hatred of the working class and of Socialism.<sup>353</sup>

Ströbel also described the assassination of the USPD Diet member of the Bavarian parliament Karl Gareis as the work of 'fascistic' operators. Die Consul Organization

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<sup>349</sup> LSI Bureau, *The Labour and Socialist Bureau Meeting at Easton Lodge, July 22, 1923*, Labour Party: Labour and Socialist International, LSI 12-14, 14/12/1/2, 1923, People's History Museum, Manchester.

<sup>350</sup> Thomas Shaw, *Shaw's shortened report from mission to Germany*, Labour Party: Labour and Socialist International, LSI 12-14, 14/15/2, 1923, People's History Museum, Manchester.

<sup>351</sup> Otto Wells, *Wells to the LSI executive, June 13, 1923*, Labour Party Archives: Labour and Socialist International, LSI Minutes 1921-1937, Minutes 1923, 1923, People's History Museum, Manchester.

<sup>352</sup> Raphael Abramovitch, *Abramovitch to the LSI executive, August 28*, Labour Party Archives: Labour and Socialist International, LSI Minutes 1921-1937, LSI Minutes 1923, 1923, People's History Museum,

<sup>353</sup> Ströbel, *The German Revolution and After*, 302.

claimed responsibility for the assassination.<sup>354</sup> This small but radical group was an ultra-nationalist organisation with a stereotypical anti-Semitic flavour. It disbanded soon after the assassination.

At the beginning of the decade the reactionary threat was a broad category used to describe an amalgam of political foes. These included Bolshevik dictatorship, Italian fascism and more traditional conservative forces. At the LSI's first congress in Hamburg, the call for 'International Action against international Reaction' was expansive. The LSI rallied workers to oppose all forms of imperialism and hatreds. It called on Hungary and Italy to restore democracy and for democracy to strengthen newly created European states. Workers needed to safeguard democratic institutions against threats either from fascism or other forms of right-wing dictatorship. It paid particular attention to 'peculiar forms of anti-Semitism' within 'fascism' endangering not just Jews but Europe's working classes.<sup>355</sup> Otto Bauer, who sat on the executive, urged the LSI to be ever vigilant in its fight against reaction. Italy and Germany ranked highly on his list of fears.<sup>356</sup> He concluded with a peroration:

We must find the means for a close co-operation of socialist parties in the fight against reaction. I do not mean insurrection and general strikes, I am thinking of mutual information, of co-operation of parliamentary action, and of mass action outside parliament.<sup>357</sup>

As the decade wore on fascism became a particular concern. The SPD's 1925 Heidelberg program identified fascism as a threat to the 'realisation of socialism.'<sup>358</sup> Italian fascism took up more space in the published literature at the second LSI

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<sup>354</sup> Ibid., 259.

<sup>355</sup> The Resolutions of the Hamburg Congress, LSI 12-14.

<sup>356</sup> International action against international reaction: Speech to Hamburg Congress, LSI/12-14.

<sup>357</sup> Ibid.

<sup>358</sup> SPD, *Das Heidelberger Programm* (Berlin: Vorstand der Sozialdemokratischen Partei Deutschlands, 1925).

congress. More specifically, it expanded, in detail, the threat it posed to socialism. The brutal repression of the Italy's socialist and labour movements caused anxiety.<sup>359</sup> On June 10, 1924, the Italian socialist leader Giacomo Matteotti was kidnapped and subsequently murdered. Though it was never firmly established that Mussolini's regime organised the hit, it was widely assumed that it coordinated the affair. More damning was that Matteotti had written a book exposing the true nature of the fascist regime a year into its rule. Months before his death, the LSI made a point of obtaining a copy and translated it into several languages.<sup>360</sup>

In the opening paragraph Matteotti outlined Fascist political strategy.

The fascist government justifies its armed conquest of political power, its use of violence and the risk it incurred in igniting civil war, by plea of the urgent necessity of restoring the authority of law and the state, and of rescuing the country from economic and financial...ruin.<sup>361</sup>

The increase in economic productivity, Matteotti continued, was present before the fascists seized power. More importantly for the wider movement, the book outlined how the new regime suppressed democratic institutions and the Italian labour movement. He highlighted the importance of Mussolini's abolition of the Guardia Regia, replacing it with a National Militia 'composed entirely of fascists.'<sup>362</sup> Most telling was his emphasis on the destruction of socialist politics in Italy. Matteotti exposed the violent suppression of socialists and unionist in Italy. From the establishment of 'fascist corporations' replacing genuine trade unions, to large-scale imprisonment of workers; Italy's vast labour movement was subjugated.<sup>363</sup> Gaetona

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<sup>359</sup> Second Congress of the Labour & Socialist International: at Marsaeilles, August 22nd to 27th, 45-47.

<sup>360</sup> *Meeting of the administrative committee, 13 May*, Labour Party Archives: Labour and Socialist International, LSI Minutes 1921-1937, LSI Minutes 1924, 1924, People's History Musuem,

<sup>361</sup> Giacomo Matteotti, *The Fascisti Exposed: A year od fascist domination*, trans. E. W. Dicks (London: Independent Labour Party, 1924), 1.

<sup>362</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>363</sup> *Ibid.*

Salvemini, an Italian socialist exile, noted the political importance of fascism's co-option of the trade union movement into a de facto state monopoly.<sup>364</sup> In 1926 the LSI executive began raising money under the 'Matteotti Fund' supporting socialists in Italy opposing the regime.<sup>365</sup> The fund's objectives were expanded to include combatting dictatorship in general. Some of the money raised helped Social Revolutionaries in Russia. By 1928 it had raised 107,362 Swiss francs.<sup>366</sup>

Even before the Nazi's turn to electoral politics, socialists saw the potential for disaster. Towards the end of the decade, German socialists began to treat Nazism as a significant threat.<sup>367</sup> After currency stabilisation, many within the movement felt Weimar had steadied.<sup>368</sup> Hilferding and Kautsky certainly thought Weimar was a well-established functioning democracy. Nonetheless, there were rumblings that socialists had to be ever watchful of their Nazi foes. One commentator referred to them as the 'Bavarian Movement'.<sup>369</sup> After the Munich Putsch and the rise of paramilitary organisations, the protection of democratic politics became paramount. This was not just to protect democracy at large but also carried with it a high degree of understandable self-interest: the first target of Nazism was clearly going to be socialists and the labour movement. The Italian situation proved this, as Max Adler noted at the time.<sup>370</sup> In January 1923, in a right-wing SPD publication, journalists and

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<sup>364</sup> Gaetano Salvemini, "Fascist Trade Unionism (part 2)," *Labour Magazine* 4, no. 11 (1926): 490-493.

<sup>365</sup> *Secretary's Report to the meeting of the Executive, August 28*, Labour Party Archives: Labour and Socialist International, LSI Minutes 1921-1937, LSI Minutes 1926, 1926, People's History Museum, ; *Meetings of Bureau and Executive, April 10-12*, Labour Party Archives: Labour and Socialist International, LSI Minutes 1921-1937, LSI Minutes 1926, 1926, People's History Museum,

<sup>366</sup> *Reports submitted to the Third Congress of the Labour and Socialist International: Brussels, 5-11 August, 1928*, (Zurich: Secretariat of the LSI, 1928), 72-73.

<sup>367</sup> Harsch, *German Social Democracy and Nazism*, Introduction.

<sup>368</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>369</sup> Herman Schützinger, "Die Bayerische Bewegung," *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, April 24 1923, 216-219.

<sup>370</sup> Adler, *Neue Menschen: Gedanken über sozialistische Erziehung*, 104-105.

publicist Paul Kampffmeyer outlined the growing and significant threat Fascism posed for the new republic.

The National Socialists are charged with breaches of the peace, criminal attacks on members of the Social Democratic Party, vulgar attacks on the Reich government, and brutal assaults on people. The nationalist *Völkischer Beobachter* [a Nazi newspaper] openly professes state-subversive fascism and rejects the legal, parliamentary way of attaining political power.<sup>371</sup>

Kautsky attempted to deal with Fascism in *The Materialism Conception of History*. While brief, he outlined what made fascism possible in Italy and improbable in other European countries, particularly in industrialised Germany. Italy was apparently unique in its predisposition to fascism. Italian capitalism lacked development. In the eyes of Kautsky, war left Italy with an unusual class character. Large parts of the country were 'declassed'. Peasants and elements of the petty bourgeois turned to banditry. Intellectuals, left idle, turned their attention to various putsches from the previous century. Such mentalities were revived at the end of World War One. Simultaneously, the Italian working class had been split by Communism. The Italian working class was 'exhausted', having lost its 'fighting capacity'. 'These are then the conditions for the rise of fascism. Limited to a particular country and a particular point in time and will not be repeated very easily'.<sup>372</sup> Based on the population of Italy and the number of fascists he thought were active, he estimated that it would take something like a million fascists to destroy German democracy – a quantity and situation he thought highly unlikely.<sup>373</sup>

The LSI put together a report on disarmament for its conference in 1928 in Belgium. Concerns among socialist about rearmament, in addition to protectionism, made it a

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<sup>371</sup> Paul Kampffmeyer, "Vom Deutschen Fascismus," *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, Januar 16 1923, 26-31.

<sup>372</sup> Kautsky, *The Materialist Conception of History*, 394.

<sup>373</sup> *Ibid.*

key theme at its Brussels congress. The threat of fascism hung heavy in the air. The report concluded with the need for new international arms conventions, referring directly to fascism and its 'armed militias' threatening international peace.<sup>374</sup> For the better part of the decade the main threat from the right came from Italy. It served as a reminder to the wider movement that forces of reaction could dominate a well-organised labour movement. Nazism, for all its brashness, was still a secondary issue.

### **All is not lost**

Despite the setbacks and complexities Social Democracy faced, there was not a total sense of defeat or retreat. Lingering vigour was still tangible. Some gains had been made. Red Vienna provided inspiration. Vienna proved to socialists how instrumental their ideas could be in improving people's lives. Its urban housing projects and city-sponsored proletarian cultural institutions were the envy of many. Vienna proved that electoral governance could lead to social transformation. As Eley rightly points out, Red Vienna was impossible without protection and legitimisation from legal institutions.<sup>375</sup> Similarly, the British Labour victory in 1929 caused excitement for continental socialists. Here was a chance to bring unemployment under control and to socialise industry.

After the Austrian Revolution in 1918 and the establishment of the First Austrian Republic, Social Democrats dominated the local government of Vienna. The capital of the new republic became the centre of Social Democratic experimentation, particularly

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<sup>374</sup> *LSI International Congress Report on Disarmament, August 1928*, Labour Party: Labour and Socialist International, LSI/15-16, 15/5/3, 1928, People's History Museum,

<sup>375</sup> Eley, *Forging Democracy*, 222.

known for its housing strategy. The Austro-Marxism tradition of *bildung* heavily influenced policy in the city. Material and cultural lives of workers were going to improve. As one historian put it, reformers 'assumed not only the traditional role of pedagogue but that of social engineer as well'.<sup>376</sup>

Amid the disarray Vienna suffered in the first years of the republic, Red Vienna's success was impressive. Between 1919 and 1934 the municipality built 63,924 domiciles; 58,667 were apartments and 5,257 were singular-family homes.<sup>377</sup> Despite the notable record of construction, only 18 per cent of these homes had gas, electricity and running water. Workers who could not find public accommodation still had to suffer a large private housing market uncontrolled by the municipality. They still lived at the whims of landlords. The city funded its construction projects with a steep 'rent' tax imposed on landlords. This only accounted for 20 per cent of the necessary funding. Taxes on luxury items made up the rest. The luxury tax in particular caused outcry. The Christian Social Party organised furiously to oppose these new measures. Many of its bourgeois members were directly affected by the imposition of several duties on items and activities they took for granted. Private cars and certain luxury foods and drinks incurred taxes.<sup>378</sup>

Robert Danneberg, one of the architects of Red Vienna, and President of the Vienna Diet, published a book publicising the successes of his city. Danneberg lauded the city's accomplishments and 'innovative tax' system. Vienna became a symbol of hope for many outside Austria. The German playwright, and former president of the short-lived Bavarian Soviet Republic, commented that the city had 'destroyed' the

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<sup>376</sup> Gruber, *Red Vienna: experiment in working-class culture 1919-1934*.

<sup>377</sup> *Ibid.*, 46-47.

<sup>378</sup> Jill Lewis, "Red Vienna: Socialism in One City, 1918-1927," *European Studies Review* 13(1983): 340-346.

depressed spirit of like-minded left-wing Social Democrats. Accustomed to defeat, Vienna offered hope for socialists. 'Culturally, only Russia is accomplishing anything comparable' to Red Vienna.<sup>379</sup> Herbert Morrison extolled that Vienna was a place where 'socialist dreams come true'.<sup>380</sup> Rote Wien was a sign that not all the radicalism had gone to waste. Socialism Democracy could be transformative.

The election of the Labour government in 1929 was also beacon of hope throughout Social Democratic Europe. The election held on May 30 yielded a hung parliament. Labour in fact came second in the popular vote but with Liberal support outnumbered the Conservatives in the House of Commons. Ramsay MacDonald became Prime Minister in the second Labour government in British history.<sup>381</sup> Many greeted Labour's victory over Stanley Baldwin with enthusiasm, though some did note that the results of 1924 were similar.<sup>382</sup> The government's tumultuous downfall is a topic for the next chapter. 1929 seemed to provide a chance for a socialist government to confront unemployment. That problem dominated the election campaign.

The German socialist Egon Wertheimer saw the Labour Party's victory as a bulwark against worsening unemployment. Wertheimer implored the new government to provide state credit to industry so it could 'absorb' as many workers as possible. Like in Germany, credit from America could reequip industry. He thought Britain could do the same, only this time with the aim of reducing unemployment.<sup>383</sup> Wertheimer worried that Labour's election promises to tackle unemployment was inadequate. It

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<sup>379</sup> Ernst Toller, "Socialist Vienna," *The Socialist Review*, no. 14 (1927).

<sup>380</sup> Herbert Morrison, "Where Socialist dreams come true," *Labour Magazine* VII, no. 9 (1929): 393-395.

<sup>381</sup> Ross McKibbin, "The Economic Policy of the Second Labour Government 1929-1931," *Past & Present* 68(1975): 95.

<sup>382</sup> Balthasar Weingartz, "Zur Pshychologie der Englischen Wahlen," *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, June 6 1929, 488-493.

<sup>383</sup> Egon Wertheimer, "A German view of British Labour," *The Socialist Review*, no. 42 (1929): 20-24.

needed more concrete mechanisms to surmount the problem. Wetheimer thought it would be tragic if the Labour minority government became moderated or defeated. In his mind, the Labour Party was the 'greatest hope of socialism in the world'.

If defeated or transformed into a new liberal party, international socialism will have lost a naval battle over its global struggle to transform the ruling social order.<sup>384</sup>

### **The Soviet Union Lives!**

Soviet Russia survived its infancy, contrary to the expectations of many Social Democrats. The regime weathered the White Army, internal rebellion, and Lenin's death in January 1924. The regime was in fact extending its control within the borders of the former Russian Empire. The New Economic Policy was contentious, but it successfully pulled the country out of its post-World War/revolution/civil-war quagmire. Between 1914 and 1922 roughly 16 million died.<sup>385</sup> The 'demographic shock' suffered by Russia was slowly being overcome. Deurbanisation was a telling marker of destruction from the previous period. This was now being reversed. By the mid-1920s a similar percentage of people lived in cities as they had prior to 1914. By 1927 agricultural and industrial output had returned to pre-war levels. In 1928 they surpassed them.<sup>386</sup>

Life was still harsh for Soviet citizens. Although agricultural output recovered, it was not without significant setbacks. The NEP produced its own problems. A significant

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<sup>384</sup> "Die Zukunft der britischen Arbeiterpartei," *Die Gesellschaft*, no. 6 (1929): 577-578.

<sup>385</sup> Gijis Kessler, "A Population under Pressure: Household Responses to Demographic and Economic Shock in the Interwar Soviet Union," in *A Dream Deferred: New Studies in Russian and Soviet Labour History*, ed. Donald Filtzer, et al. (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 318.

<sup>386</sup> Edele, *The Soviet Union: a short history*, 78.

price gap opened between agricultural and industrial products. The price of agricultural goods, particularly grain, had fallen drastically while industrial goods steadily increased. Trotsky famously dubbed this the 'scissors crisis.' The increase of peasant households and the destruction of market-oriented landowner estates may have caused the fall in prices. Soviet planners worried peasants would be unwilling to sell their produce to the state. They could hoard grain for their own consumption or sell it on the recently sanctioned private market while growing cities needed feeding.<sup>387</sup> This is exactly what happened. In 1927/28 the state bought only half as much grain as it did in 1925/26. The Soviet Union was also suffering from unemployment. Unlike other European countries where unemployment resulted from depression, in the Soviet Union it lay in the huge migration from countryside to city. Industrial expansion could not keep up with the growing urban labour reserve. In 1926 roughly 9 per cent of the working age population was without a job.<sup>388</sup>

Important changes also occurred in the high politics of the Soviet Union. Even before Lenin's death on 21 January 1924, jostling began to find his replacement. In April 1922, at the 11<sup>th</sup> Party Congress, Stalin was made General Secretary of the Communist Party. The position was thought of at the time as a bureaucratic role, not as a base for personal dictatorship. Lenin had reservations about appointing him but appreciated his organisational abilities. Such authority over the party apparatus afforded Stalin an enormous amount of power. Stalin began to gain control of Soviet Union from 1922, thereafter defending and expanding his position through manipulating party bureaucracy.<sup>389</sup> Stalin constructed a personal autocracy inside a vast single-party

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<sup>387</sup> Davies, *Soviet economic development from Lenin to Khrushchev*, 26-28.

<sup>388</sup> *Ibid.*, 28-31.

<sup>389</sup> Kotkin in particular labours this point. Opposition to Stalin had little chance since it was badly organised and easily out manoeuvred.

dictatorship. Factional conflicts within the party apparatus mirrored elite battles.<sup>390</sup> In October 1927, Stalin expelled his main rivals Trotsky and Zinoviev from the party. Trotsky was exiled altogether in 1929. As Merridale points out, Stalin alone did not contribute to the growing authoritarianism inside the USSR. The wider factional dispute between Stalin, Trotsky, and Kamenev and Zinoviev was also to blame.<sup>391</sup> Nonetheless, the period of proper collective leadership and open policy debate came to an end. Stalin's ascent opened a new chapter in the still-young Soviet Republic.

The machinations of the world's only Communist government captivated Social Democrats. To some, Stalin's rise was another sign of the degenerative nature of the regime. The NEP's results proved to other Social Democrats that the regime's tactical retreat was correct. Finally, the early signs of Stalin's industrialisation campaigns interested onlookers. A semblance of an average life, unhindered by war or revolution, was being built. Life inside the Communist regime fascinated Social Democrats.

Writing in 1926 Otto Bauer reflected on the recent history of the Soviet Union. He gave special mention of the 'remarkable' progress it had made in improving its economy. According to Bauer towns were 'abundantly supplied with provisions.' There was finally a 'basis for economic restoration.' Bauer gave no mention of the 'scissor crisis', despite being known to the outside world. Bauer's analysis of Soviet socialism was interesting:

It is still not socialism which exists in Russia, but it is not capitalism either; it is a country in a state of transition; its social economy contains very many capitalist elements, but also very many socialist ones... Today European capitalism can still say: Prices are still high, the cost of

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<sup>390</sup> It is worth noting that factionalism had been formerly banned by the party.

<sup>391</sup> Catherine Merridale, *Moscow Politics and The Rise of Stalin: The Communist Party in the Capital, 1925-32* (London: Macmillan, 1990), 21-46.

production is still high, for the time being capitalist industry can produce better... but we note the progress made by Russia.

Bauer went on, chastising the regime for its suppression of other socialists. He demanded the release of socialist prisoners and more democratic modes of governing be allowed. 'Now that the revolution had been sufficiently established' there was little need to continue with socialist oppression. Overall, Bauer was optimistic about Russia's prospects.<sup>392</sup> Given the regime's ruggedness, Bauer's belief in the Revolution's progressive potential had certainly not dimmed. He saw great prospects in its ability to build socialism given its recent success.

The Russian émigré Elias Hurwicz was far less sanguine about the results of the NEP. Hurwicz, a socialist who settled in Berlin, was more receptive to Kautsky's position. He unreservedly rejected the regime: it was a utopian experiment setup in a backward country bearing little relation to Marxism.<sup>393</sup> Hurwicz's article in the *Sozialistische Monatshefte* was a scathing critique of the NEP's results, particularly in rural Russia. Basing his piece on statistics from published figures from the Soviet planning agency GOSPLAN, he thought the peasant economy lay in ruins because of a substantial reduction in livestock numbers. Unequal access to arable soil, together with a fall in livestock, created huge inequalities in rural areas. The NEP created an abundance of new contradictions. In the rural economy there was a divide between the new wealthy peasants, 'harbingers' of an entirely new class of bourgeois peasants, and 'proletarian peasants.' It is difficult to know how accurate these figures were; nonetheless, his parting words were telling and partly accurate:

Above all, the Bolshevik government needs money, money and more money; They seek to procure by exporting grain. They aim to buy it as cheaply as possible from the farmer. This is

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<sup>392</sup> Otto Bauer, "Socialists and Soviet Russia: What must our attitude be?," *The Socialist Review* (1926): 12-19.

<sup>393</sup> Deak, *Weimar Germany's Left-Wing Intellectuals: A political history of Weltbühne and its circle*, 142.

the basic scheme that emerges from the whole regime... Cheap grain prices does not correspond to an equity in the agriculture. On the contrary, the means of production remain constantly expensive. The main aim of the Bolsheviks is the profitability of industrial enterprises. This is why industrial prices are jacked up as high as possible. Agriculture is thus neglected.<sup>394</sup>

In reality, the NEP's objective was not to jack up industrial prices far apart from agricultural prices. This worried Soviet planners too. Yet, exploitation of the countryside to facilitate industrial growth was a very real part of the Soviet economy; a pattern that exacerbated in the following years.

Social Democratic commentators offered advice and analysis on the NEP's shortfalls. Economist Judith Grünfeld gave a detailed guide to the 'scissor crisis'. Grünfeld's study, provided a detailed analysis of Russia's new place in wheat markets. The reduction in Soviet wheat exports was not just due to wartime destruction. She blamed the 'extremely autarkic' Soviet economy. As Grünfeld rightly pointed out, the Soviet Union was cut off from most international trade. Since the state had monopolised international trade, the fall in its internal agricultural prices further hurt its exports on world markets because the state had not collected enough wheat. Grünfeld's assessment of Soviet industrial policy was equally critical:

The prices of Russian heavy industry in relation to world market prices very high and it a stark example of the unbearable burden in which the Soviet government's industrialisation policy imposes upon the Russian economy.

Soviet industry produced commodities with great inefficiency and at relatively high expense. The price gaps between the rural and industrial economies, she thought, was partially a result of this. Grünfeld's assessment of the Soviet economy's preference for putting all its efforts into industry at the expense of peasants and consumers was apt.

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<sup>394</sup> Elias Hurwicz, "Die Schichtung der Bauernschaft im Bolschewistischen Russland," *Sozialistische Monatshefte* 1928, 950-957.

She urged the Soviet government to open trade barriers with the rest of Europe. This would rebalance both agricultural prices and make its industrial sector more competitive and efficient<sup>395</sup> She was also critical of the Soviet government's nationalisation of industry. No doubt, Grünfeld, like many socialists, considered nationalising industry in such an underdeveloped economy to be premature.

Social Democrats commented extensively on the drama of Soviet high politics. Some were merely interested in observing political machinations in the reclusive socialist state, others drawing conclusions about the long-term viability of the revolution itself. The LSI executive was certainly taking note of the factional infighting between Stalin and Zinoviev. *Pravda*, the organ of the Communist Party, still published internal party debates in the mid-1920s. It was an important source of information for keen Soviet observers, particularly for exiled Mensheviks.<sup>396</sup> They were aware of it from rancour within the Comintern too.<sup>397</sup>

Irakli Tsereteli, an exiled Georgian Social Democrat, observed the clashes within the Communist Party at its congress in 1925 (Tsereteli published his findings in 1926). He highlighted the debates between Stalin and the Zinoviev clique over the NEP. He went into detail exposing the silencing of Kamenev and Zinoviev. Flouting of democratic norms greatly worried Tsereteli:

If leaders like Kamenev and Zinoviev can easily be made to fall into line with the victorious majority, it would be foolish to conclude that these reprisals can also quell the discontent of the mass of the workers. What is the ultimate evolution to be anticipated of the Bolshevist regime?

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<sup>395</sup> Judith Grünfeld, "Russland und der Weltmarkt," *Die Gesellschaft* 1, no. 6 (1927): 502-521.

<sup>396</sup> See sources for I. Tsereteli, "Can the Bolshevists "Consolidate"? II," *Labour Magazine* 5, no. 1 (1926). – Tsereteli cites *Pravda* regularly as the source of information regarding Communist factional disputes.

<sup>397</sup> Secretary's Report to the meeting of the Executive, August 28, LSI Minutes 1921-1937. *Secretary's Report April*, Labour Party Archives: Labour and Socialist International, LSI Minutes 1921-1937, LSI Minutes 1926, 1926, People's History Museum,

Tsereteli also responded to Bauer's assertion of economic improvement under the NEP. He thought that any progress made by Russia was 'purchased at the price of capitulations to the worst elements of capitalism.'<sup>398</sup>

The Labour MP and pacifist Wilfred Wellock visited the Soviet Union in 1928, reporting back impressions of life inside.<sup>399</sup> He returned optimistic about his experience. Ignorant of the surely manicured itinerary of his trip, he described visiting Russia as 'as something of an explorer... wandering about much like Alice in wonderland.' The changes that had taken place were 'akin to the book of revelations.' The social levelling instilled by the regime impressed Wellock. Awestruck with the 'complete absence of the bourgeoisie', Wellock thought that Soviet governance had indeed created a highly egalitarian society. He felt an acute sense of 'democracy' on the streets of Leningrad and Moscow, something he could not say about 'any other part of the world.' The expanding state-planned and owned industries enthralled him, describing a well-oiled machine highly modern in character.

The regime's militarism confronted Wellock's pacifism. Remarkably, he was sympathetic with it, given the circumstances the regime was founded upon. He grounded his analysis in a purely 'critical' light, explaining that the regime justified its militancy due to its revolutionary nature. A revolutionary government must be on guard against internal rebellion and foreign intervention. Wellock concluded that the dictatorial state was not 'arbitrary' like that of Italy. Since capitalism had been 'swept out of Russia' the militarism used to do this would soon likely vanish too.<sup>400</sup>

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<sup>398</sup> Tsereteli, "Can the Bolsheviks "Consolidate"? II," 15-18.

<sup>399</sup> This was not Wellock's first visit to Russia. He was a part of the Labour Party first delegation in 1920. He was impressed then. See *British Delegation to Russia 1920: Report*, (London: Trade Union Congress and the Labour Party, 1920).

<sup>400</sup> Wilfred Wellock, "Soviet Russia To-day," *The Socialist Review*, no. 24 (1928): 22-30.

## Conclusion

Enzo Traverso claims that 'the past and future interact, related by a symbiotic link. Instead of being two rigorously separated continents, they are connected by a dynamic, creative relationship'.<sup>401</sup> In the case of Social Democracy after the democratic moment, the present had come to dominate the future. The energetic and imaginative link Traverso spoke of weakened. Once the democratic moment lulled, Social Democracy passed through an uncomfortable malaise. At best, it achieved limited electoral success, allowing for a narrow set of reforms. For some older intellectuals of the Second International, this was enough. For others, it represented an impasse. Europe's economic quandaries forced many thinkers into a presentist outlook. Europe's depressed economies had to be overcome before socialism could be built. The future was put on hold. New political threats from the right also forced a holding action. German thinkers, in particular, retreated to a defence of democracy before socialist economics. Weimar had to be protected. Nobody knew that things were soon going to degenerate further than they could possibly imagine.

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<sup>401</sup> Enzo Traverso, *Left-Wing Melancholia: Marxism, history, and memory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 4-5.

## Danger zone

It was a heavily economic decade, in which every serious theorist of socialism was forced to become something of an economist.

W. Wright, 1979.<sup>402</sup>

The Great Depression shattered Europe and Social Democracy in tow. Within this turmoil there were energetic responses from Social Democrats that had deeply contradicting effects on the movement. High unemployment and the drying up of capital caused much theorising on the history of capitalism since 1918. The movement's attachment to democratic institutions became a sanctimonious duty; even more so than previously. Many of the movement's most senior intellectuals, while hoping to build socialism, could not conceive of such possibilities amid rapid economic decline. There could be no socialist transition until economic growth restarted, and democracy secured. Such reactions created tensions within the movement's left and right. The SPD and British Labour suffered these pressures most grievously. The crisis encouraged competing visions of Social Democracy. Challenges from the left and right imagined new futures attempting to conquer the systemic crisis while the centre maintained its presentism.

The Depression forced Social Democrats to come to terms with how a crisis in capitalism affected socialist construction. A daunting challenge for British Labour and the SPD who were in office or in coalition respectively. The movement's leading

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<sup>402</sup> Wright, *G. D. H. Cole*, 188.

intellectuals thought the economic situation had to stabilised well before any meaningful socialist policies could resume. People like Cole, Hilferding, and Naphtali accepted the economic orthodoxy on the need to maintain the Gold Standard, albeit in a modified fashion. Such thinkers went to great lengths in exploring the uneven history of post-war capitalism. It was clear to them that patchy economic growth since 1918 was the catalyst for the Slump.

Unemployment had been a persistent issue since bourgeois stabilisation, the Depression accentuated attention to it. Alternatives to standard Marxian economics took form as socialists explored new policies. Mass unemployment and political instability saw many flock to Nazism. Socialist innovation arose from the necessity to confront the intertwined ills of unemployment and fascism.

Divisions exposed during bourgeois stabilisation now showed signs of outright schism. Inaction frustrated leftists, particularly at a time of major capitalist crisis. Inertia vindicated leftist suspicions of the movement's ineptitude from the years since 1918. Strains between the ILP and the Labour Party intensified, as they it did among former members of the USPD within German Social Democracy.<sup>403</sup> Meanwhile, Social Democracy's right wing saw weakness in attachments to Marxist orthodoxies. This gave impetus to various schemes of planned capitalism in lieu of socialist economics. While these notions were not fully developed at this early stage, they foreshadowed more advanced alternatives to established Social Democratic political economy. By late 1931 these fissures began formalising into institutional schisms.

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<sup>403</sup> Gidon Cohen, *The Failure of a Dream: The Independent Labour Party from Disaffiliation to World War II* (London: Tauris, 2007), 15-28. For the SPD see Harsch, *German Social Democracy and Nazism*, 147-150.

Five themes occupy the chapter. The first two themes describe the historical context of the Slump. It is necessary to reconstruct some of the technical aspects of the Depression. Social Democracy's responses formed amongst a particular orthodoxy, historically specific to the first decade of the interwar period. Understanding how the Gold Standard, the credit crunch, and the anti-democratic politics that it produced are important elements in historicising Social Democratic ideology amidst the Depression. Consequently, the first theme outlines the beginning of the Depression, and the economic thought and policy that framed the initial reactions to it. The second theme outlines the politics the Slump produced. The third theme elucidates the importance socialist thinkers placed on capitalism's recent history. They thought the tempestuous nature of post-1918 capitalism explained the Slump. Many viewed the current predicament as a continuation of the economic quandaries of the 1920s. The fourth section surveys how socialists confronted unemployment. Unemployment had to be overcome to stem the spread of fascism. Ideas surrounding working-class consumption, state planning and state-sponsored works became centrepieces of Social Democratic innovation. It is here where fractures within the movement began to occur. The final section investigates how these ruptures emerged during the last congress of the Labour and Socialist International. Held in July/August 1931, the congress marked the beginning of the end of the institution of Second International Socialism. Debates and political jostling indicated schism that would formalise in the following months and years.

### **Depression Economics 1930-31**

The Wall Street Crash in October 1929 was a catalyst for a European economic crisis. The instability of economies following the First World War shaped the European dimensions of the Great Depression. The obsession with re-establishing the Gold

Standard and the pursuit of deflationary policies and politics, all described in the previous chapter, made the depths of despair seen and felt well into the 1930s possible. The story of American credit is vital. Central's Europe's reliance on American credit from the mid-1920s, particularly Germany, predisposed these countries to any kind of shock in financial markets. While the Wall Street Crash precipitated the Depression, it was also a symptom of previous economic crises after World War 1.

The downfall of Weimar's economy was emblematic of the many problems with post-war economic and financial structures. As Patricia Clavin puts it, this 'lay bare problems in the way capital operated in both the domestic and international economy.'<sup>404</sup> Germany was significant not just because of the Nazi victory, but because outside the United States, it suffered the most acute crisis of the industrialised world. Signs of trouble began as early as 1927 with declines in foreign investments into Central Europe. Investment in Germany dropped sharply and by 1928 55 percent of all investments entering Germany were short-term loans. This was important since once investors began to lose confidence in their investments, it was easy for them to stem credit flows.<sup>405</sup> Credit flows also began to decline because of the stock market boom on Wall Street in 1928.<sup>406</sup> Investors shifted capital back to the United States to take advantage of the domestic bonanza.<sup>407</sup> Capital became more expensive to obtain as short-term interest rates rose in the summer of 1928.<sup>408</sup> James suggests this explains

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<sup>404</sup> Clavin, *The Great Depression*, 85.

<sup>405</sup> Ibid. Also see Patricia Clavin, *The failure of economic diplomacy: Britain, Germany, France and the United States 1931-35* (Hampshire: Macmillan, 1996), 14. Also see Albrecht Ritschl, "Reparations, Deficits, and Debt Default: The Great Depression in Germany," in *The Great Depression of the 1930s: Lessons for Today*, ed. Nicholas Crafts and Peter Fearon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 116.

<sup>406</sup> Harold James, *The German Slump: Politics and Economics 1924-1936* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 13-14.

<sup>407</sup> Mark Mazowe, *Dark Continent: Europe's twentieth century* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998), 110.

<sup>408</sup> Robert Boyce, *The Great Interwar Crisis and the Collapse of Globalization* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 218.

decreasing amounts of labour productivity in Germany since cheap labour substituted expensive capital.<sup>409</sup> Despite this, unemployment in Germany began to rise in 1928. Europe was facing a credit crunch something like 18 months before the Crash. The origins of the crisis lay in a multifaceted web of easy US credit, Central Europe's over-reliance on that credit as a result of war and hyperinflation, and a general malaise induced by deflationary policies attempting to curb inflation, return to Gold and deradicalise labour.

As 1929 went on anxieties increased over the emergence of a credit bubble on Wall Street. There was also nervousness around the recently signed Young Plan in May, and the large amounts of gold conversion France was undertaking. The Federal Reserve Bank of New York, under growing pressure, raised interest rates from 5 to 6 percent. The credit frenzy had to be curtailed. But the New York stock markets took little notice of the warning signs. The 19<sup>th</sup> of September marked the peak of stock prices in the entire interwar period. A day later the Hatry empire collapsed in London. The Hatry group was several companies and trusts controlled by mogul Clarence Hatry. He was attempting to secure an £8 million sale of United Steel. His empire went bust bankrupting him. The ensuing fallout forced London's hand and the Bank of England raised its rate from 5.5 to 6.5 percent on September 26.<sup>410</sup> By the end of that month Britain's gold stocks had declined by almost 20 percent.

In October the credit bubble finally burst. On October 14 panic sell offs ensued (Black Thursday). Panic returned on the 29<sup>th</sup>; Black Tuesday. The Wall Street Crash froze credit as firms began to cut both lending and expenditure. As one historian put it,

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<sup>409</sup> James, *The German Slump: Politics and Economics 1924-1936*, 14.

<sup>410</sup> Charles P. Kindleberger, *The World in Depression 1929-1939* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 114-115.

there was a 'race for liquidity amongst companies.<sup>411</sup> Even as stocks recovered later that year, credit flows in most areas halted as companies scaled back investments. The Crash had only a limited immediate effect on America's economy as comparatively small amounts of wealth were lost. It was the collapse in confidence and its flow-on effects around the world that destabilised capitalism. The Wall Street Crash on October 29, 1929, thus heralded 'something very close to the collapse of the capitalist world economy.'<sup>412</sup>

Recent experiences with inflation shaped European responses. Governments feared that any kind of expansive credit policy would bring a return to upheavals of the early 1920s. Resolve by both the United State and most European countries to maintain the Gold Standard, with its fixed exchange rates, 'determined that all the economies would sink together.'<sup>413</sup> The first industry to feel the Crash's effects was agriculture. There were dramatic drops in prices as demand for primary products collapsed. By 1931 the price of wheat had fallen 50 percent. Tariffs, erected throughout the 1920s, increased. The key turning point in Europe, however, was the banking crisis of 1931.

Central European banks were particularly exposed for two reasons. Firstly, so much of Central Europe had become dependent on foreign loans, particularly from the United States. By 1931 credit was a dry well. Both government and industry were pursuing almost non-existent credit markets. The second reason was the incestuous nature of commercial banks and industry. This relationship was much commented on by socialists. Hilferding made a name for himself exploring this relationship in *Finance Capital* (1910). Banking and industry had a symbiotic relationship whereby the state

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<sup>411</sup> Ibid., 124.

<sup>412</sup> Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes*, 91.

<sup>413</sup> Clavin, *The Great Depression*, 99.

of one affected the other. As interest rates were rising, since the rules of the Gold Standard dictated this, industry found it difficult to borrow money. Industry had to cope by dropping prices. This led to a vicious cycle of firms not being able to cover their bank loans as banks responded by calling in their loans. Businesses began to fail *en masse* and banks could not recoup their loans, undermining the confidence of those who had deposits. The result was a run on the banks.

The first major bank to collapse was Austria's Kreditanstalt in May 1931. Austria's particularly destructive post-1918 economic history did not help. Banks in Austria had even closer relations with industry where they covered up industry's losses with credit, creating an 'illusion of prosperity.' Banking amalgamations undertaken in the 1920s compounded the problem. The remaining banks took even more insolvent companies on their books. The credit crunch exposed the façade of the Austrian banking system and its artificial support for industry. Between the 11 to the 23 of May, the Kreditanstalt lost 300 million shillings from withdrawals. The Austrian government nationalised the bank and its assets, freezing its loans, but the damage was done.<sup>414</sup>

By June 1931 the banking crisis in Austria began to worry Germany. German banks' large investments in Austria were frozen. Their relationship with both the private and public sectors, and the Reichsbank was under stress. Germany's own banking crisis started after the downfall of the textile company Nordwolle. Nordwolle had bought a year's supply of wool in anticipation of higher prices; they had borrowed large sums from Darmstädter and the DANAT bank. When prices fell Nordwolle and DANAT went bust. There was a run on German banks with depositors quickly withdrawing

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<sup>414</sup> Ibid., 120-122.

their accounts; much like in Austria. The Dresdner lost over ten percent of its revenue; Deutsche Bank lost over 8 percent. The run exposed bad investments from the previous decade. Banks desperate to maintain liquidity increased their rates to protect deposits while forcing companies to quickly repay their loans.<sup>415</sup>

The Reichsbank struggled to prop up both the public and private sectors while maintaining Gold Standard rules. The Reichsbank was defending the value of the currency, which was struggling in real-world terms to keep up with their dwindling gold reserves. Devaluing the Mark was unthinkable; reflationary policy smacked of the bad old days of 1922/23. The crisis was in a sense bought under control in July when all financial institutions were shut. The government froze 6.3 million marks of foreign credit. Things began to stabilise in the financial scene in August but the damage to both consumer and industrial confidence was severe. People expected further deflationary measures to take place as business was unwilling to make large purchases or investments.<sup>416</sup> Unemployment became rampant. In 1931 unemployment was at 23 percent; in 1932 it was over 30 percent.<sup>417</sup>

Britain faced a very different problem. British commercial banks fared moderately well, having ample liquid reserves to weather depositors' demands. In the UK it was not commercial banks bearing the brunt of the crisis but the central bank. Defending the pound's parity with gold confronted The Bank of England. By 1931 the country had a major balance of payments crisis, where earnings from financial services, shipping and other foreign business profits had fallen in a heap. This did not just stem from the Crash but was a compounding issue from lacklustre growth since 1921. The

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<sup>415</sup> James, *The German Slump: Politics and Economics 1924-1936*, 290-291.

<sup>416</sup> Clavin, *The Great Depression*, 129-130.

<sup>417</sup> B. R. Mitchell, *International Historical Statistics* (London: Palgrave, 1998), 168.

reestablishment of the Gold Standard at an unrealistically high level and deflationary policies weakened Britain's competitive edge while the Slump hurt exports even more. There was a ballooning budget deficit which the newly elected Labour government felt constrained in its ability to tackle unemployment. This led to deep schism in the Labour Party,<sup>418</sup> something the next section deals with. The government's May Committee called for cuts to unemployment benefits and tax increases attempting to bring the budget back to surplus. This endeavoured to rally confidence but actually deepened the political crisis. Once the Labour government split and MacDonald and Snowden formed a National Government it became clear that the only way to salvage the situation was for Britain to drop Gold and float the Pound Sterling devaluing the currency. Monetary freedom from Gold allowed the reduction of interest rates easing domestic credit restrictions.<sup>419</sup>

The Depression's effects on France was not immediate. As Julian Jackson artfully explains, 'it was a slow paralysis affecting different sectors of the economy with unequal intensity.' France was the only country out of Britain, the United States, and Germany who maintained industrial output in 1930 at 1929 levels.<sup>420</sup> In 1931 the decline in production was 10 percent, 15 percent less than these countries. By 1931-32 output reduced more. Unemployment began to rise in late 1930. France's belated depression was thought to lie in the underhanded manner it played the Gold Standard. France did not play 'by the rules of the game.' France, along with the United States saw massive inflows of Gold from debtor nations. Neither country expanded credit to stem the flow of gold or to defend the gold exchange by reducing interest

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<sup>418</sup> Eichengreen, *Golden Fetters*, 283.

<sup>419</sup> Clavin, *The Great Depression*, 132-133.

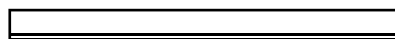
<sup>420</sup> Julian Jackson, *The politics of depression in France 1932-1936* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 23.

rates.<sup>421</sup> This was not necessarily for nefarious reasons. France, like many countries in Europe saw the relaxation of credit and monetary flows as a dangerous cocktail resulting in high inflation.<sup>422</sup> Germany in 1922-23 was the ultimately barometer of such actions. The inflows of gold led to growth in real-world domestic prices. French citizens thus continued to import goods, but exports stunted due to high prices of French goods. As such, France amassed a large trade deficit.

### **Social Democracy in Depression**

For Social Democracy, Depression politics exposed ideological and institutional limitations. No matter how much Social Democrats had been battling unemployment during the previous decade whilst maintaining economic orthodoxy, the Depression laid bare its shortcomings. It could not, nor was willing, to replace capitalism with socialism amid such a raw and destructive crisis. Social Democracy caught itself between lessening barbarous experiences of workers whilst balancing budgets and maintaining Gold, all for the promise of socialism once the economy improved. It was an impossible bind for the movement, only worsening as the crisis ensued.

The economic crisis produced a monumental political and social calamity in the Weimar Republic. The SPD had done reasonably well at the 1928 elections. While its vote had decreased since the heady days of 1918/19 it had won plurality with almost 30 percent of the vote. Herman Müller became chancellor heading another Grand



<sup>421</sup> Eichengreen, *Golden Fetters*, 249, 254.

<sup>422</sup> *Ibid.*, 254. – There has been a more recent study that suggests France's 'passive' response to the influx of gold emanated from the Bank of France's view that such movements were merely 'natural' workings of the Gold Standard. See Kenneth Mouré, *The Gold Standard Illusion: France, the Bank of France, and the International Gold Standard, 1914-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 185-186.

Coalition government. Hilferding became Finance Minister for the second time.<sup>423</sup> Even before the crisis came to ahead there was significant tensions inside the government over the previous government's approval of a Battle Cruiser program. The SPD found themselves in an awkward position voting against the bill in the Reichstag while in government. Nonetheless, the SPD came to power with the intension of a thoroughgoing reform plan, spearheaded by Hilferding's drive. As explained previously, organised capitalism was thought-to-be highly amiable to socialism. The Crash undermined these goals, and with them the SPD's entire reformist strategy.<sup>424</sup>

Even at the beginning of 1929, before the Crash, 2.8 million were unemployed putting pressure on Germany's unemployment insurance. High unemployment was bankrupting the fund. The government faced a choice, either increase contributions or lower benefits. The Social Democratic movement (unions included) wanted contributions lifted by the central government, the Länder, and other local governments. The Centre Group and the nationalist German People's Party (DVP) rejected this, seeking a decrease in benefits. The SPD, believing the DVP were out to destroy the insurance system (which they probably were), adamantly rejected decreasing benefits, instead insisting the contribution rate to salaried employers be set at 3.75 percent. While Müller and the other SPD cabinet members had come to agreement on the issue, the Reichstag SPD members refused their support. On March 27, 1930, Müller yielded under such contradictions and resigned.<sup>425</sup> As Kolb put it, the

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<sup>423</sup> Reich President Hindenburg was reluctant to appoint Müller since he did not trust Social Democrats. While he grew to have a good working relationship with him, Hindenburg seriously constrained Müller on a number of occasions. He often refused to accept Müller's cabinet choices if they did not meet to his favour. See Mommsen, *Weimar Democracy*, 248.

<sup>424</sup> Smaldone, "Rudolf Hilferding and the Theoretical Foundations of German Social Democracy, 1902–33," 296.

<sup>425</sup> Tobias Strauman, *1931: Debt, Crisis, and the rise of Hitler* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 48.

SPD leaving cabinet was a mammoth tactical misstep. For some time, reactionary forces within the republic namely, the Reichwehr, industry and landowners, not to mention Reich President Hindenberg himself, favoured a more executive leading government independent of the Reichstag. The resignation of Müller and the SPD gave the Right the opportunity to install a reactionary administration who saw parliament as a hindrance. The fall of Müller's cabinet was a dark turning point in the short history of Weimar.<sup>426</sup> Hilferding attributed Müller's fall to unresolved contradictions from 1918. The revolution failed to 'realise socialist measures.' The SPD's participation in government was the only guarantee of 'republican administration.'<sup>427</sup>

Müller's successor was Heinrich Brüning from the Centre Group; an acceptable replacement for the DVP. Brüning was a nationalist longing for Wilhelminian days. Brüning was 'at best a fair-weather' democrat more concerned with concentrating executive powers of the Chancellorship. In March 1931 for instance, he introduced sever restrictions on the press.<sup>428</sup> Brüning, a staunch deflationist sort to use executive authority to push through his agenda.<sup>429</sup> The SPD, KPD, and DVP opposed his policies, in July Brüning asked Hindenburg to dissolve the Reichstag for an election on 14 September 1930. The election results shocked the system. The Nazi Party went from 12 to 107 seats in the Reichstag. The Nazis when from being just another fringe anti-

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<sup>426</sup> Eberhard Kolb, *The Weimar Republic*, trans. P. S. Falla and R. J. Park (Milton Park: Routledge, 2005), 84-85.

<sup>427</sup> Rudolf Hilferding, "Der Austritt aus der Regierung," *Die Gesellschaft*, no. 385-392 (1930): 385.

<sup>428</sup> Richard J. Evans, *The coming of the Third Reich* (New York: Penguin, 2004), 251.

<sup>429</sup> While Brüning believed in deflation, there were important structural components to this too. The previous Müller government likewise sort to pursue deflation to solve the crisis. Much of the international pressure placed on Germany was to assure it met its reparations targets. Pursuing deflation was both a means to solve Germany's debt trap but also a means to demonstrate the country's willingness to be financially sound, capable of meeting its reparations targets. See Ritschl, "Reparations, Deficits, and Debt Default: The Great Depression in Germany," 110-129.

Semitic nationalist group to the second largest voting bloc behind the SPD. The third largest became the KPD going from 27 to 77 seats.<sup>430</sup> The SPD lost nearly half a million votes and ten seats from the previous election.<sup>431</sup> Alexander Schifrin, an exiled Menshevik, pronounced the election a 'volcanic eruption... that has thrown German democracy and socialist workers far back.'<sup>432</sup> The Nazis were well organised, campaigning vigorously against parliamentary order. The election not only heralded the rapid rise of Nazism, but it was also a reformation of right-wing politics. Schifrin proclaimed the 'fascistisation of bourgeois' politics.<sup>433</sup>

The SPD rightly calculated public rejection of Brüning's policy but missed its anti-parliamentary backlash.<sup>434</sup> After the election the SPD leadership quickly rejected government but 'tolerated' Brüning's cabinet. They would vote with the government if there was a no confidence motion. Toleration was highly controversial; it meant tacit support for Brüning's policies despite the party's vehemently opposition to them. For the SPD the health of Weimar democracy came first. Since the election saw a surge to both Nazis and communists; they felt toleration was the lesser evil. It was the only way to protect democratic institutions. In Hilferding's most famous article in *Die Gesellschaft* 'Danger zone' he implored that the party must act as a 'bulwark against the radicalism of the right and left.' His concluding remarks, in retrospect, were remarkably chilling. Hilferding admitted that even if the Reichstag's powers remained, which is what he intended, it would face an enormous task in confronting the crisis. If the Reichstag failed in its efforts to bring the depression to heel, then the outcome would be devastating.

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<sup>430</sup> Caramani, *Elections in Western Europe*, 437.

<sup>431</sup> Kolb, *The Weimar Republic*, 113.

<sup>432</sup> Alexander Schifrin, "Partei-probleme nach den Wahlen," *Die Gesellschaft*, no. 11 (1930): 395.

<sup>433</sup> *Ibid.*, 395-396.

<sup>434</sup> Harsch, *German Social Democracy and Nazism*, 86.

If the effort [of the Reichstag] fail, then we stand at the beginning of struggles whose trajectory and outcome are uncertain and whose sacrifice of the public welfare is unforeseeable, but sure.<sup>435</sup>

In Austria, since 1920, the right had locked Social Democrats out of coalition governments. The nationalist paramilitary force the Heimwehr was strengthening in numbers during the crisis. In May 1930 they declared a highly authoritarian program seeking to destroy parliament and capitalism.<sup>436</sup> Meanwhile the powers of the executive were bolstered giving the Chancellor more emergency powers to deal with the crisis. After several failed rightist cabinets, elections were held on November 9 attempting to destroy Social Democracy and to strengthen the Christian Socials. Unlike elections in Germany, the Depression vastly favoured Austrian Social Democracy. It became the largest party in the National Council. They comfortably won plurality winning 41 percent of the vote taking 72 seats. The Christian Socials lost 19 seats coming second with 35.7 percent of the vote with 66 seats.<sup>437</sup> Despite Social Democratic strength Christian Socials and a faction led by Johannes Schober formed government. The Christian Social Otto Ender became Chancellor. Austrian Social Democracy's electoral strengths were cast aside by very determined efforts of a myriad of right-wing political parties and extra-parliamentary forces. Social Democrat leader Karl Renner was not wrong to declare that the party faced the enormous tasks of defending the republic against 'fascism, malicious attempts at the constitution, and civil war!'<sup>438</sup>

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<sup>435</sup> Rudolf Hilferding, "In der Gefahrenzone," *Die Gesellschaft*, no. 7 (1930): 289-297.

<sup>436</sup> Barbara Jelavich, *Modern Austria: Empire and Republic, 1815-1986* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 186.

<sup>437</sup> Caramani, *Elections in Western Europe*, 134.

<sup>438</sup> Karl Renner, "Großen Entscheidungen entgegen!," *Die Kampf* 23, no. 10 (1930): 401.

Britain faced a very different political crisis, that in a way, had a more immediate effect on its labour movement. The election of the second MacDonald Labour government in 1929 came just 4 months before the Crash. The minority Labour government came to office with firm but nebulous promises to end unemployment.<sup>439</sup> The Labour Party assumed, as many did, that Britain problems were structural in nature. Britain failed to take advantage of the upswing in the later part of the 1920s. Industry had thrown in its lot with ageing businesses being out competed by others. Shipping, coal, and textiles were not exporting anywhere near their pre-1914 levels. It was thought monetary policy would not have helped alleviate the situation. The MacDonald government came to such conclusions even before the Depression.<sup>440</sup>

When Labour took office there were 1.1 million without a job, by the end of 1931 it was 2.7.<sup>441</sup> Like the SPD, Labour's gradualist socialism was thought only achievable when capitalism was highly functioning. The government adhered to standard economic orthodoxy. It needed to placate business whilst assuring a return to normality ushering socialism. But to accuse Labour of being overly wedded to economic orthodoxy, as some have done, is also overstated. The government invested in limited public works. Its emphasis on rationalisation, though ineffectual, was state led. Like Germany, Britain's unemployment benefit had gone bankrupt. However, the government increased benefits and widened their scope through further borrowing from Treasury. Ross McKibbin has convincingly argued that the second Labour government was not as solidly orthodox as once thought.<sup>442</sup> While it dodged reflation,

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<sup>439</sup> Robert Skidelsky, *Politicians and the Slump: The Labour government of 1929-1931* (London: Macmillan, 1967), 60-61.

<sup>440</sup> McKibbin, "The Economic Policy of the Second Labour Government 1929-1931."

<sup>441</sup> Thorp, *A History of Labour*, 69.

<sup>442</sup> McKibbin was responding to Skidelsky, who saw Labour's gradualist socialist position as necessarily excluding radical liberal solutions to Depression, as expressed by Keynes. See Skidelsky, *Politicians and the Slump*.

it did not exactly embrace deflation either. This was why the government was regarded as 'financially untrustworthy.' The government had a choice between 'deflation and drift' and had chosen to drift until conditions improved. Obviously, conditions did not improve. 'Essentially, the cabinet sat tight and waited for a trade revival', as Thorpe put it.<sup>443</sup>

The government's inaction caused instability within the party, and the ILP. Oswald Mosley drafted an alternative policy in response, as did the ILP (something discussed later in the chapter). Most importantly, the crisis split the party itself. By early 1931 the trade downturn and surging unemployment significantly hurt the budget's bottom-line. The government began pushing for wage cuts particularly infuriating the textile unions.<sup>444</sup> When the Kreditanstalt collapsed its assets froze across Europe. Huge outflows of Gold from London followed.<sup>445</sup> The government had established the May Committee to deal with this and it proposed significant government cuts and wage reductions.<sup>446</sup> Leaving Gold was still unthinkable at this point though Nye Bevin feverishly argued for currency devaluation.<sup>447</sup> MacDonald and Snowden, Chancellor of the Exchequer, tried to convince the rest of the cabinet to accept cuts but to no avail. They were wedged between business wanting deeper cuts, and the labour movement opposing them. In August, MacDonald offered the cabinet a proposition; if London secured loans from New York and Paris, Britain could stop haemorrhaging gold.<sup>448</sup> The government however would have to accept a 10 percent cut in unemployment benefits. Of the 20 ministers present, 9 refused to support any such action. MacDonald

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<sup>443</sup> Thorp, *A History of Labour*, 71.

<sup>444</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>445</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>446</sup> Phillips, *The Rise of the Labour Party*, 55-57.

<sup>447</sup> Durbin, *New Jerusalem: The Labour Party and the economics of Democratic Socialism*, 66.

<sup>448</sup> *Ibid.*, 65-66.

set out to offer his resignation to the King. The King and the leaders of the Liberal and Conservative parties thinking the cuts would be more sellable under a socialist premier pleaded with him to stay on in a National Government.<sup>449</sup> Henderson quickly replaced MacDonald as Labour leader and opposed all the new government's measures. The Labour Magazine captured the prevailing attitude of the movement,

When all the reservations of prudent national stewardship are accepted and the charge of extravagance repudiated, organised workers cannot subscribe to the doctrine that in order to make the country richer they must be made poorer.<sup>450</sup>

The crisis did not deliver a systemic shock to British society as it had in Central Europe, but it split the Labour Party, seriously damaging the movement.

The hegemony of the Gold Standard and all the lore that went with it were sacrosanct. Even if mainstream Social Democracy was critical, dumping Gold was unthinkable. For Social Democrats desperate to revive capitalism and renew the drive to socialism, too much was at stake to experiment with such notions. Social Democrats saw themselves as the praetorian guards of democracy in Central Europe. Protecting democracy came before socialism. Nonetheless there were those on both the left and right of the movement who thought otherwise. Social Democracy's responses meant that despite its presentist leanings, there was suddenly a great many visions of Social Democracy in contention. The Depression marked a renewed vibrancy in Social Democratic thinking, albeit one born out of cataclysm.

### **The fragility of Post-War Capitalism**

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<sup>449</sup> Thorp, *A History of Labour*, 76.

<sup>450</sup> R. M. Fox, "The Choice Before Us," *Labour Magazine* X, no. 1 (1931): 18-19.

The immensity of the crisis was immediately evident to socialists. The sudden surge of joblessness shocked them, despite the long-term problems apparent in post-war capitalism. As Benedict Kautsky (son of Karl Kautsky) pointed out, much of Europe did not recover from the Great War. Countries like 'England and Austria slightly improved', but most never 'got out of the crisis.' Time between booms and busts shortened and inflation only made things worse.<sup>451</sup> Most socialists blamed post-war economics for the Depression. The gap between production, consumption and its relationship with employment were continually examined. German and Austrian socialists in particular focused on the rationalisation movement within central European capitalism in the 1920s. Something that they thought explained the stubbornness of high unemployment from the previous decade. As Polish socialist economist Natalie Moszkowski specified, capitalist rationalisation and monopolisation had disrupted the labour market since the end of the war.<sup>452</sup> Likewise, people like Hobson furthered their theories of underconsumption. Such a crisis reinforced tendencies of the capital class to save, limiting their investments. Other factors contributed to the crisis too. The growth of state power played a role. People's expectations of what governments were capable of accomplishing also shaped the crisis, and this too lay in post-war developments.

Rationalisation was a post-war development socialists fixated on. It became a mantra in the second half of the 1920s in Central Europe. German industrialists became enamoured with the work of American mechanical engineer Frederick Winslow Taylor. A towering figure in the Efficiency Movement, Taylor pioneered efforts studying methods of production dogged in his ambition to maximise labour efficiency. Taylorism (and Fordism) promised to eradicate waste and inefficiency in

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<sup>451</sup> Benedikt Kautsky, "Krise der Wirtschaft - Krise der Politik," *Die Kampf* 23, no. 11 (1930): 454-462.

<sup>452</sup> Natalie Moszkowska, "Monopolkapitalismus und Arbeitslosigkeit," *Die Kampf* 24, no. 2 (1931): 75-82.

factory production through scientific rigour. As one historian points out 'by the late 1920s, the Rationalisation Movement encompassed an almost bewildering array of endeavours, techniques, organisations, and ideas.'<sup>453</sup> In the latter stages of war, Taylorism boosted production, but it became mantra amongst German industrialists in the mid 1920s; it was seen as the best way to reinvigorate the economy.<sup>454</sup> German businessmen embarked on countless sojourns to factories in the United States investigating various rationalisation techniques.<sup>455</sup> While some historians have questioned the extent these procedures were implemented and how productive they were,<sup>456</sup> it was nonetheless an important trend in German industry and was taken seriously by socialist thinkers.

Otto Bauer thought rationalisation explained the origin of the crisis.

Technology is the future of our culture. War and post-war disasters have given powerful impetus to its development. Yet more we praise the triumphal march of technology, the more horrible the world that this triumphal march creates! The worker churns day after day, hour for hour, minute for minute in eternal monotony.<sup>457</sup>

Rapid technological change created magnificent achievements while producing new contradictions. In early 1931, as the crisis was beginning to take hold, Bauer published his most substantial work of the decade, *Kapitalismus und Sozialismus nach dem Weltkrieg*. Here Bauer charted the importance of how rationalisation affected capitalism. Technical development since the 1890s was prominent in Bauer's story, particular the advent of electricity. 'Electricity supply from public unitalities has accelerated a major development; the transition from mechanical power to electric

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<sup>453</sup> Shearer, "Talking about Efficiency: Politics and the Industrial Rationalization Movement in the Weimar Republic," 488.

<sup>454</sup> Ibid., 489.

<sup>455</sup> James, *The German Slump: Politics and Economics 1924-1936*, 146.

<sup>456</sup> Maier, *Recasting Bourgeois Europe*, 544. Also see Mary Nolan, *Visions of Modernity: American Business and the Modernisation of Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

<sup>457</sup> Otto Bauer, "Geistige Weltkrise," *Die Kampf* 23, no. 11 (1930): 449.

power.’ The expansion of state-provided electricity had ‘fateful consequences’ for workers. Suddenly, the cost of production fell. Electrified factories deskilled workers cutting running costs. Moreover, it allowed reductions in the labour force since newly equipped factories did not require the manpower they once did.<sup>458</sup> Bauer argued that while wages for the workers who remained employed rose, higher rates of unemployment ensued. The working class was not better off. He noted that Britain had gone through similar processes, mentioning improvements in coal mining. Likewise, there were new sources of power production, namely in hydroelectric technology. This also affected rapid changes in employment patterns. Such speedy growth in efficiency drove up unemployment.<sup>459</sup> Ultimately, Bauer viewed Rationalisation as a determined outgrowth of capitalism. Its drive to reduce costs and maximise profits, increasing the rate of exploitation, was a classic Marxist reading of the situation. As one social democratic contemporary pointed out, ‘[for Bauer] rationalisation necessarily arises from capitalist dynamics.’<sup>460</sup>

Bauer thought unemployment was not the only outcome of rationalisation; it had remade class relations. Rationalisation required high degrees of quantification from factory owners. A new kind of capitalist bureaucracy had formed. They calculated the most efficient methods to run the means of production. Bauer wrote of the growth of ‘offices’ to coordinate the drive for efficiency. The increasing complexity in the division of labour made class relations further fraught with difficulty. The new employees of the ‘offices’ were not proletarians, but neither were they owners of

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<sup>458</sup> *Kapitalismus und Sozialismus nach dem Weltkrieg* (Berlin: Büchergilde Gutenberg, 1931), 8.

<sup>459</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>460</sup> Georg Decker, "Rationalisierung und Fehlrationalisierung: Das neue Buch von Otto Bauer," *Die Arbeit*, no. 6 (1931). Decker actually queries Bauer on this point. Decker was unconvinced by Bauer's argument that rationalisation necessarily arose from capitalism. He thought Bauer had not given enough evidence to this point. Also see Czerwińska-Schupp, *Otto Bauer*, 113.

capital. Yet, they had vast amounts of control over workers. 'Today the worker stands helpless in front of a complicated system, one that governed by a scientific disguise, making it difficult for them to attack'.<sup>461</sup> The scientific pretension of rationalisation made it hard for workers to justifiably struggle against such enlightened systems.<sup>462</sup>

Towards the end of his study, Bauer turned his attention to explain the sudden increase in unemployment. Rationalisation managed to overcome the 'economic consequences of war and defeat.' The drive for rationalisation had now slackened. Factories had to make good on sales, and with a depleted workforce, purchasing power had diminished. 'The rationalisation boom was followed by a rationalisation crisis.'<sup>463</sup> Bauer concluded that,

Rationalisation has developed and intensified the internal contradictions of capitalism. In a few years it has carried out an unprecedentedly rapid upheaval in technology, work processes, and economic methods. But despite this technical progress, it has ended with the most extensive economic crisis... The productivity of labour has plunged immense masses of workers into the misery of unemployment... The low standard of living of the popular masses stands in blatant contradiction to the highly increased productivity of their labour.<sup>464</sup>

Rationalisation produced colossal efficiencies with calamitous social consequences.

Benedikt Kautsky saw rationalisation as a mechanism for capitalism to surmount an accumulation crisis. While he agreed wage reductions would degrade workers' consumptions, capital's profits would be reinvested into projects to increase efficiency. For the time being, there would be a 'shift in purchasing power and sales.'<sup>465</sup>

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<sup>461</sup> Bauer, *Kapitalismus und Sozialismus nach dem Weltkrieg*, 113.

<sup>462</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

<sup>463</sup> *Ibid.*, 164.

<sup>464</sup> *Ibid.*, 231. – It is important to note that in the last chapter of the book Bauer goes into great detail about the importance of Stalin's Five-Year Plan as an alternative to capitalist rationalisation. This is dealt with in the following chapter.

<sup>465</sup> Kautsky, "Krise der Wirtschaft - Krise der Politik," 456.

This led companies to replace organic materials with inorganic resources to increase and cheapen production. The creation of artificial silk was an example he used. But, in a similar vein to Grossman (described in the previous chapter), this would only forestall crisis. Kautsky explained that this process led to economic surges off the back of capital's new proficiencies in reducing the cost of production. Though this would lead to dire consequences. Due to the boom in production, the price of raw materials increased. This reduced the rate of profit for many producers. If there were price fluctuations in either finished goods or raw material, 'a crisis threatened.' Simultaneously incentive to invest diminished since 'returns on those investments does not pay off immediately.' Stock market crashes were not the root cause of the crisis, rather their catalysts. 'It is not the rate of interest and certainly not the money supply that determines the course of the economic cycle, but rather the inner development in capitalist production.' Kautsky used the 1920s to demonstrate this theory. 'Technical renewal' followed the crisis of the early 1920s. Capital gained huge profits, even seeing wage increases. The sharp rise in raw materials led to serious speculation on the stock markets. In turn interest rates rose because of this speculation. These sharp movements quickly affected the 'financially weak countries on German, Austria, Poland, Italy, and Hungary'. Despite warning from central banks and economists the 'dance of the golden calf went on.' Producers no longer paid attention to profits since they showed accumulation in fictitious capital despite real world production costs rising. Kautsky pointed to large-scale speculative and unproductive investments on the American side.

Kautsky rightly stressed that vast unemployment ensuing. But there was another kind of injury too. The pitfalls of rationalisation were laid bare. It produced speculative bubbles off the back of soaring profits from reductions in production costs, all the while ignoring sharp increases in raw materials. This was not just a financial disaster, Kautsky saw this as an ideological calamity. 'Capitalism has never suffered such a

wreck as before, and the collapse of an ideology has never been complete as that of Americanism, Fordism, and whatever their names maybe.<sup>466</sup> The Slump discredited rationalisation in all its forms. The obsession with scientific management and its ideological dimensions stood condemned.

Rudolf Hilferding, by now twice finance minister, regarded the expansion of state power, rationalisation, and credit speculation as origins of the crisis. First and foremost, it was the Great War that transformed capital relations. 'The imperialist war', ultimately revolutionised the whole economy and fundamentally 'overthrew all economic relations.' The war had redefined the role of credit. Credit was internationalised in a manner hitherto unseen. Hilferding described this process as the 'extension of capital exports via a form of capital transfer.' Capital, destroyed during the war, was now 'replaced with capital imports from other countries.' The United States' investments in Europe typified such transfer. Hilferding justly cited the limited investment the US 'deposited' in Europe before 1914. However, after 1918 the American government had extended loans to Central European countries, particularly Germany, to pay off war debts and loans. US private investment flowed into Europe in an expansive and unprecedented rate. Hilferding explained that from 1924 there was huge consumer demand for goods 'driving production forward.' The consumer demand and subsequent investment demand was the basis of post-stabilisation Europe. It is noteworthy that Hilferding made no mention of the persistent unemployment that dogged Europe in the 1920s. Hilferding brought this thesis in line with his earlier theories of monopoly capitalism. 'The whole development no longer relied on free competition, but rather large monopolistic organisation and upon the power of finance capital.' Large companies bought significant quantities of raw

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<sup>466</sup> Ibid., 461.

materials in a period of easy credit. The price for things like copper and zinc shot up significantly. The commodities bubble extended the production boom and 'in this way formed a basis of the crisis.'<sup>467</sup>

He went on to explain similar processes in agricultural markets. Post-war capitalism hinged on uniquely powerful yet shaky foundations. Monopoly capital in league with finance capital made impressive strides with rationalisation. Simultaneously it exposed itself to credit markets who were directly affected by the price of raw materials, any shock in these markets undermined the entire system. As prices of raw materials began to fall and credit began drying up, political tensions in Europe, left over from the war, exacerbated the situation. Hilferding thought that the growth of short-term credit, 'which investors assumed could be withdrawn at any time' was a unique but volatile post-war innovation. The quality of both the credit and investments were, in many cases, unviable.<sup>468</sup> He rightly pointed to the fall of the Austrian Kreditanstalt as the beginning of Europe's fall into deeper crisis.

Hilferding's argument evolved from his previous works on finance capital, describing a much less hierarchal order of base and super structure. The expansion of shaky credit markets and their intimate relationship with monopoly capital was a response to the destruction of capital during the war. But it also led to qualitative transformations in ideological expectations too. The quick expansion of credit allowed for rationalisation to take place, both sowing the seeds for the crisis and, remaking political expectations of how capital, credit, and states operated. Hilferding explained a new dynamism within post-war capitalism; the dialectic between credit and

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<sup>467</sup> Rudolf Hilferding, "Social Control or Private Control (1931)," in *Austro-Marxism: The ideology of Unity*, ed. Mark E. Blum and William Smaldone (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2017), 753.

<sup>468</sup> *Ibid.*, 756.

industry exploded efficiency, remoulding the state's relationship with the economy, while laying the groundwork for a chasmic crash.

Hobson, now a long proponent of capitalism's proclivity towards underconsumption, saw the crisis in exactly these terms. Like German and Austria thinkers he too thought rationalisation explained the ability to 'produce a greater quantity... of most kinds of goods and devices required for consumption... outrunning the power to purchase and consume them'.<sup>469</sup> Hobson pointed to capitalism's tendency towards undermining worker consumption after 1918. After the war, rationalisation reduced wages and employment. Paying attention to the United States, the centre of rationalisation, Hobson described linkages between increased output and increases in unemployment. Wages rose for those who had kept their jobs, but there were less jobs available. Interestingly, the statistics he used only showed small fluctuations in wages and employment, but Hobson saw these as noteworthy.<sup>470</sup> The over production of goods could not be sold due to limited market expansion. 'New capitalism' was unable to expand into new markets either domestically or internationally. England's high unemployment of the previous decade was testimony to this failure. Hobson then returned to his previous argument. Post-war capitalism merely drove home maldistributed income. Large pools of savings wasted away that could have otherwise been used to purchase gluts of goods.

The attention given to the post-War dislocation of finance, industry, and commerce and consequent changes in the relative volume and the direction of national markets, does not touch the heart of the problem. Rationalisation is driving home the truth that our malady is one of distribution of income.<sup>471</sup>

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<sup>469</sup> J. A. Hobson, *Rationalisation and unemployment: an economic dilemma* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1930), 6-7.

<sup>470</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>471</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

The following year he nuanced this line in *Poverty in Plenty: The Ethics of Income*. The 'Great Depression' the world now faced was more than just a by-product of the 'dislocations' caused by the Great War. In fact, even if the damages of the war were fully repaired, capitalism would still face the same problem, and perhaps the maldistribution of income 'further enlarged'.<sup>472</sup> Despite the thousands of words and hundreds of pages produced by Hobson, he clung to his original argument on overconsumption and income. Rationalisation merely exposed more bitterly the 'irrational' distribution of wealth.

G. D. H Cole's view was somewhat more distinctive. He cited the tightening of credit in Britain in the 1920s as one of the reasons for the current dilemmas.

The effect of banking amalgamations undoubtedly was to make the banks lend less on personal and more on collateral security... The big banks were more inclined to say that they lent to those who could afford to borrow.<sup>473</sup>

Clearly, Cole thought the restructuring of Britain banking sector after the Great War restricted credit and went some way into explaining the persistence of unemployment. But he also thought rationalisation played a part too. Responding to various arguments within the Labour government to explore rationalisation as a tool to expand industry and soak up unemployment, he gave a stark warning.

Even, however, if this very real difficulty is successfully overcome, it by no means follows that the effect of industrial reorganisation will be seen, for some time to come, in an increased volume of employment. Indeed, everyone knows that in most cases the effect of rationalisation will be to reduce the numbers employed, in the early stages of the process at least. This has been the effect of rationalisation in Germany.<sup>474</sup>

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<sup>472</sup> J. A. Hobson, *Poverty in Plenty: the ethics of income* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1931), 20.

<sup>473</sup> G. D. H. Cole, *Gold, Credit & Employment* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1930), 145-146.

<sup>474</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.

Not all viewed the Slump in such terms. Fritz Naphtali, a close ally of Hilferding, and an important SPD economist thought different. In his mind the crisis was neither unique nor unprecedented. Rationalisation was not a component he thought led to the crisis. On the contrary, Naphtali was adamant rationalisation was an important aspect behind the upswing in the global economy after the war. 'Everyone agreed that rationalisation' was needed to repair Germany after inflation and currency stabilisation.<sup>475</sup> In 1928 he went so far as to declare that it would be 'reactionary' for workers to oppose rationalisation. Technical progress was a 'progressive' force in history.<sup>476</sup> Naphtali believed that while each capitalist crisis had its own 'peculiarities', this one was nonetheless an archetypal downturn in the business cycle easily explained by Marxian economics.

These examples are sufficient to make it clear that the things we are currently experiencing are typical manifestations of the crises in the business cycle of the capitalist economic system. They are typical earthly events, measured by historical experience, and they are typical phenomena also characterised by the fact that they take place internationally in a comparable, approximately identical framework.<sup>477</sup>

The thinkers listed above all of more or less occupied centrist positions in the movement. Perhaps Hobson and Cole are slightly more right leaning than the rest, but this should be taken within British contexts. Marxian political economy was far more limited within the British movement. Bauer is an exception, while decidedly more left leaning than the others, he was also embedded in Austrian Social Democracy. A party and movement that was more progressive and open to radical notions, a conscious

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<sup>475</sup> Fritz Naphtali, *Wirtschaftskrise und Arbeitslosigkeit* (Berlin: J. H. W. Dietz, 1930), 15-16.

<sup>476</sup> "On the Consequences of Capitalist Rationalisation," in *The German Left and the Weimar Republic: A selection of Documents*, ed. Ben Fowkes (London: Brill, 2014), 301. – This is an excerpt from a speech he gave at the ADGB congress in September 1928, Hamburg.

<sup>477</sup> *Wirtschaftskrise und Arbeitslosigkeit*, 9.

strategy designed to limit communist threats from the left.<sup>478</sup> Leftist elements of the movement came to vastly different conclusions about what the crisis represented. While they broadly concurred with some of the thinkers listed above about the causes of the crisis. The crisis itself represented more than just another dip in the business cycle. Max Seydewitz, a key figure on the left of the SPD and a member of the Reichstag, pointed to similar Marxian processes to people like Hilferding and Bauer. However, he came to distinct inferences. While war, rationalisation, and the partial victory of the workers movement in 1918 had led to the current crisis, the crisis was far deeper and more profound than more moderate thinkers anticipated. Capitalism was suffering from an unprecedented systemic crisis. If Social Democrats did not acknowledge this, the situation would not only worsen but Social Democracy would prove itself impotent. Citing Naphtali's works, Seydewitz responded with a direct attack.

In Naphtali's view the current crisis is like all pre-war crises of capitalism. This is an easy and safe find requiring easier policies to pursue, avoiding conflict with the bourgeois, a policy that is followed by the reformist elements of the SPD; they want to make further concession and passively wait the situation to improve itself. But after consideration, who would come to the conclusion that the current crisis is comparable to the pre-war period. This is not just another economic crisis but an actual crisis of the capitalist system in decline.<sup>479</sup>

Seydewitz's thought that the situation was the beginning of some kind of final crisis in the capitalist mode of production. Social Democratic response to it had to be distinct and far more radical than the palliative answers 'reformist elements' offered.

The varying arguments on the causes of the crisis reflected only a fraction of the divides over how to respond to it. The hasty economic downturn did not just produce

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<sup>478</sup> In this, Austrian Social Democracy was remarkable successful. The Austrian Communist Party was a negligible force in the country's politics, unlike Germany.

<sup>479</sup> Max Seydewitz, "Die Aufgabe Der Arbeiterklasse," in *Die Krise des Kapitalismus und die Aufgabe der Arbeiterklasse* (Belin: Marxistischen Büchergemeinde, 1930), 131.

unemployment and abject poverty. In Central Europe in particular, it produced a political, and a wider social crisis. The Depression marked the meteoric rise of Nazism, seeing the beginning of gridlock and break down in both Weimar and the Austrian Republic. Even Naphtali admitted that 'the special nature of the crisis was the degree of political unrest that can currently be seen in the world.'<sup>480</sup> The situation necessitated answers that would solve all three of aspects of the crisis, the political, the social, and the economic. Even in the early period of the Depression, this question came to define Social Democracy.

## Unemployment

The mounting crisis challenged Social Democrats in a unique and fundamental manner. If socialism promised the abolition of capitalism, how would Social Democracy react in the face of capitalism's worst crisis? After the September 14 election in 1930, the hasty rise of the Nazi Party confronted Social Democracy and Weimar at-large. Questions over unemployment, the limits of capitalism, the dangers to democracy, and the ascent of fascism were tangibly interrelated. Max Seydewitz pleaded that the only way to defeat fascism was to fight for a 'new socialist order.'<sup>481</sup> But many did not see it in this manner. The crisis was not time for socialist transition. This was impossible under such circumstances. Many in the centre felt socialism was only attainable during economic growth not sweeping contraction. For British socialists, the complicating factor was that Labour had fatefully secured government weeks before the Crash in 1929. Many thought the crisis exposed outdated thinking

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<sup>480</sup> Naphtali, *Wirtschaftskrise und Arbeitslosigkeit*, 21-22.

<sup>481</sup> Seydewitz, "Die Aufgabe Der Arbeiterklasse," 132.

within Social Democracy. Such quarries strained fissures already present in the movement.

The traditional leading thinkers of the Second International were sceptical that the crisis presented opportunity for radical new directions. At a joint meeting of the LSI and IFTU in 1930, doubt pervaded over how the worker's movement could influence events. Present at the meeting was Naphtali who could not see any way out of their predicament other than passive and tokenistic gestures.

We [the international] have no means of getting the crisis over quickly. There was no way of causing unemployment to disappear. The crisis would pass as other crises had. We could however explain the causes and draw special attention of the working class to wages, social insurance, pensions etc. The question of Gold should not be discussed if we do not have a clear answer... If we analyse the present situation and emphasis its socio-political aspects, we shall have done something.<sup>482</sup>

As the subject of a joint world conference was being discussed, most doused the idea since the lack of clear alternatives to current directions would arouse unsatisfied expectation. As another member of the commission said, 'A world conference would not produce anything; it would raise hopes which could not be fulfilled.' The only thing achievable was to publish resolutions opposing wage reductions, promote shorter working days, and to stoke anti-fascism.<sup>483</sup>

Such notions, in varying degrees, were held widely. Karl Kautsky was optimistic about a recovery. In the Foreword to the third edition of *Die proletarische Revolution*

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<sup>482</sup> *Joint Commission of the IFTU and the LSI on the unemployment problem, October 27-29*, Labour Party Archives: Labour and Socialist International, LSI Minutes 1921-1937, LSI Minutes 1930, People's History Museum,

<sup>483</sup> *Ibid.* – Out of this meeting the joint commission did publish a report that mirrored these objectives. See Joint Unemployment Committee of the IFTU and the LSI, *Fighting World Economic Crisis and Unemployment* (Publications Department of the International Federation of Trade Union, 1931).

(1931), Kautsky thought the Depression was 'on the basis of Marxist economic thought' unavoidable. 'Every era of propensity inevitably leads to terrible unemployment and misery.' He foresaw recovery as soon as countries overcame 'political and economic divisions';

an extensive period of prosperity should come... At the moment we are not ready to use socialism to solve the crisis. However, we have every reason to expect that the upcoming prosperity will initiate a lasting prosperity... a period we can call the proletarian revolution.<sup>484</sup>

Kautsky's determinism remained unshaken by the situation. Socialism would come but for the time being was impossible under such circumstances. The proletariat could only truly seize power when the economy was booming. Socialism was only attainable when the fruits of capitalism were ripe.

Likewise, Hilferding offered little more than tempered solutions to the crisis. Hilferding rejected abandoning the Gold Standard; a new global currency would do nothing to stop prices falling. 'A rubber owner is simply not in a position to make new investments, since iron costs seven times more than it had a few years ago.' Hilferding pointed to Britain's abandonment of Gold as proof that all it did was encourage protectionism. His solution was moderate but rooted in keen historical insight. Hilferding called on Germany to adopt a more expansive banking policy. The state needed to wield direct influence on the borrowing policies of the banks. The state's newfound powers after the war meant that government did not allow big banks to fail. Since large banks 'administer the wealth of the nations and therefore have the guarantee of the nation' he stated, 'it has become unbearable to leave the banks exposed to the vagaries of the private economy.' Government needed to force banks into replacing foreign credit that had left Germany with domestic credit. Banks needed to be less 'rigid' in maintaining gold coverage 'at all times.' He called on the

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<sup>484</sup> Karl Kautsky, "Die proletarische Revolution," *Die Kampf* 24, no. 7 (1931): 285-291.

government to create a Cartel Office (Kartellamt) to 'directly control monopolistic organisations.' Clearly, Hilferding thought monopoly capital's ability to plan outputs through its extensive structures was the answer to Germany's woes.<sup>485</sup> This, in turn with state backed credit, distributed through German banks would allow industry to restart and rebuilt, increasing employment.

The political issues of Nazism and the gridlocked government were also at stake. It was not enough for the workers' movement to conquer state institutions. Germany's situation was, in Hilferding's eyes, unique. Whilst in Britain the labour movement was only concerned with controlling government, in Germany the movement had to accomplish economic recovery whilst defending German democracy.<sup>486</sup>

British thinkers were in a different position. There the Labour government, despite its minority status, had access to considerably more power and leverage. Many felt that the government, before its split, could, through the tweaking of current policies, alleviate unemployment. McKibbin's important study on the second Labour government explains that since Britain did not benefit from the upswing in the mid-1920s due to 'structural distortions', ideas focusing on finance were unimportant. Henry Clay, an Oxford economist and member of the Macmillan Committee went as far as to argue that Britain's unemployment was due to 'maladjustment' of industry to the global demand of commodities.<sup>487</sup> As 1930 wore on it became increasingly clear to many that the Labour government 'had no serious political will in relation to capitalist recovery than in relation to the achievement of socialism itself.' The inability of the government to form policy directly confronting unemployment 'angered'

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<sup>485</sup> Hilferding, "Social Control or Private Control (1931)," 768-769.

<sup>486</sup> *Ibid.*, 770.

<sup>487</sup> Cited in McKibbin, "The Economic Policy of the Second Labour Government 1929-1931," 103.

people like G. D. H. Cole. Cole turned his attention to providing an alternative direction to the wavering Labour government.<sup>488</sup>In 1930 he published a small but dense book, *Gold, and Credit & Employment*, attempting to solve Labour's impasse.

Similar to Hilferding, Cole wanted British banks to do more of the heavy lifting. Cole also wanted banks to be less determined by gold stocks. Whilst he rejected abandoning the Gold Standard, domestic credit policies needed to be independent. Reducing the quantity of money when gold left the country was destructive. Monetary independence would reverse deflationary trends in the British economy. Rigid application of the Gold Standard vexed Cole. It forced prices down since it restricted money supply. Gold however was still important when it came to British exports. 'Great Britain is more dependent on international trade than any other country in the world.' Importers and exporters had to readily know and understand exchange rates. The Gold Standard provided such stability. Cole wanted to walk a tightrope between maintaining stable exchange rates through Gold whilst wresting monetary independence through 'issuing currency and credit' domestically.<sup>489</sup> Cole admitted that this would lead to price hikes since there would be a 'time lag' between an increase in purchasing power before there could be more goods produced with the easing of credit. Cole thought exchange rates would ultimately normalise since increasing production would balance 'extra money' in circulation.<sup>490</sup> He was also unconcerned about the drain of gold if this would happen. The most important question was to solve unemployment through an increase in the money supply, mainly through credit. Merely easing credit was not enough, British industry needed overhauling.

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<sup>488</sup> Wright, *G. D. H. Cole*, 190.

<sup>489</sup> Cole, *Gold, Credit & Employment*, 36-37.

<sup>490</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

Cole reckoned industry required state coercion to improve efficiency and expand production. He worried, rightly so in some cases, that British industry lagged behind 'the general pace of world improvement,' as a result of monetary conditions. He called on the state to directly invest in British industry to undertake such changes on a 'sufficient scale'. This in turn would stimulate domestic demand because of the increase in employment.<sup>491</sup> He did warn that without 'a change in financial policy' rationalisation would accentuate unemployment. Cole's approach, though somewhat unorthodox, relied on accepting capitalism, in both its economy and moral form. The Gold Standard would remain for ease of trade. Fundamentally, Cole wanted greater domestic control over monetary policy along with state funded industrial projects to cope with unemployment; he foresaw state power as critical to tackling unemployment, a far cry from his days as a Guildsman.

About a year after the joint commission of the LSI and ITFU met, they produced a somewhat comprehensive report on how the movement should respond to the ever-growing crisis. The report was careful to make a distinction between past slumps and the one they were living through. 'It must not be forgotten that never before has capitalism...brought us to the edge of so deep a morass.'<sup>492</sup> The report admitted that rationalisation had improved the productivity of labour. But this had adverse effects on worker's job opportunities. The committee considered it 'inopportune' for the movement to fight for the 5-day week. It seemed capitalism was not healthy enough to sustain labour reform during such a severe downturn. The report ended with 5 broad but limited goals. The first was that rationalisation required consent and

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<sup>491</sup> Ibid., 48-49.

<sup>492</sup> Joint Unemployment Committee of the IFTU and the LSI, *Fighting World Economic Crisis and Unemployment*, 3.

consultation from trade unions. It could only serve to increase employment. The second was a reduction in hours for those still in work; forcing capital to pass on the benefits of rationalisation to labour. The third was to assure comprehensive unemployment insurance. The fourth wanted capital to compensate workers who had lost their jobs due to rationalisation. The final objective was to call on governments to 'find employment for displaced workers under conditions at least equal to those previously enjoyed by them.'<sup>493</sup> The report fulfilled Naphtali's limited ambitions. It outlined, very broadly, the ailments of capitalism, and gave broad and ambiguous alternatives that were unimaginative. For some, this was simply not enough, and worse, characterised the movements lacklustre nous and lacklustre commitment to socialism at-large.

The pressure building up from the left and right of the movement had been simmering since the previous decade. The Slump exposed these fissures further. Many of these reactions began creating real stresses on party structures. Not all of these contradictions threatened outright schism, but they added to the atmosphere of desperation many in the movement understandably felt. While these challenges to Social Democratic orthodoxy came from differing philosophies, many came to similar conclusions on the need for far-reaching state intervention.

Within the SPD and wider German labour movement, there was growing frustration that the party needed to take a more active role in economic policy. The exiled Menshevik, and now-German trade union economist Wladimir Woytinsky took it upon himself to lobby the movement in this direction. The set of ideas and policies he formulated had two objectives. In his own words they were to 'to establish public

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<sup>493</sup> Ibid.

works, and to fight deflation by injecting purchasing power into the economy through bank credits.<sup>494</sup> His first official foray into this area was in an article in *Die Arbeit* in mid 1931. He decried the movement's compulsion to wait for the 'inevitable upswing' in the economy to continue the drive towards labour's emancipation. 'If the worker's organisation relies on the self-healing powers of the capitalist economic order, they are at risk of gradually bleeding to death.'<sup>495</sup> Woytinsky warned that unlike other depressions this one threatened to last longer with serious ramifications for the movement. The working masses would lose faith in both the party and the wider labour movement if it continued advocating 'lesser evil' policies. The entire movement needed 'bold measures to revive the economy... showing the working class that Social Democracy and the unions see a way out of economic hardship.'<sup>496</sup> The article went into detail about a more 'active' economic policy on behalf of the League of Nation's gold committee. It also called for a job creation program, run by the state, to soak up unemployment. He broadly called for an 'active economy policy' to deal with the crisis.<sup>497</sup> He did not overtly say that he wanted to take Germany out of the Gold Standard. Though decades later, in his autobiography, he admitted that upon hearing the news Britain was leaving gold, he was 'elated'. Britain had 'done the proper thing by launching an anti-deflationary policy.'<sup>498</sup> Woytinsky's ideas went further against the grain of Social Democratic determinism than many before. It was the beginning of a concrete program that seriously countered the orthodoxy of Social Democratic thinking.

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<sup>494</sup> W. S. Woytinsky, *Stormy Passage: A Personal History Through Two Russian Revolutions to Democracy and Freedom: 1905-1960* (New York: Vanguard Press, 1961), 464.

<sup>495</sup> Wladimir Woytinsky, "Aktive Weltwirtschaftspolitik," *Die Arbeit*, no. 6 (1931): 413.

<sup>496</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>497</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>498</sup> Woytinsky, *Stormy Passage*, 467. Woytinsky notes that shortly after hearing the news he met with Hilferding. Hilferding thought Britain's exit from the gold standard and its currency devaluation were 'insane' moves that would only lead to more unemployment.

Woytinsky, along with two others, Fritz Tarnow president of the Lumber workers' union and Fritz Baade member of the Reichstag, developed this 'active economic' policy further into the WTB programme; named after each of their initials.<sup>499</sup> The plan, written up in later stages of 1931, opened with a statement directed at the SPD's establishment.

The mechanisms of the capitalist system... is unable to function in the present crisis... the self-healing mechanisms is no longer functioning; attempts have been made to restore the economy by altering price levels. This policy of universal price and cost reduction, especially wage reduction, has not only failed... it has worsened the crisis.<sup>500</sup>

The SPD's support for Brüning's deflationary policies, and its faith in capitalism's self-correcting mechanisms were both fallacy and fantasy. Its second objective called for large 'public works' programmes. This would give 'additional purchasing power' to 'push the economy into recovery.' A 'supplementary credit' would cover such vast expenditures. This was also a direct attack on deflationary policies. The plan required 2,000 million marks to fund such works. It was sure to allay fears of high inflation since so much productive capacity lay idle, these funds would restart production, increase employment, and ultimately 'increase purchasing power.'<sup>501</sup> The WTB plan tacitly accepted that capitalism was to be the mode of production indefinitely. The Depression was not a final crisis, but it was a deep crisis needing resolution through significant state intervention. This state intervention was decidedly unorthodox within Social Democracy since it did not seek to alter who owned the means of

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<sup>499</sup> Woytinsky insisted many years later that he was the main architect of the document, the others attached their names to the plan to give it further political legitimacy. See *ibid.*, 470.

<sup>500</sup> Fritz Baade, F. Tarnow, and W. Woyttinsky, "The Trade Union Movement Calls for Job Creation: The 'WTB Plan' of 1931," in *The German Left and the Weimar Republic: A selection of Documents*, ed. Ben Fowkes (London: Brill, 2014), 170.

<sup>501</sup> *Ibid.*, 171.

production. There was no call for nationalisation, just credit expansion and state works. It aimed to prop up capitalism through state power relieving unemployment. In this manner Fritz Tarnow's famous speech at the Leipzig SPD conference in mid 1931 is given richer context.

Are we sitting at the sickbed of capitalism, not only as doctors who want to cure the patient, but as prospective heirs who cannot wait for the end and would like to hasten it by administering poison? We are condemned, I think, to be doctors who seriously wish a cure, and yet we have to retain the feeling that we are heirs who wish to receive the entire legacy of the capitalist system today rather than tomorrow. This double role, doctor and heir, is a damned difficult task...The organised working class desires the fall of the capitalist system but not the collapse of the economy. It wants socialism to be an improvement of its situation, not a further deterioration.<sup>502</sup>

There was immediate reaction to Woytinsky from the party's established thinkers. Naphtali responded to Woytinsky's article in *Die Arbeit* a month later. He queried Woytinsky's use of long wave theory to describe prices hikes and dips over long periods of time. A theory that was heterodox and unsubstantiated. Most importantly, he questioned the 'money creation' policy. Naphtali cited the lack of trust in the German currency to undertake such expansive measures. Given Germany's recent history of the 'devil of inflation', only countries with well-established currencies could tinker with money supplies on such vast scales. He was afraid that this would undermine Germany's bond market, having dire consequences from investments from other countries. Naphtali insisted that the only way to raise funds for the type of programmes Woytinsky wanted was to obtain further loans from 'foreign capital,

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<sup>502</sup> Fritz Tarnow, "At the Sickbed of Capitalism," in *The German Left and the Weimar Republic: A selection of Documents*, ed. Ben Fowkes (London: Brill, 2014), 304.

through long-term foreign bonds.<sup>503</sup> And given the circumstances, the implication was that this was impossible.

Hilferding was more critical. Any measure using reflationary methods would be met with disaster. 'We cannot expect to overcome the crisis via the currency' he insisted. Writing in the *Die Gesellschaft* he further warned against expanding the money supply. 'The production of liquidity will be at the expense of profitable enterprises, continuing unemployment.'<sup>504</sup> The WTB plan pitted the unions against the party. The ADGB endorsed the plan on February 16, 1932.<sup>505</sup> The SPD rejected it. Apparently, at the SPD executive meeting following the unions endorsement, Hilferding decried the plan as 'unmarxist.'<sup>506</sup> Privately however Hilferding understood the ramifications of SPD's tacit policy. In a letter to his old mentor Karl Kautsky, he admitted the shortfalls of his position.

Worst of all in this situation we can't say anything concrete to the people about how and by what means we would end the crisis. Capitalism has been shaken far beyond our expectations but... a socialist solution is not at hand and that makes the situation unbelievable difficult and allows the Communists and the Nazis to continue to grow.<sup>507</sup>

Within the SFIO in France, there begun to be similar, but more overt right-wing challenges to the party establishment. Marcel Déat, a front generation leftist,<sup>508</sup> challenged the premise of French socialism. He accepted capitalist social relations and

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<sup>503</sup> Fritz Naphtali, "Neuer Angelpunkt der aktiven Konjunkturpolitik oder Fehlleitung von Energien?," *Die Arbeit*, no. 7 (1931). – Woytinsky responded to these criticisms in the same edition. See Wladimir Woytinsky, "Und dennoch Weltwährungspolitik gegen die Weltwirtschaftskrise!," *Die Arbeit*, no. 7 (1931).

<sup>504</sup> Rudolf Hilferding, "Probleme der Kreditkrise," *Die Gesellschaft*, no. 9 (1931): 239-240.

<sup>505</sup> Gates, "German Socialism and the Crisis of 1929-1933," 350.

<sup>506</sup> Ibid.

<sup>507</sup> Quoted in Berman, *The Social Democratic Movement*, 193.

<sup>508</sup> See White, *Lost Comrades*, 11,19.

rejected class conflict as a basis for socialism. Influenced by Henri De Man, Déat began a rightward push within the SFIO. His book *Perspectives Socialistes* outlined a new conception of socialism with a distinctly statist emphasis. The first pages pleaded socialists to accept the harsh reality of capitalism's immense power. 'Whatever our ultimate beliefs... whatever our political tendencies... our entire existence is dominated by the fact of capitalism.'<sup>509</sup> Déat argued class struggle undermined French society by creating further contradictions. If workers and peasants struggled separately to obtain increases in wages or an increase in profits, then such conflicts undermined the ability to achieve a kind of national salvation. Instead of revolution, Déat proposed a state led effort to reinvigorate the economy spreading wealth more equally. It was, at this point in time, a vague project inspired by Fordism, but led by the French state. His kind of socialism would lead to the 'rejuvenation of the state.'<sup>510</sup>

Similar tensions arose in other parts of Social Democracy. The British Labour Party faced mounting internal tensions on several fronts in 1930/31. Beatrice Webb for instance thought the crisis exposed weakness within Britain's political institutions, threatening to devolve into either a fascist or communist dictatorship.<sup>511</sup> Mounting unemployment and the government's stagnate position on the matter caused turmoil within the broader movement. There were those desperate to see production resume and unemployment brought to heel. At the Labour conference in December 1930 Oswald Mosley, now a significant figure in the party, attempted to promote an alternative vision. His vision repudiated Labour's 'gradualism', but neither was it a radical exposition. He had been a member of cabinet but resigned on May 20 that year. He had sharp disagreements within cabinet over how best to deal with the Slump. He

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<sup>509</sup> Marcel Déat, *Perspectives socialistes* (Paris: Librairie Valois, 1930), 13.

<sup>510</sup> *Ibid.*, 160.

<sup>511</sup> Sidney Webb, *A new reform bill* (London: Fabian Society, 1931), 1.

pushed to increase the population's 'purchasing power', coming to severe stoushes with MacDonald.<sup>512</sup>

The policy was narrowly defeated at conference, but it gained prominence, and was printed in a widely read pamphlet called *A National Policy: An account of the emergency programme advanced by Sir Oswald Mosley*. It began with a pointed attack on Labour's orthodoxy, but it also spelled out tacit signs of a new political settlement beyond Labour.

We see nothing in the official programme of the Conservative Party which offers a way out of the deepening crisis, nor any evidence that the crisis will wait on the slow gradualism of the Labour Front Bench.<sup>513</sup>

The programme repudiated deflationary policies like wage reductions and 'attacks upon social services.' Mosley feared that deflation would ruin the working class. Deflation reduced purchasing power whilst undermining the home market and increasing competitiveness in foreign markets. Mosley also argued for an end to free trade, 'the world will no longer buy British goods in the old quantities.' Mosley wanted trade barriers erected to build up local industries. Britain could no longer ignore protectionist trends. Mosley wanted a National Economic Planning Organisation to begin the process of a planned economy. The planning body would assure that rationalisation was a carefully coordinated process, helping to maximise production. He warned, as so many others before him had, that without planning rationalisation 'intensified our problems.'<sup>514</sup> He also wanted 'Commodity Boards' to be setup, directly controlling Britain's imports. This was a part of his own vision of rationalisation. These boards would assure the importation of the best and cheapest

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<sup>512</sup> Howell, *Mosley*, 120-121.

<sup>513</sup> Oswald Mosley, *A national policy: an account of the emergency programme* (Macmillan, 1931), 5.

<sup>514</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

quality of goods on a needs only basis. Trade unions would sit on these boards to assure the price of goods was in line with British wages.

His justification for this was in line with the wider discourses in socialist thinking.

Unless the worker's consuming power rises as his power to produce rises, the gap between the capacity to produce and the capacity to consume, which is the supreme paradox of this century, and which lies at the root of the unemployment problem, will continue to grow.<sup>515</sup>

The document made further calls for the empowered of the state with the 'right to plan the locations of new industrial developments.' Mosley rightly pointed to old industries that were 'decaying'; there needed to be a national industrial rebirth if Britain was going to overcome unemployment. The document was clear of the word socialism and was markedly a-partisan. Mosley wanted to 'impart a new impetus to British politics.'<sup>516</sup> As one historian rightly points out, Mosley's plan was not state ownership of industry, 'but its survival.'<sup>517</sup> Soon after Mosley left the Labour Party forming the New Party. The New Party adopted his plans and some in Labour followed him. In 1932 Mosley visited Italy and met with Mussolini. The experience had a profound effect on him, and he formed the British Union of Fascists in 1932.<sup>518</sup>

Mosley's plan was contentious but not without support. Key people like Bevan, Brown, and Strachey supported Mosley proposals. Brown and Strachey were also members of the ILP giving Mosley backing within the left of the movement as well. The Labour leadership was of course completely opposed. Such proposals tempted only 'swell heads not of working-class origin' bemoaned Herbert Morrison. Hugh

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<sup>515</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>516</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>517</sup> Howell, *Mosley*, 151.

<sup>518</sup> Ibid., 206.

Dalton thought it was 'a move towards Toryism.'<sup>519</sup> In their eye's Mosley's plan was not socialist. It propped up capitalism without altering class relations.

The mainstream of the Labour Party were not the only ones opposing Mosley's plan. The parliamentary wing of the Independent Labour Party also opposed him at the Labour conference.<sup>520</sup> The ILP felt that it upheld capitalism too, despite its now fractures relationship with the government and wider Labour Party. For some time, the ILP was coming to increasing loggerheads with Labour. There had always been tension between the two but since the first Labour government in 1924, the ILP had grown increasingly critical of Labour's gradualism and sceptical of its commitment to socialism. Soon after the Second Labour government came to power, it became hostile to Labour who was overseeing a crisis of unemployment it was seemingly unwilling to tackle. The ILP barely tolerated Labour on the grounds that the Conservatives would fare worse.<sup>521</sup> James Maxton, party president outlined the ideological distinction between the two parties. In his view, the ILP served an important function in British politics. Since the Labour Party had 'avowed socialism' as its primary objective, it was the ILP's role to serve such a function. The real issue was that the 'cry for rationalisation and for increased production' was misdirected energy. This was a pointed attack on the Labour government. Instead, Maxton wanted the government to 'distribute what we produce'. Hobson's underconsumptionism influenced many in the ILP, including Maxton. 'Distribution, not production, is the main problem' he uttered.<sup>522</sup> He warned the movement that it was not the job of 'Labour and [the]

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<sup>519</sup> Cited in *ibid.*

<sup>520</sup> Laybourn, *The ILP, 1914-1939*, 109-110.

<sup>521</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

<sup>522</sup> J. Maxton, *Where the ILP stands: presidential address of J. Maxton to the ILP confress, together with the Delcaration on the relation of the ILP to the Labour Party* (London: ILP, 1930), 6.

Socialist Movement' to better manage capitalism. The task was to seize ownership of industry distributing its produce efficiently and fairly.<sup>523</sup>

Fenner Brockway, leader of the ILP articulated the party's alternative platform to Labour in a speech to parliament on April 16, 1931. Brockway's *A Socialist Plan for Unemployment* delineated more radical solutions to Britain's woes. He attacked Labour for failing to use 'socialist measures' to combat unemployment, lamenting the government's policy of increasing productivity before prioritising job creation. He called for nationalisation of industry, national planning agencies, establishing export and import boards tightly regulating foreign trade. In response the parliamentary Labour Party imposed standing orders restricting Labour MP's ability to vote against the party.<sup>524</sup>

The ILP was not the only left-wing challenge to Social Democratic establishment. The SPD's toleration of Brüning and its passive reaction to the crisis emboldened left-wingers. The party's relationship with workers and its dedication to socialism at-large were fervently questioned. As early as 1930, leading left-winger Max Seydewitz warned against the party's strategy. If the SPD did not comprehend their timidity, it would haunt the moment. He likened toleration to the party's fateful decision to support the war in 1914. Voting for war credits was 'a policy largely dictated by the notion of the responsibility to the state.' The problem was that the SPD was guarding a state unshaped by the working class. The SPD was making the same blunder by tolerating Brüning. It was supporting a government on a misguided principle. Brüning's government did not represent workers. Supporting Brüning sowed seeds of self-destruction. 'This creates despair among the most unfortunate victims of

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<sup>523</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>524</sup> Laybourn, *The ILP, 1914-1939*, 110.

capitalism, who expected help from Social Democracy, who believed in the goals' of the movement. The rise of Nazism, Seydewitz claimed, represented a 'crisis in confidence' amongst the masses against the movement.<sup>525</sup> The crisis in confidence was 'a result of Social Democracy's alliance and coalition policies.' Social Democracy's bind would benefit the ruling class and Nazism. Once the bourgeois parties no longer needed the SPD, they would invariably turn to the Nazis to achieve their goal at suppressing labour. 'The bourgeois does not see fascism as their ultimate enemy, but as the ultimate weapon for use against the proletariat in an emergency.'<sup>526</sup>

Anna Siemsen, member of the Reichstag (1928-30), and former member of the USPD, aired indignation at the party's reticence. She viewed toleration as a breach of the party's claim to represent workers. The 'Brüning cabinet has unmistakably revealed its thoroughly reactionary and anti-working-class character.'<sup>527</sup> More importantly, she warned of the growing divide between the party hierarchy, and the working class. Siemsen interestingly pointed to a now famous study on Social Democracy undertaken by political scientist Robert Michels. Michels in 1911 published an examination of the oligarchical tendencies of political parties. One of his case studies was the SPD. Siemsen thought that the SPD had now fulfilled Michels's description of a party, claiming to represent the working class but was being governed by conservative minded oligarchs.<sup>528</sup> Under the current leadership, she thought the SPD was showing signs of 'degeneration'. She called for the party to be less rigid in party

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<sup>525</sup> Seydewitz, "Die Aufgabe Der Arbeiterklasse," 107.

<sup>526</sup> "No to 'Toleration'," in *Marxists in the face of Fascism: Writings by Marxists on Fascism from the Inter-War Period (1930)*, ed. David Beetham (Chicago: Haymarket, 2019), 265.

<sup>527</sup> Anna Siemsen, *Auf dem Wege zum Sozialismus: Kritik der Sozialdemokratischen Programme von Heidelberg bis Erfurt* (Berlin: M.B.H., 1931), 11.

<sup>528</sup> See Robert Michels, *Political Parties: a sociological study of the oligarchical tendencies of modern democracy*, trans. Eden & Cedar Paul (Heart's International, 1914). – This study still influences academics, particularly in political science and sociology.

discipline, imploring it to embrace a 'change in direction.'<sup>529</sup> Siemsen looked to the party's history and its programmes concluding that 'extreme reformism' permeated them. Increasing temperance characterised its successive programmes. And, despite the SPD's cumulative moderation, most of its aims outlined at the Heidelberg conference in 1925 remained unachieved.

The programme of Social Democracy... was a minimum program of conservative democrats and cautious Realpolitikers. It failed completely, precisely because it was such a minimum program.<sup>530</sup>

Left-wing pressures exerted on Social Democracy's establishment became a prominent feature. The wider movement's fatalism and its inability to shift or radicalise before such a systemic and existential crisis exhausted leftists. Whether it was Labour's gradualism or the SPD's toleration of Brüning; waiting for an upswing to renew socialist drive was not enough to allay depression and fascism. They had long-tolerated moderation from their parties and now demanded alternative visions for socialism. Leftist now struggled to tow party lines. These leftist fissures did not just impact domestic party structures, they shaped the wider international movement as well.

### **Beginnings of schism and the last LSI Congress**

There had always been elements within the Labour and Socialist International that were sceptical of its mission. Its unwillingness to unite with the Comintern troubled left-wing elements. The reason behind the 5-year hiatus between the end of the war

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<sup>529</sup> Anna Siemsen, *Parteidisziplin und sozialistische Überzeugung* (Berlin: E. Lausche, 1931), 32.

<sup>530</sup> Auf dem Wege zum Sozialismus: Kritik der Sozialdemokratischen Programme von Heidelberg dis Erfurt, 92.

and the creation of the LSI was that the competing Social Democratic internationals were split over this very issue. As explained in the first chapter, the ILP maintained its pressure within the LSI to opening dialogue with the Third International well into the 1920s.<sup>531</sup> Its congress in Vienna, held in July 25 – August 1, 1931 was its last congress until its dissolution in 1940.<sup>532</sup> As the LSI was organising Vienna, it became clear that there would be leftward push from several of its more radical constituent parties, some of whom had been affiliates of the Austrian led ‘Two-and-a-half’ international. For them, the failure of Social Democratic orthodoxy to confront the crisis necessitated protest on the international stage. The left’s protests foreshadowed open schism in the months following Vienna.

LSI politics was another arena where the ILP and Labour clashed. From the moment the ILP joined the LSI they were at loggerheads over the number of votes each were allotted, since votes were allotted per country. Both the Labour Party and ILP represented Britain at the LSI.<sup>533</sup> In the middle of its clash with Labour over unemployment, the ILP begun fermenting discord within the LSI. In March 1931 it dispatched a memorandum calling LSI members to sign up to a list of broad but radical objectives. The document wanted ‘unity’ with Soviet Russia and to anyone who embraced ‘all organisations accepting the principle of class struggle.’ It demanded opposition to militarism, opposing all forms of ‘armaments expenditure.’ It aspired ‘mass-action’, including boycotts and strikes, particularly with ‘revolutionary action against fascism.’ There was a general appeal to embrace radical politics promoting socialism. ‘The present phase of capitalism’ has seen ‘chronic unemployment, and systemic exploitation.’ The only answer to these woes was

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<sup>531</sup> See discussion on the NEP in the first chapter.

<sup>532</sup> There was a conference held in 1934, but this was smaller than a general congress, and it was held in the last minute as a response to the destruction of the Weimar Republic.

<sup>533</sup> See LSI/17/3, People History Museum.

'socialist economic policy, world-wide in scope.' Key industries required socialisation so production could be reorganised and a 'living income achieved.'<sup>534</sup> At an LSI executive meeting Otto Wels warned that such notions were direct attacks on Snowden and the Labour government in general. He urged the international to support the Labour government's endeavours. At the same meeting, Fenner Brockway even wanted to invite representative from the Comintern to Vienna.<sup>535</sup> The ILP had issued a revolutionary gauntlet to the rest of the international movement.

Even before the ILP distributed the memorandum it had received support from another likeminded party. The Jewish Labour Bund (a part of the Polish contingent), a recently joined member of the LSI, voiced support for it at the executive level through its representative Victor Alter.<sup>536</sup> In the following months the Bund and the ILP drafted a number of resolutions for the up-coming congress. They were building a revolutionary faction in the LSI. The Bund wrote up a draft resolution decrying that as long as capitalism existed contradiction would persist. Socialist parties needed to 'offer energetic resistance to the existing menace to peace... and to exert revolutionary pressure on their governments.'<sup>537</sup> The ILP put forward similar resolutions calling on the need for socialist transformation.<sup>538</sup> Perhaps more galling to the LSI establishment was a separate resolution criticising the SPD policy of toleration. 'The toleration of the Brüning cabinet by the SPD is indirectly weakening power of the working class and lowering living standards.' The ILP then insisted that the SPD reject all forms of coalition politics and embrace a 'revolutionary socialist programme.' The resolution ended with a telling statement. 'The economic conditions are ripe for socialism... the

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<sup>534</sup> *ILP memorandum on international socialist policy*, LSI/17/3, 17/3/1, 1931, People's History Museum,

<sup>535</sup> - This was obviously meant with derision at the meeting.

<sup>536</sup> The Bund were a part of the Polish delegates of the LSI.

<sup>537</sup> *Draft resolution submitted by the "Bund" in Poland*, LSI/17/7, 17/7/1/2, 1931, People's History Museum,

<sup>538</sup> *Draft resolution submitted by the ILP*, LSI/17/7, 17/7/6, 1931, People's History Museum,

workers movement should endeavour to overthrow capitalism and establish a socialist commonwealth.<sup>539</sup> Max Adler thought that the Bund had gone along with the ILP to quickly build allies within the LSI.<sup>540</sup> But this was more than just political manoeuvring. Despite the small size of the revolutionary faction, they were genuine in their opposition. They saw a fainthearted Social Democratic international movement unwilling to confront capitalism, fascism, and the drift to militarism, at a moment of genuine systemic crisis.

The Fourth Congress of the LSI was its last congress. It was held at a time when the full bore of the crisis was being felt. The immense social, economic, and political crisis, particularly in Germany, was causing critical anxiety. The threat to Weimar and German Social Democracy, was a grave concern for the entire movement. While the Vienna congress attempted to deal with things like rearmament and peace, it was Nazism and the Depression that dominated debates.<sup>541</sup> From July 25 to August 1, the entire Social Democratic movement gathered in Vienna to confront Europe's descent.

When Otto Bauer rose to speak, unanimous applause followed. All sides respected Bauer. He was an Austro-Marxist on the left of the international but worked within broadly orthodox frameworks. Both reformists and revolutionary elements held him in high esteem.<sup>542</sup> He argued capitalism was now unable to 'fully utilise labour' even

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<sup>539</sup> *Draft Resolution on Point 2 (submitted by the British ILP)*, LSI/17/7, 17/7/34, 1931, People's History Museum,

<sup>540</sup> *Meeting of Enlarged Bureau, Paris, October 31 - November 1*, Labour Party Archives: Labour and Socialist International, LSI Minutes 1921-1937, LSI Minutes 1931, 1931, People's History Museum, Adler stated this after the congress, but was referring to the Bund's pact with the ILP in general. Since the Bund joined the LSI in 1930, he surmised they needed quick allies in the international movement.

<sup>541</sup> Braunthal, *History of the International II*, 360.

<sup>542</sup> Otto Bauer's work on nationalities was in fact taken up by the Bund to be its apart of its opposition to Zionism. Though Bauer rejected the argument that Jews constituted a nation, the Bund modified his notions to fit their objectives; but of course, this was decades before the LSI congress, in the 1900s.

for its own survival. Too much capital lay idle in the United State and France. This was more than just another cyclical downturn, mechanisms capitalism usually relied upon to restart production were no longer viable. 'The capitalist themselves are no able to use capital' he exclaimed. The only way to restart production and reinvigorate idle capital was the through state power. 'Governments alone can force idle capital back to business and secure employment.' Bauer thought international credit could help Germany back into production. He called on wealthy countries to release credit, along with ending war debts. This was in support of one of the resolutions that had the backing amongst a majority of the congress. It was also one of the conclusions the joint LSI/IFTU committee had come to. Bauer then turned his attention to the ILP/Bund resolutions. It was easy for a party (he was referring to the Bund) who was not 'exposed to any fascist menace to say, 'what is the good of democracy if it offers no benefits to the working class?' He implored that there needed to be solidarity behind SPD struggles in German. Bauer again received overwhelming support from delegates.<sup>543</sup>

In response to Bauer, the Bund's representative Henryk Erlich arose to a hostile congress. Erlich reminded Bauer and the rest of the congress that Poland too faced reactionary dictatorship that had coerced bourgeois parties into supporting it. He insisted that the Polish working class now confronted a similar choice than their German comrades. They faced either 'a way to independence, and a determined class politics' or agree to supporting middle class parties and anti-democratic forces. He spoke of moral decay of the Polish working class. Directly aiming at the German SPD, Erlich said that the Polish working class would now only fight for democracy if it was 'filled with social content.' If the working class did not see material benefits like

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<sup>543</sup> Otto Bauer, "Fifth Session, July 30," in *Fourth Congress of the LSI* (London: Labour Party, 1931).

socialisation and the like, they would be 'politically impotent.' On these grounds, he rejected coalition politics declaring class struggle against capitalism. Erlich finished his speech rejecting Bauer's solution of pleading international capital to grant credit to Germany. 'How can one expect the directors of international finance capital will be more willing to show quick and generous international solidarity to Germany?' Erlich proclaimed the 'seizure of power by the working class' was the only way to strengthen democracy. This would fill democracy with 'social content' transforming into a 'social democracy.' Howls of disagreement followed as Erlich concluded his speech.<sup>544</sup>

James Maxton rose in support of the ILP/Bund proposals. Maxton turned to the Germans asking a powerful and valid rhetorical question. 'Why cannot you tell the people of the world you cannot stabilise capitalism?' Maxton rejected all forms of reformist policies; capitalism was historically determined to fall. 'The situation cannot be saved by capitalist devices; however clever those devices are... You may [only] post-pone the final catastrophe'. Maxton continued warning the SPD that support for Brüning fuelled fascism.

Well, I maybe badly misinformed about the growth of fascism, by my impression is that fascism in Germany has grown side-by-side with the progress of coalitionalism on the part of German Social Democracy.

The only way to defeat fascism and overcome economic doldrum was to drop reformism, embracing a revolutionary approach. Howling derision met Maxton, as it had Erlich. Reflecting more than 30 years later, Julius Brauthal, an Austrian delegate, thought the ILP and Bund's pleas called for the SPD to adopt a position of 'civil war.'<sup>545</sup>

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<sup>544</sup> H. Erlich, "Fifth Session, July 30," in *Fourth Congress of the LSI* (London: Labour Party, 1931).

<sup>545</sup> Braunthal, *History of the International II*, 363.

Eventually, after long debate, the resolutions were a put to a vote and easily defeated. On one resolution the ILP and Bund lost 314 to 7.<sup>546</sup> Nonetheless the Fourth Congress was the most contentious out of the previous three. Despite the routing of ILP and Bund, their opposition to Social Democratic orthodoxy was pertinent. Their challenge represented significant tensions in the movement that in the following months and years boiled over into several schisms. Debates at the LSI congress represent prescience of what these schisms would be over. Would Social Democracy remain dedicated to reformist visions, continuing belief in capitalism's ability to self-repair; waiting for the good times to instil socialism? Or would it adopt a revolutionary approach to the crisis of fascism and depression, using the opportunity to overthrow a system it had long promised to replace with a socialised economy?

### Conclusion

The previous chapter spoke of a disjuncture between the future promise of socialism and the realities of bourgeois stabilisation. In a sense, the disconnect between the movement's futurist promise and its need to surmount present problems continued but in a vastly different manner. The Depression forced Social Democratic thinkers into confronting unemployment and how to restart production. The mainstream of the movement fell back on deterministic arguments. Some cited capitalism's crisis prone tendencies always self-corrected. Elements of the mainstream accepted that there needed to be new direction but did not to stray too far from established orthodoxies. Centrist arguments, already rousing angst in the 1920s, caused greater friction within the movement. For many, both on left and right, such a systemic shock

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<sup>546</sup> "Vote on Item 2," in *Fourth Congress of the LSI* (London: Labour Party, 1931).

was reason to rethink Social Democracy's mission at-large. The threat of fascism amplified these fears. The right began to tinker with ideas beyond standard Social Democratic political economy. With the role of the state expanded after the war, could it now have a more direct hand in the economy? The left felt that the movement was betraying the working class. Revolution was the only answer to a major crisis in the capitalist mode of production. The proletariat, being led by Social Democrats, had to re-embrace its historic role as the class that would overthrow capitalism. The left feared that if Social Democracy failed to embrace revolution, workers would turn on the movement.

It was the beginning of a new period of innovative thinking, causing severe tensions. Social Democracy's tendency towards presentism was being questioned vigorously and vibrantly. Most socialists agreed that lifting working class consumption would solve the crisis, how this was attained feverishly differed. These ideational differences became more defined as the crisis continued into 1932. This is what the next chapter turns too.

# Darkness Descends

Alas sir...the unholy alliance of Nationalism and Capitalism is everywhere bent on breaking up the foundations of a Society of Nations, paralysing the forces of international commerce, sowing seeds of economic discord to ripen into fights for markets, and threatening with starvation large sections of those nations that are furthest advanced in the arts of civilization.

J. A. Hobson, 1932<sup>547</sup>

While the crisis brutally bore down on Europe, Social Democracy imagined new futures as it simultaneously fractured. Novel ideas, in nascency just a year before, became more mature and detailed. Concepts surrounding mixed economies and planning established themselves as viable alternatives to the current course. Institutional schisms began to form reflecting these ideational differences. Pressures from the left and right, long simmering, breathed new vigour; some formerly broke with the mainstream movement. As Social Democracy faced internal rancour, its external threats became existential. The Depression gave new life to Communism and propelled fascism. Fascism had quickly become a mass movement, now seriously threatening the liberal order. Due to its newness and hasty rise, it had remained largely untheorised. Social Democracy now had to confront it given its potency. Economic turmoil had reconfigured class structures counter-intuitive to socialist thinking. In Germany, the reorientation of bourgeois politics towards Nazism was another reminder that largescale pauperisation did not automatically amount to greater socialist support. This too forced novel thinking from Social Democrats. And

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<sup>547</sup> J. A. Hobson, *The Recording Angel: A report from Earth* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1932), 104.  
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as Social Democrats faced turmoil at home, the only Communist country in the world had ostensibly avoided economic disaster. The Soviet Union's breakneck industrialisation seemed to vindicate the Bolsheviks and their revolution. As Europe descended into cataclysm, the movement went through a period of intensive intellectual innovation and growth as it suffered through the crisis.

The ideational divisions explained in the previous chapter exacerbated into formal splits. In Germany, France, and Britain factional groupings splintered from their respective parties. This too had ramifications for the international movement. The LSI had to weather a Left Socialist splinter.

Nazism was the benefactor of the crisis. Social Democracy now had to theorise on what brought about its quick rise. Traditional class structures had fallen away, or at the very least, been significantly altered; could this explain fascist appeal? Class relations needed reconceptualisation. Clearly economic turmoil and mass pauperisation had not benefited socialism as Marx predicted.

Amongst the morass of Europe, the Soviet Union had instituted its own autarkic form of mass state planning and rapid industrialisation. It seemed to escape disaster. The enormity and pace of change forced upon the country by the Five-Year Plans was gargantuan. Stalinism formed a new kind of socialism that had rigorous scientific planning built into it, all without market forces. The new system promised to master supply and demand. Its outcome was of significant interest to many. Bauer in particular thought it was a substantial turning point in the history of the Russian Revolution, vindicating the Bolshevik takeover. Kautsky, true-to-form, maintained his extremely critical position.

Five themes divide the chapter. The first explains the continued economic and political crisis. The second reveals the formal splits within Social Democracy, mainly focusing on Left Socialism and its challenges to mainstream Social Democracy. It also explores French neo-socialism and its more conservative challenge to the movement. The third theme investigates the theoretical problem fascism posed to the movement. Long term unemployment reshaped much of Europe's politics. The growth of fascism was part of this narrative. Social Democrats spilled much ink with differing interpretations of how fascism related to class politics. Was it a tool of capital, or was it a new outgrowth of the newly pauperised middle classes? The fourth theme expands upon Social Democratic responses to the Depression. By the fall of Weimar, planning, in various forms, had established itself as a viable alternative to more orthodox gradualisms. Finally, the chapter focuses on Stalin's Five Year Plans. The rapid industrialisation of Soviet Russia fascinated Social Democrats. The implications for Social Democracy's own impasse in Central and Western Europe were painfully clear. Social Democracy gave Stalin's Five Year Plan much attention amidst its own descent.

### **Depression economics and politics endures**

By the end of 1931 countries began to leave the Gold Standard. Germany left in July/August. Most importantly, Britain left Gold in late September. By doing so Britain had relinquished its role as the 'steward' of the Gold Standard,<sup>548</sup> and as one of the world's leading creditors. Despite dumping Gold, both the British and German governments continued with deflationary policies. They attempted to draw gold back

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<sup>548</sup> Feinstein, Temin, and Toniolo, *The World Economy between the World Wars*, 102.

to their shores. 'While this grip in ideology was strong, it wore off within six months.' Monetary policy became expansive in 1932 and Britain devalued the pound sterling.<sup>549</sup> Britain's change in direction had flow on effects. The United States' gold reserves were now under pressure. The floating of the pound reminded central bankers of the dangers in holding foreign exchange reserves. They moved to liquidate their dollar balances demanding the government convert them to gold. There was a second round of bank failures in the country and money supply declined.<sup>550</sup> The US maintained allegiance to Gold, increasing interest rates and reducing supply. The economy further descended.

By 1932 governments began to be more 'hands on' in their economic policy. Britain's floating of the pound was the first substantial step towards economic stabilisation, followed by a slow recovery.<sup>551</sup> In the last few months of Brüning's tenure, the German government invested 135 million Reichsmark on job creation programs. Under Franz von Papen, the government invested a further 167 million creating 15,169 jobs in the textile industry and 12,683 in mining. Given Germany's joblessness ran at 6 million, it was a drop in the ocean, but it was a sign of things to come. Hitler, once in power, adopted and expanded such programmes.<sup>552</sup> This was an example of the freedom governments had once they left Gold. They had the flexibility to expand money supplies and credit without having to maintain currency parity with gold. After Britain's exit more countries left in quick succession. By the middle of 1932 few countries remained. The US, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Italy, Poland, and Lithuania persisted on the Gold Standard.<sup>553</sup> By the end of 1932, some

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<sup>549</sup> Ibid., 102-103.

<sup>550</sup> Eichengreen, *Golden Fetters*, 289.

<sup>551</sup> Clavin, *The Great Depression*, 144.

<sup>552</sup> Ibid., 141-142.

<sup>553</sup> Feinstein, Temin, and Toniolo, *The World Economy between the World Wars*, 103.

countries were seeing primary and industrial prices return to levels seen at the beginning of the crisis. Protectionist methods made it difficult for international trade, but it did help domestic farmers and their primary products. Unemployment remained stubbornly high. In Germany it reached its apex at 30 percent of the workforce in 1932, it fell the following year to 26 percent. In Britain, unemployment ran at 15.6 percent in 1932 but declined by about 1.5 percent the following year. Austria's road was bumpier, its unemployment peaked at 406,000 in 1933 only slowly reducing in 1934.<sup>554</sup> While countries had freed themselves from Gold, protectionist policies became further entrenched; something that worried Social Democrats.

By the winter of 1931/32 the danger for Social Democrats and for democracy in Central Europe was abundantly apparent. Brüning at this point still held the chancellorship but President Hindenburg was pressuring him into making concessions to the nationalist right. The presidential elections held in March 1932 revealed how dire things were. While there were significant tensions between Brüning and Hindenburg, Brüning supported Hindenburg's candidacy. Social Democrats did the same thing, expecting him to run against Hitler. Goebbels announced Hitler's candidacy at a mass rally at the Berlin Sport Palace on February 22. The SPD formally backed Hindenburg on the 27<sup>th</sup>. The KPD ran their own candidate, Ernst Thälmann. Hitler's candidacy quickly used up oxygen for another nationalist candidate. More importantly, Hitler openly campaigned to end democracy installing an NSDAP dictatorship. Hindenburg, looked like an aging field marshal representing a 'moribund system.' As Hans Mommsen points out, under such circumstances even a Hindenburg victory 'would do nothing to halt the republic's slow drift to the right.'<sup>555</sup>

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<sup>554</sup> Mitchell, *International Historical Statistics*, 164-166.

<sup>555</sup> Mommsen, *Weimar Democracy*, 409.

Hindenburg won. He received 53 percent while Hitler won 36.8. SPD journalist Alexander Schiffrin thought this spelt danger of Nazism, and its ability to win future elections.<sup>556</sup> After their defeat the Nazis went on an offensive capturing a number of local and state elections. After increasing Nazi thuggery on Germany's streets, the Brüning government briefly banned the SA. But Hindenburg, being influenced by the reactionary general and Defence Minister Schliecher, met with Brüning on May 29 demanding a purely conservative government. The following day Brüning and his whole cabinet tendered their resignation. Hindenburg appointed Franz von Papen as Chancellor. Though originally from the same Centre Party as Brüning, he was more reactionary. The SPD rejected the new government, but the Nazis pledged toleration in return for fresh elections and the lifting of the SA ban. Papen thought placating Hitler and his party would moderate them. Elections were called for July 31, and Brown Shirts were back on the streets.<sup>557</sup>

The SPD approached the campaign with vigour coordinating it under the auspices of the pro-republican paramilitary organisation the Iron Front. Under the banner of Three Arrows (Drei Pfeil), the campaign pitted itself against communism, monarchism, and Nazism. Street violence punctuated the campaign. With the SA back on the streets, Iron Front members clashed with Nazis and communists.<sup>558</sup> The SPD promised contradicting policies endeavouring to entice farmers and other bourgeois elements into backing it. The Nazi's, taking direct inspiration from the WTB plan, promised public works. After a bitter and violent campaign, Papen's attempt at moderating the Nazis stupendously backfired. The Nazis doubled their vote to 37.4 percent. There was a wider polarisation of German politics.<sup>559</sup> The KPD increased their

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<sup>556</sup> Alexander Schiffrin, "Hitler im Engpaß," *Der Kampf*, no. 4 (1932): 145.

<sup>557</sup> Harsch, *German Social Democracy and Nazism*, 186.

<sup>558</sup> *Ibid.*, 188-189.

<sup>559</sup> Evans, *The coming of the Third Reich*, 293.

vote to 14.32 percent. The SPD slumped to 24.53, 2.55 percent less than the previous election. The other right-wing parties, either plateaued or shrunk, losing ground to NSAPD. Thereafter Hitler refused entry into coalition with other parties unless appointed Chancellor. Hindenburg backed Papen; both remained determined to do away with parliamentary procedure. The Reichstag convened in September that year. Immediately, the KPD with support from the Centre and the Nazis passed a no confidence motion. Papen now faced a new round of elections. This turn of events outraged the SPD, rightly seeing it as a betrayal of republicanism. Otto Leichter thought Hindenburg's treatment of Brüning, Papen's accent, and the placation of Nazism, proved the bourgeoisie's hostility to democracy. They would do anything to keep workers from power. ~~He asked, if German~~ Social Democracy was 'unconditionally committed to democracy but was cheated by the ugly bourgeoisie... then what does Social Democracy promise at all?'<sup>560</sup> Despite this the November elections somewhat backfired on the Nazis. They decreased their votes by 4.18 percent losing 34 seats. The SPD lost a further 12 seats. The KPD won 11 more.<sup>561</sup>

Papen now faced an even more hostile Reichstag. With street violence spiralling as competing paramilitary groups clashed, the army lost its confidence. It feared civil war. General Kurt von Schleicher recently made Minister of Defence, informed Papen that he no longer had support and Papen resigned. Hindenburg entered into negotiations with Schleicher. At this point the Weimar Republic was no longer a functioning democracy. As Richard Evans puts it, Weimar had reverted back to the Wilhelmian days with governments being anointed by heads of state.<sup>562</sup> Hitler still refused to support the new government. There was a considerable amount of intrigue

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<sup>560</sup> Otto Leichter, "Warnung und Lehre," *Der Kampf*, no. 11 (1932): 460.

<sup>561</sup> Caramani, *Elections in Western Europe*, 443.

<sup>562</sup> Evans, *The coming of the Third Reich*, 301.

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as to what to do next. Hindenburg no longer trusted Schleicher, and when Schleicher asked for sweeping powers the ageing President rebuffed him. Papen, who still had the President's ear convinced him to appoint Hitler as chancellor. If there were conservatives in cabinet, they could control Hitler and isolate him in months. With the Nazis sidelined and seemingly in electoral decline, a significant aspect of the crisis would be under control. On January 30, 1933, Adolf Hitler was sworn in as Chancellor of Germany.

The Austrian Republic was in worse shape. By 1932 Nazis were gaining ground and there had been a failed right-wing coup in September 1931. No more national elections were held but local elections in April 1932 saw significant Nazi gains. Like in Germany, nationalist parties led votes their way. The national ministry led by Christian Social Karl Buresch lost a no confidence vote. Engelbert Dollfuss replaced him. Dollfuss faced a hostile national assembly. Social Democrats, still the largest party in the assembly, were pressing for new elections. Dollfuss managed to suspend parliament on March 7. He governed by decree destroying the Austrian Republic. What followed was a curbing of civil liberties. The regime particularly targeted Social Democrats, shutting down their paramilitary group the Schutzbund, and sanctioning their newspapers.<sup>563</sup> The regime relied heavily on Italy, and Mussolini, having an ambitious foreign policy pressed Dollfuss for political 'reforms.' In May 1933, Dollfuss announced the formation of the Fatherland Front. Austro-fascism now governed the defunct republic. <sup>564</sup> Bauer exclaimed the destruction of Austrian democracy; laying the blame at the country's middle classes. The bourgeoisie saw Dollfuss 'as their representative.'<sup>565</sup>

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<sup>563</sup> Jelavich, *Modern Austria*, 190-198.

<sup>564</sup> Ibid.

<sup>565</sup> Otto Bauer, "Um Die Demokratie," *Der Kampf*, no. 7 (1933): 269-270.

While democracy in Central Europe fell, Britain and France's political institutions remained very much intact. Social Democrats though were farther from the halls of power than they had been since the end of World War One. The 1931 election devastated the Labour Party. It collapsed to a mere 46 seats in the House of Commons. The one consolation was Macdonald's National Labour Organisation was not a significant threat. After Labour's defeat the unions 'flooded money' into the party. The ILP abandoned the party disaffiliating in 1932. Henderson became leader of the party again. Henderson though spent much of 1932 ill, George Lansbury succeeded him in 1933.<sup>566</sup> France's position is discussed further into the chapter.

By early 1933 democracy had collapsed in Central Europe. Social Democracy was in retreat. It faced either reactionary dictatorship, fascism, or electoral disaster. In 1933 John Strachey summarised the situation in a hauntingly apt manner.

We live in a world which it has become a platitude to describe as a madhouse; in which our poverty is only matched by our surfeit of commodities; in which our ability to starve for lack of production; in which we are about to slaughter each other as the only way we can think of to give each other employment. Can it be wondered that in such a world the forces of unreason, of reaction and of despair are in the ascendant?<sup>567</sup>

## Open Schism

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<sup>566</sup> Thorp, *A History of Labour*, 78-82.

<sup>567</sup> John Strachey, *The Menace of Fascism* (London: Victory Gollancz, 1933), 116.

The LSI congress in July/August 1931 demonstrated that Left Socialism was threatening rupture.<sup>568</sup> The push to radicalise the LSI, and to unify the competing internationals was a macrocosm of similar disputes within its constituent parties. Left Social Democrats in the SPD began to organise against the party's leadership. Initially opposing the SPD's toleration of Brüning and deflation, they then found further ammunition with the unabated popularity of Nazism. The ILP's frustration and constant infighting with the Labour Party also came to a head in the last months of the Labour government. The movement's revolutionary elements began flexing their muscles. In early 1932, Max Adler gave a stark warning to the movement. In the face of 'right wing socialism' sapping the working class of 'revolutionary class struggle', the left had new historical relevancy. The dialectic between the right and left had always been a part of Marxism and ignoring it at such a juncture was harmful.

The strengthening of the left-wing in all social democratic parties means the best and only hope for the recovery [and] the revival of the old fighting spirit of... revolutionary social democracy.<sup>569</sup>

Even after the reunification of the MSPD and the USPD in 1922, Left Social Democrats remained active and critical of the party's right-leaning leadership. According to Hunt Left Social Democrats 'remained behind in the transformation of the SPD from a party of social protest to a party of government.'<sup>570</sup> Left Social Democracy had a limited presence in the German Labour movement. It saw support in similar areas where KPD

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<sup>568</sup> The previous period was of course the various left splinters surrounding the Great War and the revolutions of 1918/19. The creation of the 'two and a-half' international is another example.

<sup>569</sup> Max Adler, "Die historische Funktion des Links-sozialismus," *Der Kampf*, no. 2 (1932): 72-74. It is important to note that Adler was not formally apart of the SPD splinter group. Austrian Social Democracy was far more welcoming of differing views, and as such there was no splinter organisations and only tepid support for communism in the country. Adler did openly ally himself with German Left Social Democrats. However, Adler opposed the splinter International. He saw this as a move away from working class unity. It is also significant to note that this article likely coined the term Left Socialism.

<sup>570</sup> Hunt, *German Social Democracy*, 223.

affiliation was high; namely in the Rhur, Saxony, and Upper Silesia; concentrated in largely heavy industry where opposition to unionisation fomented leftist trends amongst workers.<sup>571</sup> Whilst it continued to be a faction within the SPD, after 1930 it became more hostile to the party leadership. As discussed previously, its key leader in the Reichstag Max Seydewitz had publicly chastised toleration from the beginning of 1930. He called for nationalisation to confront unemployment.<sup>572</sup> Against the backdrop of toleration, nine leading Left socialists voted against the government's 'Pocket Battleship' program. Since the SPD was supporting the government, they broke party discipline. On July 31 the Left, through one of its publication's, openly warned the party off the road it was going down. Max Seydewitz, Rosenfeld, Heinrich Ströbel and Max Adler signed the article. On September 29, the SPD expelled Seydewitz and Rosenfeld.<sup>573</sup>

On October 3, 1931, the Sozialistische Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands (SAPD) was formed.<sup>574</sup> The party's first edition of its daily newspaper denounced coalition building and pleaded for the unity of the working class.<sup>575</sup> Seydewitz outlined the full mission of the new party in June 1932. 'The Failure of Germany's working-class parties in the present historical situation has accelerated Germany's path to Fascism'. He called for a United Front between the SPD and the KPD to combat Nazism. If a United Front did not eventuate and the SPD followed its same well-worn path, he predicted utter disaster for the republic. Seydewitz, rightfully, accused President Hindenburg of working against the Brüning government orchestrating its downfall. Social

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<sup>571</sup> Ibid., 226-227.

<sup>572</sup> Seydewitz, "Die Aufgabe Der Arbeiterklasse."; "No to 'Toleration'."

<sup>573</sup> Hunt, *German Social Democracy*, 232-233.

<sup>574</sup> Harsch, *German Social Democracy and Nazism*, 147. – The creation of the party was announced at a 3000 strong rally in Breslau.

<sup>575</sup> Hans Ziegler, "Reichstagsrede des Genossen Ziegler," *Sozialistische Arbeiter-Zeitung*, 21 October 1931, 1.

Democratic 'pretensions' about the president was a false-dawn, and that he had a 'friendly disposition' towards the Nazis. Given the degradation of Weimar's political institutions, a fascist government was inevitable. He went further, predicting that once Nazism was in power it would have trouble fulfilling its varied and contradicting promises. This would lead to 'increasing mass dissatisfaction'. 'To distract attention' away from this the Nazi government would 'commit the German people to foreign adventures, whose results will be not only a new war against Poland, but a new world war as well.' The SAPD was the only party capable of bridging the divide between the two socialisms. It was a party 'born in a moment of peril for the working class.'<sup>576</sup>

The SAPD started with 6 members in the Reichstag; all stalwarts of the left. But the party, hoping to capitalise on the SPD's impotence and the KPD's extremism, fell well between the cracks come the first election it faced. At the July 1932 election it received a tawdry 0.2 percent of the vote. All 6 of its members lost their seats.<sup>577</sup> Most likely their would-be supporters maintained voting SPD or voted communist. Finding middle ground between the two socialisms fell on deaf ears. German politics and its high-octane flavour had little room for nuance.

The disaffiliation of the ILP with the Labour Party was more significant in terms of its effects on British politics. The ILP had formed before Labour. Many senior Labour MPs were dual members of both parties, despite formerly representing Labour. While the ILP was always decidedly more left leaning than its fraternal party, many Labour MPs, to the right of the ILP, remained members. Ramsay Macdonald continued his membership until the formation of the National Government. Despite its relatively

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<sup>576</sup> Max Seydewitz, "The Mission of the Socialist Workers' Party (June, 1932)," in *Marxists in the face of Fascism: Writings by Marxists on Fascism from the Inter-War Period*, ed. David Beetham (Chicago: Haymarket, 2019), 268-269.

<sup>577</sup> Hunt, *German Social Democracy*, 235.

small number of seats in the House of Commons, the ILP wielded significant intellectual influence in the Labour Party. For instance, Hobson's underconsumptionism was almost as much part of Labour's thinking as it was the ILP's.<sup>578</sup> The ILP, like many Left Socialist groupings opposed militarism and was vehemently anti-war in 1914. When the Labour Party formed in 1906 it affiliated with it. The ILP maintained the right to hold its own conferences and maintain its own structures. It was extremely critical of the first Labour government in 1924. Labour's gradualist socialism proved feeble.<sup>579</sup> In the later 1920s the ILP leadership took a turn to the left. Characters like James Maxton and Fenner Brockway (who was a Marxist) adopted a more critical stance towards the Labour Party. In response to this, at Labour's 1929 conference it tightened its standing orders disallowing MPs to vote against a Labour government. This was an attempt at strongarming ILP MPs; preventing any leftward protests on the floor of the House of Commons.<sup>580</sup> Even at the beginning of the Crash, the two were already at odds with each other.

Explained in the previous chapter, as unemployment intensified so too did the erosion of trust between the two parties. Whatever technical reasons lay behind the ILP's split, that was their opposition to Labour's new standing orders, at its core was its hostility to Labour's gradualism. The ILP vocalised their opposition to the government's inaction on unemployment. Brockway and Maxton began to be vehement in their criticism of the Labour Party, going beyond unemployment issues. By the middle of 1931 the ILP was openly condemning Labour on multiple fronts over unemployment,

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<sup>578</sup> Schneider, *J.A. Hobson*, Chapter 7. – Hobson at this point was also a member of the Labour Party.

<sup>579</sup> Laybourn, *The ILP, 1914-1939*, 98.

<sup>580</sup> Cohen, *The Failure of a Dream: The Independent Labour Party from Disaffiliation to World War II*, 11-12.

the international movement, and disarmament.<sup>581</sup> The defection of Macdonald, and the formation of the National Government accelerated the path to disaffiliation. Soon after Macdonald formed his new government and called an election. Labour again demanded all its candidates sign its Standing Orders. 19 ILP candidates refused to sign and were thus not formally endorsed by the Labour Party.<sup>582</sup>

Labour's defeat at the October election shocked both the ILP and Labour. The loss of seats was extensive, particularly for the ILP. They began with 37 seats and lost all but five.<sup>583</sup> Even after the election Labour continued to press the ILP on its standing orders. Meanwhile, the ILP became heavily factionalised itself. A group led by Maxton was pushing hard for disaffiliation. A Marxist faction had also emerged adopting a policy of revolution.<sup>584</sup> It too opted for disaffiliation. The third faction felt the party would be in a better position to shape British socialism if they remained affiliated with Labour. They saw the ILP as a party whose 'function and duties are not competitive, but complimentary to the function of the Labour Group [Labour Party].<sup>585</sup> H. N. Brailsford, a well-known left-wing journalist, urged the ILP to remain affiliated. He felt that Labour had run a formidably socialist campaign in 1931. Labour 'had executed a remarkable change of front. It abandoned the old gradualist, reformist tactics.' There was little reason to leave at a moment Labour was turning leftward, despite the presence of 'easy going right wing' elements.<sup>586</sup> The ILP's left wing was resolute in pursuing disaffiliation. Campbell Stephen, a leftist Glaswegian, saw Labour's

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<sup>581</sup> Fenner Brockway, *A socialist plan for unemployment* (London: ILP, 1931). Also see David Kirkwood, "Second Session, July 27," in *Fourth Congress of the LSI* (London: Labour Party, 1931); John Paton, "Second Session, July 27," in *Fourth Congress of the LSI* (London: Labour Party, 1931).

<sup>582</sup> Laybourn, *The ILP, 1914-1939*, 112.

<sup>583</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>584</sup> By revolution they meant radical economic policies like vast nationalisations over most of the economy.

<sup>585</sup> *The Bradford Pioneer* quoted in Laybourn, *The ILP, 1914-1939*, 114.

<sup>586</sup> H. Brailsford, "Should the ILP leave? The case for affiliation," *New Leader*, July 15 1932, 10.

socialism as moribund. Further galling was that much of the ILP's criticism of the recently defeated Labour government was proven correct. 'Experience has proved that the ILP criticism and defiant actions were fully justified.' He doubted Labour's change of heart at the recent election. The Labour government's kowtow to employers gave the ILP 'the answer' to its dedication to socialism.<sup>587</sup>

The Special Conference at Bradford sealed the ILP's fate. In the first session on June 30, 1932, the conference voted overwhelming to disaffiliate from the Labour Party. The disaffiliation motion passed 241 to 142. Seconds after the vote 'cheers swept the hall, and delegates sprang to their feet and sang the Red Flag.' Maxton pledged the party to fight for a 'united working-class movement, not on a reformist basis, but a revolutionary one.'<sup>588</sup> Soon after the conference Maxton reiterated the reason behind the split.

[Labour and the National Government] differ somewhat in method and in the detail devise for saving capitalism, but the differences that split the Labour government were not as to whether capitalism should be maintained or destroyed. There was merely a difference as to how far it was necessary to go in the way to saving it.

Our differences with the Labour Party, which have led to the present break, arose from our attempt at maintaining... socialism while every act of the Labour government was a negation of socialist principle and was anti-working class.<sup>589</sup>

The ILP radicalised in the face of crisis. It could no longer tolerate Labour's gradualism. Tensions between the two had long festered but the debacles of the Labour government, along with Labour's standing order antics were too much for the

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<sup>587</sup> Campbell Stephen, "The Labour Party? The case for disaffiliation," *New Leader*, July 15 1932, 11.

<sup>588</sup> "The critical debate "the ILP is disaffiliated", " *New Leader*, August 5 1932.

<sup>589</sup> James Maxton, "After the great decision," *New Leader*, August 12 1932, 2.

ILP. Labour's left turn at the 1931 election was too little too late. Thereafter the ILP adopted an openly revolutionary line, calling for a United Front with the communist party. The *New Leader* became flagrantly sympathetic with Leninism, and consistently updated its readers on affairs in the Soviet Union. It approved of Trotskyism too. The ILP took aspirations for a United Front seriously. Left socialism had again broken with moderate Social Democracy attempting to salvage revolutionary fervour. Just after the ILP disaffiliated at Bradford, the party sent a telegram of 'good wishes' to their German comrades in the SAPD for the upcoming election.<sup>590</sup>

Left wing schism did not spare the international movement. The beginnings of a Left Socialist schism had their origins a year before the 1931 Vienna congress. Three senior ILP figures travelled to Holland attempting to build a Left Socialist camp within the International. James Maxton, Campbell Stephen and Fenner Brockway aimed to 'establish close relations' with the Norwegian Labour Party, the left faction of the Dutch Social Democratic Party, the Polish ILP, and the Jewish Labour Bund (Poland).<sup>591</sup> The grouping also made contact with the left of the SPD. Brockway insisted that a 'formal committee' remained unformed out of fear of disciplinary action from the LSI. But the parties agreed to an informal pact and announced their intentions to the rest of the International.<sup>592</sup> A decade later, in Brockway's autobiography, he stated that the faction did not originally plan on withdrawing from the LSI to create a new International. They 'retained hope to unite the Second and Third Internationals... to an all-inclusive International.'<sup>593</sup>

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<sup>590</sup> J. Compton, "The Unions, The party, and the Breakaway ILP," *Labour Magazine* XI, no. 5 (1932): 198-200.

<sup>591</sup> Fenner Brockway, *Inside the left: Thirty years of platform, Press, Prison and Parliament* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1942), 276.

<sup>592</sup> *Ibid.*, 277.

<sup>593</sup> *Ibid.*, 278.

At the congress in July/August 1931 Left socialist members were organising themselves behind the scenes. As the ILP and Bund were pressing the LSI leftwards at the centre-stage of the congress, behind closed doors and in between sessions, movements were afoot to form a new organisation. At an executive meeting of the LSI in mid-May 1932, Brockway confessed that the ILP had held factional meetings with Left LSI members during the congress. He maintained that there was no intention of splitting with the LSI.<sup>594</sup> The LSI's executive forced Brockway to answer hard-hitting questions because two weeks earlier there had been a conference of 'left-wing parties' in Berlin.

From May 5 to 6 a "conference of 'left-wing' parties and groups" was held in Berlin. Six parties attended. The recently formed SAPD, the Independent Socialist Party of Holland, the Norwegian Labour Party, the Polish ILP, the Bulgarian 'left-wing group', and the ILP. An insignificant member from Berlin represented the Bund. The Polish government denied Victor Erlich and his cohort passports. They could not cross the border. Max Adler planned to attend but was struck by illness.<sup>595</sup> Fenner Brockway ran most of the proceedings. It was clear that the ILP was the dominant party. While the congress offered nothing new that had not already been said, its organisational resolutions were noteworthy. The parties committed to increased cooperation. The congress established a permanent committee that would pass information and coordinate Left Socialist activity. The ILP would 'act as the common centre for the collection and circulation' of the group's activities. The 'admission of new parties must

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<sup>594</sup> *Executive Committee, Zurich, May 19-20*, Labour Party Archives: Labour and Socialist International, LSI Minutes 1921-1937, LSI Minutes 1931, 1932, People's History Museum, Also see "Für Kampfeinheit der Weltarbeiterklasse," *Sozialistische Arbeiter-Zeitung*, Mai 8 1932, 1.

<sup>595</sup> *Conference of "left-wing" parties and groups in Berlin May 5 - 6*, The archives of the British Independent Labour Party . Series II, Minutes and related records (microform), 68, 1932, Bodleian Library, Brighton.

be agreed to unanimously by the parties' present at the congress. The congress pleaded for its constituent parties to contribute funds to the new committee. Despite the obvious organisational capacity it was building, many in the congress shied away from forming a new International. Brockway was reluctant to 'commit the ILP to break' from the LSI. One of the SAPD representatives, Rosenfeld, did not wish for the current Left LSI members to break their associations either.<sup>596</sup> Joseph Kruk (Polish Independent Labour Party) however argued that the 'current situation was impossible'. A united international was unmanageable given the stances of both the Comintern and the LSI. The only path left was to form a new International.<sup>597</sup> The question of a new International remained formally unresolved. For all intense and purposes however, the question had very much been answered. Whatever misgivings some at the congress had, the formation of formal links, the creation of a permanent committee, formalising financial input, and the imposition of membership rules meant that a new de facto-International had indeed been founded. Two weeks later Brockway penned his thoughts on what the congress represented.

Until recently [the working class] was divided broadly into Social Democrats and Communists. Now a third section is arising—the Revolutionary Socialists. The Revolutionary Socialists are opposed both to the gradualism and class-collaboration of the Social Democrats and to the rigidity and psychology of the Communists.<sup>598</sup>

Right wing pressures also fractured Social Democratic parties. France was such a case. Marcel Déat's book *Perspectives socialistes* (described in the previous chapter) caused frictions within the SFIO. Since 1929/30 there had been extensive debate within the SFIO about participation in coalition with the Radical Party in The Cartel Des

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<sup>596</sup> The SAPD had in fact left the LSI upon its formation.

<sup>597</sup> Conference of "left-wing" parties and groups in Berlin May 5 - 6, 68.

<sup>598</sup> Fenner Brockway, "Common Action by 'Left socialists'," *New Leader*, May 13 1932, 11. – In this article Brockway shied away from announcing a new international; merely stating the congress committed to greater cooperation and coordination of Left socialist parties.

Gauches. The left of the SFIO had become critical of this arrangement. Déat's book, in the words of one scholar,

amounted to a theoretical justification for ministerial participation. The urgent necessity of a broad "anti-capitalist" coalition and the historical possibility of divorcing the republican state from capitalist control—the main conclusions of *Perspectives socialistes*—were so many reasons for entering into coalition with the Radicals.<sup>599</sup>

As explained previously, the book argued for class collaboration instead of antagonism. It envisaged a socialism bereft of class conflict, opting for a more corporatist model where government would take over parts of the economy, while other parts remained in private hands.<sup>600</sup> It was fundamentally anti-Marxist and an affront to many within the SFIO.<sup>601</sup> However the factional divide did not take schismatic form until after the 1932 legislative elections.

The SFIO did well at the 1932 election but the right outmanoeuvred them forming government. As a result of their electoral surge however there was an influx of leftist candidates. The party was not stronger enough to form government but simultaneously it refocused debates on whether the party should participate in coalition governments. The Radical led government rejected SFIO overtures to participate in government, but this did not stop a Brüning-style debacle. In March 1933 the SFIO, without approval from its congress voted in favour of harsh budget cuts to the civil service. After several turbulent party meetings, the left (the anti-participationist) censured the right for their public criticism of the party. In October the SFIO expelled the neo-socialist faction. In December, Déat formed *Le Parti socialiste*

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<sup>599</sup> Mathieu Hikaru Desan, "The Invention of Neo-Socialism: The Dynamics of Schism and Doctrinal Distinction in the French Socialist Party," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 31, no. 3 (2019): 699.

<sup>600</sup> Déat, *Perspectives socialistes*.

<sup>601</sup> White, *Lost Comrades*, 70-80.

*de France-Union Jean Jaurès* (PSdF). He became secretary-general and remained the intellectual force behind plannism in France.<sup>602</sup>

By the end of 1932 Social Democracy had weathered schisms on multiple fronts. The crisis breathed rebellious vigour into Left Socialism. Left socialists wanted revolutionary policies and mass mobilisation to overcome fascism and depression. The right wing split in France was, in a sense, similar, though differed in ideological orientation. It saw the SFIO left as impotent. Reliance on outdated modes of class warfare were wielding little for France's working class or the economy at large. The Depression alone was not the cause of these ruptures. The growing threat of fascism hung heavy. For the neo-socialists in France, without class collaboration fascism would benefit from the fallout. Left Socialism wanted to confront fascism with mass mobilisation and pre-emptive manoeuvring and alliance-building with communism. A United Front was a tactical and strategic necessity. Whatever misgivings Social Democracy had with communism, confronting the growing menace of fascism eclipsed ideological and electoral contestation with communist parties and the Comintern. Left Socialism saw itself as an interlocutor between the timid Social Democratic mainstream and the rigid authoritarian communists. The defeat of fascism was paramount. It was fascism that much of socialism had to come to terms with. It demanded desperate theoretical attention.

### **Fascism and Class**

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<sup>602</sup> Jackson, *The politics of depression in France 1932-1936*, 141-144.

By late 1931 fascism had become, in the words of Otto Bauer, a 'serious menace' to Central Europe.<sup>603</sup> Fascism, and more specifically Nazism, was a new and distinct right-wing ideology that had evolved into a peculiar revolutionary movement. Fascism became a mass movement deriving support from a backlash of the democratic and liberal order. In the case of Nazism, it merged ultra-nationalism with various kinds of petty-bourgeois anti-capitalisms, explicit authoritarianism, all directed by a severe pseudo-scientific political anti-Semitism. Hitler's *Mein Kampf* relied on a highly racialised and social Darwinist vision of the driving forces of history. The 'race struggle' informed every aspect of Nazism and was a manifest counterpoint to Marxism's class struggle.<sup>604</sup> Hitler and the Nazis envisaged a Germanic society remade and reformed by this racialised political philosophy. Nazism was both reactionary and revolutionary. Its immediate effect on Weimar was the erosion of conventional bourgeois politics. The centre and conservative parties haemorrhaged votes to National Socialism. The SPD also bled votes their way, but to smaller degrees.<sup>605</sup> Economic and political turmoil ~~clearly worked in its~~ favour. Socialists thought the systemic shock of the Depression and previous crises had reconfigured class relations. Fascism reaped benefits from large sections of the bourgeoisie being 'de-classed'. One observer pointed out that 'large parts of the middle class [were] now proletarianised... they are now dependent on wages.'<sup>606</sup> Fascism's allure came from its promise to bring big capital to heel while destroying organised labour. It was a prime conduit for middle class disillusionment. Some saw fascism in a more conspiratorial light. Was fascism simply a tool of capital to organise the masses against labour? Theorising fascism became as important as tackling unemployment.

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<sup>603</sup> Bauer, "Fifth Session, July 30," 666.

<sup>604</sup> See Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1939).

<sup>605</sup> Michael H. Kater, *The Nazi Party: a social profile of members and leaders 1919-1945* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016), See chapter 6.

<sup>606</sup> Theodor Geiger, "Die Mittelschichten und die Sozialdemokratie," *Die Arbeit*, no. 8 (1931): 631.

Social Democrats were always sceptical of the bourgeoisie's commitment to democracy.<sup>607</sup> Nazism's rise off the back of middle class's support was well in line with socialist ideas. As Alfred Braunthal pointed out in 1930,

The bourgeoisie is only enthusiastic about democracy as long as democracy is *its* democracy. As soon as the proletariat penetrates parliaments with its influence, and as soon as it appears to use democracy as a lever to transform the organization of society, it loses its taste for democracy and begins to flirt with fascism.<sup>608</sup>

Particularly in the socialist literature surveyed in this study, middle class support for democracy was at best conditional on a muted, and deradicalised workers' movement, far removed from the levers of the means of production. From the beginning of Nazism's rise, socialists realised just how transformative the new movement was. It threw Germany's right-wing politics into complete disarray. Social Democratic journalist and Menshevik exile Alexander Schifrin commented on this soon after the 1930 election. The 'fascistisation' on bourgeois politics had begun.

The Nazi zone of influence now begins immediately to the right of the centre... the Brüning block is disintegrating by the success of the National Socialists... We have reached the point where fascism has become the strongest power on the bourgeois front.<sup>609</sup>

The immediate effects on German politics were all too clear. Even if Germany's right had come to a begrudging accommodation with Weimar, it was now under threat from a violently anti-democratic force.<sup>610</sup> German politics would never be the same.

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<sup>607</sup> This has also been much commented on by contemporary historians. For instance see Mulholland, *Bourgeois liberty and the politics of fear*.

<sup>608</sup> Alfred Braunthal, "Der Kampf um die Demokratie in Deutschland," *Die Kampf*, February 1930, 62-69.

<sup>609</sup> Schifrin, "Parteiprobleme nach den Wahlen," 396-397. – There were also concerns that the reformation of right wing politics of Germany would bleed over to the rest of Europe. See Emile Vandervelde, "Where is Germany Going?," *Labour Magazine* IX, no. 5 (1930). Also see Alexander Schifrin, "Die jüngste Etappe der deutschen Parteienentwicklung," *Die Kampf* 23, no. 4 (1930).

<sup>610</sup> There is plenty of evidence that the right was not in favour of Republican institutions. But there have also been some contemporary studies suggesting more conservative segments of German society were coming to terms with Weimar before the crisis.

However, it was not enough to simply describe the Nazis as a movement whose social basis was drawn from the middle classes. Social Democrats had also seen electoral setbacks since the onset of the Depression. It had itself lost votes to the KPD, and to a smaller extent the Nazis. Class structures needed re-examination.

Many concluded that Long-term unemployment had paradoxical effects on class relations. The pauperisation of large swathes of both the working and middle classes did not translate to socialist support. Such developments contradicted Marxist predictions. Helene Bauer dramatically outlined these developments in late 1932.

The hope that the terrible collapse of the economy, in which not only all the contradictions of the capitalist system, but on top of that the wretched carelessness and wretched inferiority of so many of its most distinguished bearers have been brought into such a glaring light, will give life to opposing forces that with the force of indignation would bring an abrupt end to the iniquitous game of wage-earning, has disappeared. The decline of the capitalist economy has not resulted in a decline in the capitalist system, nor has it even resulted in a loss of positions of power for its ruling classes.

To make both workers' parties [referring to the SPD and the British Labour Party] appear in the eyes of the masses as jointly responsible for everything that they were too weak to prevent. The crisis therefore brought them electoral defeats, the loss of their previous parliamentary position and soon made them defenceless against the system, which they had recently criticized, denied, but seemed to protect and cover.<sup>611</sup>

The breakdown of capitalist interactions did not lead to the breakdown of capitalism, rather it led to countless unforeseen distortions in class and social relations. These perversions weakened the movement and strengthened its foes. Social Democracy's own timidity had led to large sections of populations laying blame on it for its troubles. As Seydewitz had warned two years before, the movement was liable for

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<sup>611</sup> Helene Bauer, "Im vierten Krisenjahr," *Der Kampf*, no. 12 (1932): 493-494.

passively supporting the institutions and political actors who had imposed harsh measures on them. Socialism was now reaping what it had sowed. Alfred Braunthal too outlined similar sentiments.

The misery that capitalism has evoked in its current crisis is limitless... For the socialist criticism of capitalism had never before triumphed so clearly... And yet it cannot be denied that the socialist movement benefits less from this - in some countries it is even threatened by setbacks.<sup>612</sup>

Nazism's success was a result of these unforeseen setbacks.

Austrian Social Democrat Wilhelm Ellenbogen took a long view of the origins of fascism's 'international dimensions.' Immediate post-war developments needed interrogation. He reasoned that the democratic moment laid the foundations of the bourgeois' fear of democracy. The democratic revolutions in Europe heralded a proletarian march through state institutions, restricting 'the bourgeois' monopoly on power.'<sup>613</sup> Democracy empowered workers, but at a cost. As a dialectical response to workers' emancipation, the middle classes fomented a 'public relations' fear campaign. The 'growing diminution' of middle-class power arose, not from democracy's 'failure', but from bourgeois 'reaction against it.' Fascism's turn away from the putsch towards electoral contestation was significant. It did not just spell the movement's success but entrenched the middle class's anxious relationship with democracy. 'One must not forget' fascism's 'grotesque' relationship with democracy. 'It's probably the first movement in the world to undertake the fight against democracy... using democratic means.'<sup>614</sup> The middle classes became drawn to

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<sup>612</sup> Alfred Braunthal, "Die Sprengung des Kapitalismus," *Der Kampf*, no. 8/9 (1932): 364.

<sup>613</sup> Wilhelm Ellenbogen, "Wurzeln und Geisteshaltung des internationalen Faschismus," *Der Kampf*, no. 5 (1932): 193.

<sup>614</sup> *Ibid.*

fascism as they saw their power diminish by democratic revolution and the consequent growth of organised labour's political clout.

Likewise, Ellenbogen rightfully pointed to the barbarisation of large aspects of society after the World War. This drew countless younger people to fascist movements. His gendered analysis is of interesting note.

The preference for the uniform (also among the female followers), the military games in which every participant feels extravagantly imposing, the parades, the irresponsible thrashing about when ordered, the pretence of a magnificent heroism of a magnificent masculinity of an unmistakable attraction on youth, all also are products of a psychology from war.<sup>615</sup>

The war had other affects too. It had 'deformed' class structures. Large scale movements of populations 'gripped' the various middle classes. As most of the workers held on to their 'allegiance' to organised labour and their political parties, the middle classes swayed between various right leaning parties. The formation of fascism, and now he was specifically referring to Nazism, finally 'seized' the 'swaying middle classes... and never let go.' Fascism was a middle class 'rebellion' with historical analogues to the Boulangist movement in France. Such rebellions occurred during capitalist crises. These movements, like the Nazis, often adopted 'sharply' anti-capitalist politics; even participating in 'proletarian action.'<sup>616</sup> But the Nazis's anti-Marxism was proof of middle-class resentment of the rise of the working class and the seemingly diminished power of the bourgeoisie.<sup>617</sup>

To Ellenbogen, the world crisis did not create fascism. It had roots in the shocks caused by the Great War. Long term unemployment directly affected large parts of the middle classes. This made Nazism a popular movement since it attracted the jobless and

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<sup>615</sup> Ibid., 196.

<sup>616</sup> Ibid.

<sup>617</sup> Ibid.

disaffected bourgeois. The Depression 'increased the intensity of this middle class rebellion.' 'The millions of doctors, lawyers, teachers... from middle class families have no prospect of work.' Ellenbogen described them as being 'lifeless victims of idle class demagoguery.' Interestingly he pointed to the traditionally minded officer corps who made up a leading group in Nazism. Also radicalised by their weakened positions after the war, they had now found cause seeking to destroy the democratic order that had disempowered them.

Exiled Menshevik leader Theodor Dan thought Nazism was a historical anomaly. Its success was purely as a result of economic turmoil.

National Socialism has not become a mass movement as a result of the war or Germany's defeat... But by only the world crisis of capitalism... Its fairy tale-like growth has taken place entirely in the last three years of the crisis.<sup>618</sup>

Dan did concur, as did many, that its support lay in the petty bourgeois; the 'decaying' remnants of the middle classes. He also rejected the term revolutionary being ascribed to Nazism. Unlike the Italian fascists who marched on Rome, it seemed Nazism shied away from such brute powerplay. But to Dan, class politics had been re-arranged, and this explained Nazism's success, but it also exposed its limitations. In late 1932, Dan still thought that too many hurdles stood in the way of Nazism to take power in a putsch. He believed that this lay in its inability to make inroads in 'cities and industrial areas.' Nazism was successful in electoral politics, but this inhibited it from becoming a genuinely revolutionary force. Dan also thought Germany's strong socialist tradition complicated Nazism's appeal. Since it was unable to win over Germany's 'class conscious' working class, National Socialism's tactics had to compensate. The Nazis had to both feign socialism and commitment to electoral politics to win proletariat support. In order to 'bypass or break the wall' of Germany's working class, the party

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<sup>618</sup> Theodor Dan, "Der Vormarsch der deutschen Konterrevolution," *Der Kampf*, no. 8/9 (1932): 329.

'throws around "socialist" phrases.' For the same reason it pursued 'legal methods' of power since 'revolutionary' tactics 'seem[ed] too dangerous.' Dan thought Nazism had reached an electoral impasse. It was unable to win workers' support, but nor was it able to embrace putsch-style tactics if it was going to remain electorally viable.

Dan thought disaffected aristocrats bankrolled the party and was another reason he dismissed National Socialism's revolutionarism. He attempted to explain the party's ability to muster street thuggery. Who paid for these 'private armies' he asked?

It finds these resources among the princes who have been chased away, among the nobles who were crippled by the revolution, and among those who were exasperated by the "social burdens" and the "negligence" of the workers Large industrialists, for all those who yearn for the pre-revolutionary conditions.<sup>619</sup>

Nazism was the perfect vehicle for the diminished German aristocracy. Germany's stunted revolution easily explained this. He, as many before him, relied on the rushed revolution thesis to clarify Germany's perverted politics. The revolution had 'gotten stuck in its beginnings.' It had left too much of the old class structures intact from the Wilhelmian days. 'The supremacy of the monarchic, military and feudal aristocratic classes... was left untouched.' Nazism gave these ruling classes 'courage' to commit to their 'restorative plans.' In this sense the social basis of Nazism was on much less firm ground than Italy. In Italy there had been a weak bourgeoisie who threw their support behind Mussolini; this was not the case in Germany. In Germany the bourgeois were 'stronger and more confident.' It had no intention of being dictated to by a 'plebian Duce.' Dan argued that the bourgeoisie were going to exploit Hitler's financial and political dependence on it to restore its own 'economic and political supremacy.' In this manner he did think that Nazism was a separate force from traditional reactionary elements. Nazism came from the dregs of the unemployed

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<sup>619</sup> Ibid.

middle class, distinct from owners of capital. There were competing visions of counterrevolution, albeit one was exploiting the other for its own gains.

The restoration of counterrevolution now competes with the plebian counterrevolution of fascism, which it has bred and nurtured.<sup>620</sup>

If class relations had altered, what did this mean for Marxism? As many Social Democrats saw Nazism as a dialectical response to either the growth of working-class power, or to long term unemployment leading to bourgeois disillusion (or both). How could dialectical frameworks tackle this query? How could Social Democracy respond to such a systemic problem? As socialist sociologist Theodor Geiger asked,

If Marx's forecast of future development were to be right, there should be an avalanche-like influx of new followers with the increasing concentration of capital and the expropriation of former property owners...The psychological constitution and the political and social attitude of the middle classes seem to contradict Marx's foresight. It seems to prove that economic proletarianisation and socialist societies do not go hand in hand.<sup>621</sup>

Socialism had to come to terms with this ostensible paradox. Nazism's social basis needed comprehension. As too did the historical moment leading to its rise.

This question aroused debate on the pages of the German trade union movement's journal *Die Arbeit*. Ernest Wilhelm Eschmann, another sociologist,<sup>622</sup> tackled this question. He wanted to investigate a 'crisis of the middle class.' The rise of Nazism was a sociological symptom. It disproportionately affected the character of large pockets of the bourgeoisie. He thought that post-war economic turmoil, along with the current Depression sapped the middle classes of their role in the development of capitalism. Once they were the prime social force in history, spreading capitalism as

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<sup>620</sup> Ibid.

<sup>621</sup> Geiger, "Die Mittelschichten und die Sozialdemokratie," 619.

<sup>622</sup> While it is difficult to find sources on his life, he became a collaborator and joined the Nazi Party in 1940.

a new and productive system, but this had changed. As capital concentrated, more and more became sidelined in the development of the capitalist mode of production. They refused to acknowledge their obsolescence now capitalism had monopolised. These factors were not 'realised in their consciousness'. The Depression reinforce this.

Large sections of the middle classes are sociologically and economically aggravated from their old foundations... but they refuse to acknowledge this fact... it no longer has a space in the developmental scheme... They try to cover it up with romantic and irrational movements.<sup>623</sup>

For Eschmann, the issue was that economic disturbances had pauperised large section of the middle class. They were now far removed from the means of production. This generated large labour reserves with additional class divides amongst the bourgeoisie. They formed roughly two groups, the 'real owners' of the means of production and the 'non-capitalist bourgeoisie.' The implication was of course that the non-capitalist bourgeoisie would be hostile to proletarian socialism. They were highly suspicious of capitalism but were still unable to come to terms with organised labour.

Eschmann then turned his pen towards Social Democratic orthodoxy. The entire farce of the 'Marxist conception of civilisation is now shown' he declared. It was 'impossible to simply derive social values from economic situations.' He went further, attacking German socialism's inability to grasp the reality of this situation. Such historical forces, he thought, had been obvious for quite some time, roughly since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. German socialism failed to adopt a new world view and policies shaped by it; botching the chance to attract these non-capitalist middle classes to socialism. Socialism should show compassion to these 'new proletarians.' Clearly, Eschmann eschewed Marxism's overt materialism and its mechanical view on how social relations were purely products of economic forces. This fundamental failure of

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<sup>623</sup> Ernst Wilhelm Eschmann, "Zur, Krise 'des Bürgertums,'" *Die Arbeit*, no. 5 (1931): 364.

ideology had now come back to haunt the movement.<sup>624</sup> Social Democracy had to embrace 'non-proletarian forms' of socialism. He insisted the proletariat should not be the 'only bearers of socialism.' This was the only way to reverse fascism's success.<sup>625</sup>

Theodor Geiger responded to Eschmann's claims some months later. Geiger agreed with Eschmann that German Social Democracy's 'rigid' ideology blinded it to class restructuring. Furthermore, Marxism's view that society moved closer to socialism when large sections of the middle classes became pauperised 'implied that [socialism] promoted this process of impoverishment.'<sup>626</sup> Geiger however was sceptical of Eschmann's notion of a 'non-capitalist' middle class. The implication was that non-proletarian forms of socialisms were delusions. For large sections of the bourgeoisie which he called 'the propertied middle class' any kind of socialism was unthinkable. Since socialism called for the socialisation of the economy, the middle classes would always deem this as unpalatable. Geiger saw that while the wage-earning middle classes had become sceptical of capital, it still held fast to the capitalist mode of production. It was more precise to define the propertied bourgeoisie as being anti-monopoly rather than anti-capitalist.<sup>627</sup>

Geiger did think the middle classes had become increasingly stratified. However, Social Democracy could still win over sections of it. The 'non-propertied' middle classes now accessed the economy in largely the same manner as proletarians. Here he agreed that sections of the middle class were now a newly minted working class. However, there were complications. 'The strongest ideological barrier that separated the new proletariat from Social Democracy arises from its relationship with the

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<sup>624</sup> Ibid.

<sup>625</sup> Ibid.

<sup>626</sup> Geiger, "Die Mittelschichten und die Sozialdemokratie," 624.

<sup>627</sup> Ibid., 629.

nation.' The sticking point was nationalism. Social Democracy's internationalism, its anti-militarism, and most importantly its acceptance of the Versailles Treaty exposed it. Greiger thought the SPD's botched attempts at courting this new class went some way into explaining the success of Nazism.

The party did not take into account the mood of the new proletariat it was courting and did not conform to the post-war global political conditions or did it too late! The new proletariat, not ready to give up its national sentiments, was driven into the arms of National Socialism.<sup>628</sup>

The appeal of Nazism to this new proletariat relied on a vulgar mixture of nationalism and a pseudo-replacement of class struggle with the Nazi concept of 'volk'. His final plea was for the movement to 'loosen up its ideology' to the new proletariat.

Give us freedom of thought! To conclude with a paradox: The adherence of the party frozen in its Marxism will prevent the new proletariat from fulfilling Marx's law of socialist development.<sup>629</sup>

Not all had such materialistic readings on Nazism's appeal. Henri De Man, now a firmly established non-Marxian socialist had other ideas. He too agreed that Nazism's attracted the newly jobless and poor middle classes. This was another example of Marxist failure. It could not take 'psychological factors' into its analysis. Middle class psychology thus accounted for its quick support of fascism. De Man thought this was for two main reasons. Firstly, this situation lent itself easily for fascism to blame economic failings on non-economics sources. Particularly in Germany, Nazism diverted 'economic and social resentment into racial resentment.' Anti-Semitism, De Man thought was an easy tool to channel middle class umbrage. Nationalism worked in a similar manner but was more of a direct attack on the class politics socialist parties espoused.

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<sup>628</sup> Ibid., 626.

<sup>629</sup> Ibid., 635.

Nationalism is the emotional safety valve for a feeling of social inferiority, the form of compensation par excellence for the threatened collective self-esteem, the ideological means of diverting an economically and socially conditioned resentment to an object that is not only very different from the objects of industrial-proletarian resentment, but also symbolises the most stark contrast to proletarian-socialist class consciousness.<sup>630</sup>

The implication here was that socialist rationality failed again to take into consideration how people became socialised. Middle class poverty was not going to wipe away their experiences of relative privilege. The middle classes defined their 'social prestige and self-respect according to their vertical distance' from the working classes. Such mentality was never going to see support for socialism.<sup>631</sup>

National Socialism's success with women also did not go unnoticed. Hitler guaranteed women emancipation from the labour force, promising state support in their traditional role as housewives. The Social Democratic economist Judith Grünfeld argued that the movement had to do far more to support working class women. This was another area where the party was vulnerable to Nazism. She began with explaining that in times of 'upswing' women's participation in the labour force was somewhat uncontroversial. The demand for labour meant women workers 'were rarely met with resistance.' This was not without its complexities. People 'scarcely took notice' that women were poorly paid and treated, while being torn away from 'family duties' expected of them. The situation deteriorated when the demand for labour fell. Men were vastly favoured for employment when there were shortages in job vacancies. Women were seen as 'double earners.' This was both bigoted and unbased in material reality. Grünfeld rightly claimed that by 1925 women in the labour force numbered around 12 million of about 32 million. They were

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<sup>630</sup> Hendrik De Man, *Sozialismus und National-Fascismus* (Postdam: Alfred Protte, 1931), 16-17.

<sup>631</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

indispensable to the economy. The Nazi's slogan 'women go into trouble in times of crises' had to be met with extreme scepticism. She denounced National Socialism's conception of women as 'narrow minded bourgeois conceptions.' She continued her assault.

In the Third Reich, women are to "live according to their natural destiny, according to their nature," while "more robust men steer the state"... Fascism does not endeavour to take over the entire economic production, distribution and transport work by the male gender - but rather to push the work of women exclusively into subordinate areas.... Their main objective remains that women do not achieve economic, political and cultural independence and self-development.<sup>632</sup>

Nazism wanted to exploit women's particularly vulnerable position in society. Once in power however they would further subordinate them to male dominance, robbing them of autonomy. Nazi attitudes were 'medieval'. The Nazis' promise to end female employment as a matter of emancipation also made little sense since so many women had to work because their 'husbands and fathers' were jobless. Entrepreneurs preferred to employ women since they could pay them less. Socialism had to attack fascism with increasing vigour to counter and expose their false promise to 'release women from the workforce.'<sup>633</sup>

Socialists also conceived of fascism as something attempting to redefine materialist politics. It was a movement bent on sublimating class conflict into a corporative state where nationalism and statism directed a new kind of society. G. D. H Cole reckoned this was fascism's primary concern.

Fascism, as we have seen, is above all an attempt to override class distinctions by making the ideas of Nationalism and the Corporative State the dominant note in contemporary politics.<sup>634</sup>

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<sup>632</sup> Judith Grünfeld, "Frauenarbeit und Faschismus," *Die Arbeit*, no. 7 (1932): 426.

<sup>633</sup> Ibid.

<sup>634</sup> G. D. H. Cole, *Theories and forms of Political organisation* (Victor Gollancz: London, 1932), 150.

Though he thought this was an untenable situation for fascism. It could only hold back class politics for so long before it overcame such a regime. He thought Italian fascism would not last for this reason. John Strachey, writing a year later came to similar conclusions. Fascism's cross class appeal forced it to promise unrealistic goals. It attempted to accommodate contradicting social groups who had their own distinct grievances.

Fascism promises to every man his heart's desire...Fascism tells the worker that it will give him employment; it tells the shopkeeper that it will give him customers; it tells the peasant that it will give him land; it tells the capitalist that it will give him dividends.<sup>635</sup>

To Strachey, the cross-class allure contradicted on a few levels. It tried to bridge divides between social forces and groups not compatible with each other. This made for eclectic and often nonsensical party platforms. He thought this would lead to its downfall; unable to contend with the multiple societal contradictions it tried to bond under the banner of nationalism and a strong state.

Up until now I have reconstructed key themes in Social Democratic interpretations of fascism, and in particularly Nazism. However, given the subsequent success in establishing the Third Reich, and the countless heinous crimes it committed, most significantly the Holocaust, this begs further questions of the now obvious flaws in Social Democracy's analysis. Particularly in the case of anti-Semitism. To put the question simply, why didn't socialists focus in on Nazi racism when it was such a central component of their ideology? Geoff Eley asked a similar question on why the Nazis were more violent than other reactionaries.

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<sup>635</sup> Strachey, *The Menace of Fascism*, 81.

To put it bluntly: killing socialists rather than just arguing with them, or at most legally and practically restricting their rights, amounted to the most radical of departures. The brutality of this break can hardly be exaggerated.<sup>636</sup>

A similar question can be asked about anti-Semitism. Here though we are asking, not what caused this radical departure from other right-wing politics; but given the extent of the Third Reich's violence, why didn't socialist theory take this into consideration? Why didn't Social Democracy take the Nazis' 'radical departure' on anti-Semitism seriously? How could Nazism's most vehement opponents neglect such things, and the seeming teleology that begins with *Mein Kampf* and ends with the murder of 6 million Jews? There are several reasons for this. Perhaps a good starting point was foreshadowed by debates in the 1920s surrounding socialism's attachment to rigid forms of structuralism and materialism.<sup>637</sup>

Henri De Man's critique of Marxism in the late 1920s goes some way into explaining Social Democracy's blind spot in assessing Nazi anti-Semitism. The old Marxist adage that the base moulds the superstructure was closely followed by most Social Democratic thinkers. Even if people like Hilferding and Bauer nuanced dialectical analysis, class analysis was invariably going to take centre stage when assessing a new political force. Even De Man, who by this point rejected Marxism, followed a fairly materialist conception of fascism. De Man argued, as many did, that Nazi anti-Semitism was a diversionary tactic refocusing economic strife onto racial anxiety.<sup>638</sup> Despite the Nazi's extreme anti-Semitism, the movement had clearly redefined bourgeois politics. Socialists offered legitimate insight about how the middle classes interacted with democracy and the growth of the labour movement after the

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<sup>636</sup> Geoff Eley, *Nazism as Fascism: Violent, ideology, and the ground of consent in Germany 1930-1945* (London: Routledge, 2013), 208.

<sup>637</sup> These were discussed in chapter 2.

<sup>638</sup> Man, *Sozialismus und National-Fascismus*, 16-17.

republican revolutions of 1918/1919, and how this had led to an anti-democratic backlash when they became impoverished. These discussions obviously ranked anti-Semitism low on the causes behind the movement's success. It even ranked low when trying to explain the ideological pillars of Nazism. Rigid materialism made this difficult. When socialists did discuss anti-Semitism, they often did so in relation to their structural analyses.

Otto Bauer saw Nazi anti-Semitism as a typical bourgeois response to a crisis of capitalism. One that had historical analogues.

Just like after the long crises of the eighties and nineties, bourgeois rebellion, bourgeois anti-capitalism initially takes the form of anti-Semitism.<sup>639</sup>

According to Bauer, Nazi anti-Jewish attitudes were no different to previous middle class anti-capitalist reactions. Anti-Semitism provided the middle classes with a powerful and easy explanation for their now precarious circumstances. Svend Reimer, a Social Democratic sociologist thought the Jew was part of a whole lexicon of the Nazis' analysis of capitalism. Since economic crisis devastated the middle class, the Jew became a component of their uniquely 'atomised' systemic analysis.

From this attitude, capitalism is grasped by symptoms. Interest rates, department stores and the trading Jew... From here, economic collapse is imminent. Its opponent become plastic and tangible for the atomized middle class. The system is individualized; one beats the Jew instead and sees history as a series of machinations.<sup>640</sup>

In this line the bourgeois conception of history was unable to grapple with systemic crisis. The middle class's world view, diminished from its once mighty position, grasped at easy explanations for a system in was unable to comprehend. Anti-Semitism became a convenient explanation to lean on. The bourgeoisies' lack of

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<sup>639</sup> Otto Bauer, "Der 24. April," *Der Kampf*, no. 5 (1932): 191.

<sup>640</sup> Svend Reimer, "Zur Soziologie des Nationalsozialismus," *Die Arbeit*, no. 2 (1932): 197-198.

materialism steered it toward unmaterial explanations. This too saw anti-Semitism as merely a by-product of changing circumstances for the middle classes in the base-superstructure model. The economic crisis produced a perverted and irrational politics. Anti-Semitism was a superstructural symptom of swift and radical changes in the base.

There were some exceptions. The most notable being the SPD Reichstag member Carl Mierendorff. He won his seat at the 1930 election and became intensely interested in the success of the Nazis at that election. He detected the uniqueness of Nazi anti-Semitism in mid 1930. While the National Socialist movement shared commonality in its anti-Semitism with the nationalist movements of the 1890s, 'above all the movement is something completely new and essentially different as an anti-Semitic movement.' Its use of racial theories informing most of its politics was novel. Its arguments tying racial resentment with the declining 'social situation' gave it an 'explosive' dynamic demonstrating electoral success.<sup>641</sup> Mierendorff's assessment was accurate though exceptional. Few figured Nazi anti-Semitism was such a core principle in itself.

Rigid materialism was not the only explanation for social democracy's lacuna on Nazi anti-Semitism. Wider contexts are important too. Anti-Semitism was not only abundant in Central Europe but was a fundamental tenet of right-wing politics; almost universally in Europe. Germany was no different. Parties of the Right were highly anti-Semitic. Historian Peter Pulzer bluntly explains this. 'To write a history of anti-Semitism in the nineteenth and twentieth-century Germany is to write the history of

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<sup>641</sup> Carl Mierendorff, "Gesicht und Charakter der nationalsozialistischen Bewegung," *Die Gesellschaft*, no. 6 (1930): 489-504.

the German Right.<sup>642</sup> German nationalism constructed itself in opposition to the French Revolution. It relied on a 'Romantic German nationalism' opposing liberal notions of the nation-state and constitutionalism. Pulzer explains that the German Right's opposition to the emancipation of Jews in the 1860s was as much to do with its 'struggle against liberalism' than with its anti-Semitism. Jews were consequently associated with the enlightenment and the liberal revolutions of the 1840s.<sup>643</sup> As capitalism progressed and workers movements organised themselves into formal parties, socialism's promise of universal emancipation attracted Jews.<sup>644</sup> Hence the enemies of reaction also happened to be Jewish in their heritage.<sup>645</sup> This point was of a keen anxiety to Austrian Social Democracy; many of its most senior leaders were Jewish.

Weimar saw a sharp surge in anti-Semitism after the First World War and the revolution, as did Austria. This was particularly the case at universities. While Weimar's constitution guaranteed universal rights liberalising Germany's political institutions, on university campuses students took up the causes of the radical right. Universities became far more illiberal and anti-Semitic.<sup>646</sup> Suffice to say, National Socialism was not the only wellspring of anti-Semitism in Germany. Far from it. While Nazi anti-Semitism was unique in its pseudo-scientific construction, this distinction was lost in the plethora of the wider anti-Semitism engulfing much of Europe and late Weimar. To put it candidly, all of the German and Austrian Right were anti-Semitic. While the Right heavily relied upon it for political purposes, it was a deeply held

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<sup>642</sup> Peter Pulzer, *The rise of political anti-semitism in Germany and Austria* (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, 1988), 31.

<sup>643</sup> *Ibid.*, 32-33.

<sup>644</sup> The Bund represents the best example of how socialist Jews married socialism's universalism with representing the Jewish working class's precarious position in Central and Eastern Europe.

<sup>645</sup> Pulzer, *The rise of political anti-semitism*, 252.

<sup>646</sup> *Jews and the German State: The political history of a minority, 1848-1933* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 276.

belief. There has been recent scholarship suggesting that by 1930-32 the Nazis had figured this out and in fact played down public anti-Semitism since it was yielding few results. The Nazis also worried that extreme anti-Semitism would scare bourgeois voters it wanted to entice. Anti-Semitism was in fact more of a feature in DNVP propaganda in late Weimar.<sup>647</sup> If the Nazis were going to distinguish themselves from other German nationalist parties, anti-Semitism was not going to suffice. When Social Democracy confronted Nazism, it did so amid both a wider proliferation of anti-Semitism, and a larger right wing who had long defined itself as anti-Semitic. In such a milieu, Social Democracy's equivocal analysis of Nazi anti-Semitism becomes clear. Anti-Semitism was a tell-tale sign of reactionary politics in general. Socialists interpreted this as another symptom of the bourgeois' inability to think systemically. There was an element of truth to this. Anti-Semitism was a frequently used weapon against socialism. The German Right did not just use Jews as a scapegoat for Germany's woes, they genuinely thought Jews were the cause of those woes. Nazism shared this conviction. While Nazi anti-Semitism was more extreme and distinct, it did broadly conform to archetypes of the German Right. At this point, the NSDAP seemed to be merely another anti-Semitic nationalist party.

There was another notable failure in the Social Democratic analysis of fascism. That was the importance of the leader. Even in the most erudite analyses of fascism or Nazism, the dictatorial figure was of minimal importance. Adolf Hitler, his character, and his highly personal grip on the Nazi Party featured minimally. The same went for Mussolini. The movement's structuralism obscured this too. Such things were of secondary importance to wider structural analyses. Individuals could do little in the

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<sup>647</sup> Mommsen, *Weimar Democracy*, 340.

face of historical forces. Hitler's effective remoulding of the party to legally contest elections, or the popularity of *Mein Kampf* was not taken seriously.

While Social Democratic analysis of fascism was an ambiguous affair, it was nonetheless important. Social Democracy was confronted with a movement and ideology that was alien. Unlike its contestation with communism, Nazism was a threat explicitly anti-socialist and anti-democratic, yet electorally successful. Even when KPD votes surged, it never surmounted the SPD as the Nazis had other German nationalist parties. Since Nazism eclipsed other elements of the German Right theorising its origins was of vital importance. Rigid materialism laced Social Democratic analysis, losing sight of Nazism's more salient features, like its anti-Semitism. However, socialists foresaw its danger, and extreme violence. They were also well aware that other parties of the right would likely collude with it.

### **New plans for capitalism and socialism**

As the crisis wore on concepts and theories nascent only a year before matured. For instance, Woytinsky continued developing his ideas of deficit spending and relaxations of credit controls. Ideas for planned and mixed economies became more dominant. There were differing notions of how this would work, more continued questioning long-held assumptions. The Labour Party, after a horrendous few years and a particularly debilitating elections loss, was forced to question some fundamental theories. Hobson's notions of underconsumption, a theoretical base for both the Labour Party and the ILP was put under the microscope. A new generation of Labour economists strongly influenced by Keynes, began to make inroads. Henri De Man's plannism took hold in various Social Democratic quarters and was one of the more detailed alternatives to standard Social Democratic economic thought. Public

expenditure became fashionable. The ILO released a plan, written up by the French socialist Edgard Milhaud calling for an 'imposing scheme of large-scale European public works.'<sup>648</sup> In mid 1932, Woytinsky noted the dissemination of these new ideas, and that 'active' (active meaning interventionist) modes of economic thinking were beginning to take form.

The past few months have been unusually rich in attempts actively countering the crisis. From various sides, demands have been made and plans have been developed that are far from the previous liberal deflationist utopias ... The world market has turned into a pile of broken glass... But in this confusion...one can already see the first signs of an active fight against the crisis.<sup>649</sup>

In Britain, Labour's devastating loss at the 1931 election yielded some soul-searching. The party took a left turn in its campaign, dropping its gradualism. Much of its election material relied on combative languages of class warfare. So much so that elements of the ILP were reluctant to disaffiliate. Nevertheless, there were movements amongst some up-and-coming Labour Party economists who no longer held firm to some of the party's assumptions on capitalism. John Maynard Keynes had by this point made a name for himself as a heterodox, albeit liberal, economist. Keynes, though rejected by much of the Ex-Chequer, and figures on the right, had made inroads amongst economists both within Britain and beyond. As for the Labour Party, it began a period of internal examination and reorganisation. From roughly 1931 to 1935 the party's ideology was in flux. Debates over economic policy were important in shaping this interregnum. David Howell describes this 'fight for the soul of the Labour Party' being between Marxists and Keynesians.<sup>650</sup> Though it is probably more

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<sup>648</sup> Edgard Milhaud, "A plan for immediate action against unemployment and the economic crisis," *Annals of Collective Economy* (1932): 1-22.

<sup>649</sup> Wladimir Woytinsky, "Vor der Wende der Weltwirtschaftspolitik?," *Die Arbeit*, no. 7 (1932): 393.

<sup>650</sup> David Howell, *British Social Democracy: A study in development in decay* (London: Croom Helm, 1976), 60.

accurate to describe the argument as being between underconsumptionists (of which Marxists schematically fell into) and Keynesians.

In 1932, J. A. Hobson once again recounted how underconsumption was the seed of disaster.

The attempt to save too much and spend too little is the evident nature of the related diseases of poverty and unemployment... Thus, under-production and under-consumption interact, reduced production reducing consumption, reduced consumption reducing production. This is known as a vicious cycle.<sup>651</sup>

This 'disequilibrium between spending and saving, and production and consumption' was at the centre of the crisis. Given what this study has covered so far, this was hardly a surprising conclusion for Hobson to come to. He recounted, yet again, the dedication to the same underconsumption he had developed nearly three decades before. His answers to how socialism should respond were vague though novel. First, he rejected what he called 'trade union socialism'. According to Hobson, trade union socialism, which aimed to secure portions of capitalism's surplus value to its members, did little to repair the disequilibrium between consumption and production. This would not only detract from other workers in different industries who had failed to make such gains; it would also involve the better paid members of the working class in imperialism. The conflict between capital and workers in wealthy nations could be 'bought off by concessions to labour at the expense of a big sweating policy in Asia and Africa.' Such a situation would 'maintain the disequilibrium' between consumption and production.<sup>652</sup> Hobson thought that 'wholesale' management or nationalisation would no longer suffice, it would not solve the savings glut. Hobson looked to international institution to alleviate the savings problems. He

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<sup>651</sup> J. A. Hobson, *From capitalism to socialism* (London: Hogarth Press, 1932), 7.

<sup>652</sup> *Ibid.*, 25-26.

wanted to vest power in an 'international bank' that would issue and direct credit where it was 'greatest needed.' He aspired to transform the Bank of International Settlements into a 'Central Banker's Bank'. In order for this to work Gold needed to be universally dropped. There needed to be a 'managed world monetary system.' He envisaged a 'consumer socialism' where production and consumption were finely balanced creating an equilibrium. Hobson concluded that it mattered little what kind of socialism was used, as long as this disequilibrium was tended to.<sup>653</sup> Hobson's vagueness aside, his solutions were still distinctly liberal. Hobson's rejection of 'trade union' gradualism is of note too. Hobson's long-laboured argument, the basis of so much policy and thought inside British socialism, was about to come under scrutiny.

Evan Durbin was part of a new generation of Labour Party economists seeking to challenge the movement's assumptions. Durbin was a classically trained economist who drew ethical influence from Tawney but economic inspiration from the likes of Marshall, Keynes, and Hayek. Durbin wanted to introduce economic rigour to British socialism. He required professionalism and the disciplinary norms expected amongst specialised economists. British socialism had to be disciplined. It relied on heterodox economic thought couched in idealistic pomposity.<sup>654</sup> Durbin, who would become a member of Parliament in the years to come, attacked underconsumptionism head on. 'It is preached with consuming passion by labour movements around the world' he explained. This needed correction. Underconsumptionism illuminated no truths 'about the process of monetary circulation', and it was dangerous to view it as a 'golden cure' for mass unemployment and poverty.<sup>655</sup>

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<sup>653</sup> Ibid., 49-52.

<sup>654</sup> Noel Thompson, *Political Economy and the Labour Party*, 2nd ed. (Routledge, 2006), 94-98.

<sup>655</sup> E. F. M. Durbin, *Purchasing Power and Trade Depression: a critique of under-consumption theories* (London: Alden Press, 1933), 190.

Square in his sights was of course Hobson, the old hat of the ill-disciplined theory. Written in mid to late 1932 but published in 1933 Durbin's first major intervention was *Purchasing Power and Trade Depression: a critique of under-consumption theories*. He began with questioning a base assumption of underconsumptionism.<sup>656</sup> Was the cost of production equal to the consumer's income? Since underconsumptionism relied on this being the equilibrium that was not being met Durbin needed to demonstrate that this was false. This base assumption Durbin argued in no way represented how commodities were produced, particularly since finished products were made up of many production lines and points of sale. His simple example was that of a baker selling bread. The various things involved in such a process, like growing the wheat, selling the wheat etc meant that Hobson's theory quickly fell short. 'The consumer's income becomes a smaller and smaller fraction of total costs as the complexity of the industrial structure grows greater.'<sup>657</sup> Durbin expanded this argument further, considering the overall growth of both capital and living standards since the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. How could savings inhibit development, if much of the world had experienced overall patterns of growth in the last century?

If we reflect upon the economic history of the last hundred years it is apparent that saving cannot always be disastrous. There has been during this period a great rise in the general standard of living and this increase has been accompanied by, and is clearly related to, the equally enormous growth in capital. Over the long period saving therefore appears to promote rather than to check consumption.<sup>658</sup>

Durbin wanted to encourage 'efficient capital savings,' without wage reductions. His work did not devote much attention to working class matters; his focus was on

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<sup>656</sup> Also part of Durbin's frustrations with Hobson was in reluctance to take Keynes seriously, though he himself was not a Keynesian. See Geoffrey Foote, *The Labour Party's Political Thought: a history* (London: Macmillan, 1997), 169-161.

<sup>657</sup> Durbin, *Purchasing Power and Trade Depression*, 49-50.

<sup>658</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

macroeconomy. He implied socialist sympathies rather than overtly explicated them. He rejected both deflation and inflationary policies. Rather Durbin wanted a 'third' policy option 'aimed at the banking system.' The option he outlined was exceedingly vague but aspired to maintain consumer incomes while forcing prices and costs down. Since both would fall, it would not create a disequilibrium.

Consumers will take the increasing real standard of living made possible by the accumulation of more efficient capital wholly in the form of falling prices and not at all by the increase of money incomes.<sup>659</sup>

Durbin's answer to underconsumption was to encourage 'efficient capital.' Industry would use these savings for productive purposes. This was both an intellectual counter to Hobson and co, but also a plan to foster employment. In years to come Durbin would finesse his thoughts further.<sup>660</sup> Even at this early point however, he began to make inroads. In late 1933 the journal *Economica* published a debate between Hobson and Durbin. Both reiterated their previous arguments demonstrating the extent this battle had made inroads both inside and outside the movement.<sup>661</sup> Durbin was not the only one wanting Labour to reformulate its socialism.

G. D. H. Cole altered his socialism in the midst of Labour's turmoil. The experience had shaken him. Labour needed a socialism that did not scare even elements of the working class into voting against it.

For, in an advanced country like Great Britain, we have at least reached under capitalism a point at which most people feel they have something to lose...Despite the chronically unemployment... the majority of people have something to lose. This condition markedly affects their power and will to receive socialist ideas.

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<sup>659</sup> Ibid., 187-188.

<sup>660</sup> Jackson, *Equality and the British Left*, 125.

<sup>661</sup> See J. A. Hobson, "Underconsumption. An Exposition and a Reply," *Economica*, no. 42 (1933): 402-427.

Since a great many workers had employment and a small but noteworthy amount of savings, even amid capitalist crisis, they would oppose socialism in fear of losing their 'scanty and hardly won half-security.'<sup>662</sup> Cole concluded that socialist propaganda focusing on the certain collapse of capitalism was an ill-fated tactic. Such notions reinforced fears of socialism. A gradualist socialism was required. A promise of 'smooth and painless' transition would win over workers broadly sympathetic to socialism. 'They are the natural disciples of the inevitability of gradualism.'<sup>663</sup> If the 1931 election proved anything to Cole, it was working class loyalty to trade unionism was fickle. The movement could not habitually rely on the worker class's 'instinctive loyalty' to 'progress towards political socialism'.<sup>664</sup> The movement had to embrace a palatable socialism.

Cole figured capitalism's great weakness was that during a downturn, productivity and employment relied on individual owners of capital willing to invest. There needed to be a more efficient system where investments could be directed in the interests of the community. Cole thought 'national planning' would alleviate this fundamental weakness in capitalism, but also be an acceptable kind of socialism. He wanted a 'national agency' to control and direct investment. These bodies of 'public credit' could be used to invest savings for workers. This was an alternative to 'exposing' people to the stock markets. State directed investment solved the 'waste' of capital. A National Investment body would be setup alongside a National Banking system to direct investment and guarantee employment. Before 'equalisation of wealth' could occur there needed to be control over 'agencies where income is made'

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<sup>662</sup> G. D. H. Cole, *Some Essentials of Socialist Propoganda: A tract for the times* (London: Fabian Society, 1932), 3-4.

<sup>663</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>664</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

(in this case companies, private banks etc).<sup>665</sup> This planned socialism was the only way in which Labour was going to win votes. Planning would convince people that socialism was not destructive.

The most famous form of planning was Henri De Man's Plan De Man. For a number of years, he had rejected mainstream Social Democratic ideology and policy, advocating for entirely different forms of socialism. The language of class warfare, and the built-in materialistic assumptions of Marxism were purely academic, failing to take into consideration real-world experiences of workers. De Man's most influential tract brought together many of his ideas.<sup>666</sup> Class warfare had given way to class collaboration, as had socialised economies given way to mixed economies. De Man returned to Belgium from Germany after the NSDAP takeover. Emile Vandervelder ask De Man to setup a special research bureau to formulate the party's response to the crisis. A sympathetic industrialist funded the bureau. It consisted of multiple subcommittees and some salaried employees. Pels recons it was the first such 'independent' research body funded by a western socialist party.<sup>667</sup> In late 1933, De Man unveiled his plan to a rapturous response from the party.<sup>668</sup>

It became the official policy of the Belgium Labour Party. It also attracted attention from French socialists in particular. Likewise, Cole and the Fabians took keen interest.<sup>669</sup> A mixed economy was its basis. It embraced state powers over certain

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<sup>665</sup> Ibid., 14-20.

<sup>666</sup> Milani, *De Man and Social Democracy*, 133.

<sup>667</sup> Dick Pels, "Hendrik De Man and the ideology of Planism," *International Review of Social History* XXXII(1987): 209.

<sup>668</sup> For more details about how the Plan became popular, both within the Belgium Labour Party and beyond see Milani, *De Man and Social Democracy*, 125-183.

<sup>669</sup> See Henri De Man, *Planned Socialism: The Plan du Travail of the Belgian Labour Party*, trans. G. D. H. Cole (London: Victor Gollancz, 1935). Forward by Cole.

sections of the economy, while also taking advantage of the monopolistic tendencies of capital. Its first objective was to

institute a system of mixed economy... side by side with the private and national sectors which embrace the organisation of credit and the principal industries which are in fact already under monopolistic control.

Like Cole, credit was something that had to be directly controlled to avoid lulls in business confidence. The plan aimed at bolstering the domestic market to 'reabsorb' unemployment. In an analogous fashion to Cole, De Man wanted to create a 'State Credit Institution.' This body would assure 'credit banks would be in harmony with the Plan.' It would have a kind of 'monopoly of credit' to direct banks into making lending decisions that were in line with the Plan. There would also be a 'Financial Commission' that would take 'charge of the general direction of credit, of the monetary system, and on control over the movement of the balance of payments.' All of this was under the grand plan to 'nationalise credit'. De Man called for the 'nationalisation of basic industries.' Companies that produced 'raw materials or motive power' would be taken into government ownership. Interestingly, nationalisation would only occur with companies that already existed as monopolies. De Man, like so many socialists, saw huge potential in how monopolies encouraged economies of scale. Nationalising monopolies was the next logical step from capital monopolising to state planning.<sup>670</sup> Again, there is little doubt that Hilferding's work, now over two decades old, still held sway, even in non-Marxists quarters of Social Democracy.

De Man made it clear nationalisation would not affect vast portions of the economy. Small and medium enterprises, peasants, and shop owners were to be left alone. 'The means of production would be left in the same hands,' in these cases. The Plan wanted

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<sup>670</sup> *Plan du Travail* (Bruxelles 1933).

to harness competitive market forces without the stifling of competition from ‘the trammels of monopolistic capitalism.’ While De Man had ventured far from Marxism, he had retained some of its diagnoses. Marxists reasoned that part of capital’s crisis prone tendencies was that monopolies thwarted competition. Since capital’s compulsion was to monopolise, as capital further concentrated, productive competition became marginal. Monopolised industries distorted market forces. If an economic policy could remove monopolies from capitalist relations via nationalisation, yet harness their potential to produce vast amounts of goods efficiently, proper competition could be restored.<sup>671</sup> The objective was to coordinate and expand public, and the now ‘free’ private sectors. State controls would reduce ‘speculation’ in credit markets while easing access to credit for business and consumers. The state would take control of monopoly capital, directing it to where it was most productive in the economy, while setting the market free from the distortions in competition monopolies create. Interestingly it wanted to work towards a ‘A Five Year Plan.’ Both public and private sectors were to work towards this final plan. De Man, had seemingly merged the most productive segments of capitalism and socialism into a unified vision. It clearly embraced class collaboration. But most interestingly, it incorporated bourgeois thrift without monopolistic threat, while integrating socialism’s appeal to rationally plan, harnessing scientific rigour manipulating economic forces encouraging employment. ‘Plannism’ promised a new era of capitalism and statecraft. In De Man’s own words, he considered it ‘anti-crisis socialism’.

More precisely, it is a form of socialism... designed to provide a way of escape from the economic crisis. Or again, if an alternate formula is preferred, it is a form of socialism which

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<sup>671</sup> Ibid.

converts the perennial and theoretical struggle against capitalism into an actual practically struggle against capitalist crisis, or rather against the crisis of capitalism itself.<sup>672</sup>

Woytinsky continued to develop his plan for job creation promoting credit expansion without inflation. He reminded people that large scale job creation without 'credit creation was unthinkable.' There was simply no other way to generate employment in such a climate. Woytinsky estimated it would cost 2 billion marks to employ one million people in 'public works'. This would have a flow on effects solving several of the government's woes; all without inflation. Firstly, it would relieve the government's unemployment pension, which was effectively bankrupt and the cause of much angst. Various taxes levied at the newly employed would reimburse the unemployment insurance. The consumer industry would 'receive new orders' with the sudden increase of purchasing power. Other taxes and levies on consumables like tobacco, sales taxes, consumption tax etc would give the government much needed revenue. The state would get a portion of its money back through various direct and indirect taxations. There were additional benefits Woytinsky outlined. Workers would pay off their debts lessening pressure on banks. Municipalities would see an uptake in their income from transport companies. Woytinsky concluded that with the growth of consumer industries, there would be a simultaneous expansion of credit. This would create a kind of monetary equilibrium between money flowing through the economy, and the available goods in circulation quashing inflation. Woytinsky was responding to various critics that worried about inflation. He explained this was an 'unfounded panic'. His plan was about 'an intervention by the state in the game of

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<sup>672</sup> Henri De Man, *Socialisme et Planisme* (Bureau d'action pour le Plan, 1933).

blind economic forces, an attempt by the state to act organisationally in the area where there was previously chaos.<sup>673</sup>

Some saw planning as the next evolution in socialist doctrine. They historicised the various stages in socialist economic policy, beginning with the revolutionary creeds of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, moving to the nationalisation drives of the 1920s. Planning was the next stage as a more sophisticated and scientific mode of thought. Otto Leichter, the socialist writer and later academic, thought exactly this. He argued that both capitalism and socialism tended towards planning. The growth of monopolies and the crisis necessitated further state intervention. Now that there was such a serious crisis, and organised labour was embedded in European society, they could formulate, in detail, what a socialist economy would look like. Economic planning was the answer. Before the epoch they were living through, socialist parties had to pursue more immediate objectives, like democratisation, before seriously considering the character of socialism.<sup>674</sup> Alfred Braunthal echoed these thoughts.

Compared to the "socialization period" immediately after the war, we have come a good deal further in the realization that socialism is not only a question of property relations, but of the organization of the economy as a whole...The socialization of individual branches of the company is not the main focus of the socialist struggle today, as it was then, but the idea of overall planning of the economy.<sup>675</sup>

De Man historicised planning as the 'third phase' in the history of socialism. The first was the insurrectionist phase, the second was reformist, and the third phase came

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<sup>673</sup> Wladimir Woytinsky, "Arbeitsbeschaffung und keine Inflationsgefahr!," *Die Arbeit*, no. 3 (1932): 142-154.

<sup>674</sup> See Otto Leichter, *Die Sprengung des Kapitalismus: Die Wirtschaftspolitik der Sozialisierung* (Wien: Volksbuchhandlung, 1932).

<sup>675</sup> Braunthal, "Die Sprengung des Kapitalismus," 372. – Braunthal's article was a critical response to Leichter's book. His main gripe was Leichter's interpretation of capitalist development. He mainly agreed with him on his conclusions about socialism.

about because of the failures from the previous two. It what was a typical De Man analysis, he explained that planning was the logical conclusions of decades of setbacks for Social Democracy.

As a of result of a whole series of negative experiences... there has emerged the belief in planning... Men are seeking for a strategy which will make is possible to escape the long series of setbacks, and even utter political catastrophise, which have been the outcome of the passivity of the various Social Democratic movements in the face of the crisis.<sup>676</sup>

By 1933, large sections of the Social Democratic movement embraced some kind of planning. Planning did not just require innovation in socialist economics, it required a kind of reconceptualisation of how socialism related to the capitalist mode of production. Planning rejected many assumptions socialists had about the operations of capitalism. Socialists, particularly centrist Marxists, absorbed conclusions made by classical economics. They anticipated that markets self-corrected, and supply created its own demand. Planning rejected these expectations. It empowered the state to intervene creating demand by injecting large sums of money to prop up employment. Whether this was through state works, or easing credit restrictions, the objective was the same. Judicious planning would assure credit and consumption sustaining employment.

The success in planning was a reaction to the crisis. But there was another factor; momentous changes in the Soviet Union. The imposition of Stalinism, with its 5-year Plans, and massive state works ostensibly demonstrated to the socialist world that a country could operate outside capitalism and be safe from the miseries it was now creating. Of course, the true reality of Stalin's Russia was far more complicated and grim. Nonetheless, Stalin's 'revolution from above' intensely occupied Social

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<sup>676</sup> Man, *Socialisme et Planisme*, 8-9.

Democrats. As Kautsky admitted in 1931, 'socialist parties of all ... have always been aware of the importance of events in Russia in connection with the struggle for the emancipation of the proletariat all over the world.'<sup>677</sup>

## The Soviet Union and the Five Year Plan

In December 1930, Stalin wrote to the famous Bolshevik playwright Maxim Gorky.

There, in Europe, let them meow, in full voice . . . about the USSR's "collapse." They will not alter one iota either our plans or our cause. The USSR will be a first-class country with the largest, technologically best-equipped industrial and agricultural production. Socialism is invincible. No longer will we have "*miserable*" Russia. An end to that! We'll have a powerful and prosperous *modern* Russia.<sup>678</sup>

Stalin's revolution from above sort to transform NEP Russia into socialist Russia. Speedy industrialisation would modernise the Soviet Union's backwater economy, growing its cities, and creating the basis for a highly technocratic and technological economy.<sup>679</sup> Since the capitalist world surrounded the Soviet Union, war was thought to be inevitable. Industrialisation likewise sort to transform the Soviet Union into a highly militarised state.<sup>680</sup> In the words of Stalin 'internal capital accumulation' would be the aim, seeking to bleed the peasantry dry through mass collectivisation, feeding growing cities where industry was being constructed.<sup>681</sup> Vast planning bureaus led 'breakneck' industrialisation putting Stalin's 'socialism in country' into action. One Menshevik looked on from Germany, simply describing the depth of change as

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<sup>677</sup> Karl Kautsky, *Boleshevism at a deadlock*, trans. B. Pritchard (London: George & Allen, 1931), 23.

<sup>678</sup> Quoted in Stephen Kotkin, *Stalin: Waiting for Hitler, 1929-1941* (New York: Penguin Press, 2017), 11.

<sup>679</sup> Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 135-136.

<sup>680</sup> Robert C. Tucker, *Stalin in Power: The revolution from above 1928-1941* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1990), 45.

<sup>681</sup> Edele, *The Soviet Union: a short history*, 101.

'breathtaking'.<sup>682</sup> Helene Bauer, summed up the situation well. Socialism in one country was an admission, that for the time being, the capitalist and Soviet systems would co-exist side by side. It intended to make the Soviet Union 'independent' of the capitalist world.<sup>683</sup>

The Soviet Union's latest revolution had quite an impact on Social Democratic thinking. Vast scale planning keenly interested Social Democrats. The Five Year Plans also refocused debates on how Social Democrats viewed the Russian Revolution at-large. The usual suspects saw it as another authoritarian overreach generating further internal contradictions dooming the regime. Others wondered if a modernised Soviet Union would finally lead to democratic reform. They were not blind to the destructive toll collectivisation had on the country's peasantry. By 1930 it was well known the issues the regime was facing with collectivisation.<sup>684</sup> There was widespread ignorance of the famine in the Ukraine that cost over 5 million lives, not to mention the terror the regime inflicted on large elements of the population, and on the Communist Party itself.

Karl Kautsky had not changed his tune on Russia. The regime's new industrialisation drive was yet another example of failed policy and an exemplar of an ideology bereft of proper Marxist rigour. In *Bolshevism at a Deadlock* (1931), Kautsky continued his crusade against the Russian Revolution. Kautsky's thinking, despite the immense changes and survivability of the regime since 1917, had not changed; it was a 'wild experiment'. He remained resolved to discredit the 'unmarxist and Bonapartist'

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<sup>682</sup> R. Abramowitsch, "Fünfjahresplan und Sozialdemokratie," *Die Gesellschaft*, no. 7 (1931): 24.

<sup>683</sup> Helene Bauer, "Sozialismus in einem Lande," *Die Kampf* 24, no. 11 (1931): 475. – While this is true to a certain extent, much of the industrialisation was based on technology imported from the West.

<sup>684</sup> See Olga Domanewskaja, "Agrarsozialismus Russland," *Die Gesellschaft*, no. 4 (1930): 325-347. – An early and detailed Social Democratic account of the failures of collectivisation.

regime. He clung fast to Marxist developmental theories. 'The attempt to evolve a socialist system of production superior to that of the capitalist system in the most backward economy was, from the outset, doomed to end in bankruptcy.'<sup>685</sup> Kautsky doubted that the regime's industrialisation drive would amount to anything if it was grounded on retrograde modes of production. Since capitalism had not matured, there was no basis to build a modern economy on. Since Russia was starting from such shallow foundations, he thought that in a perverted manner the 5 Year Plan made sense,

Actually, the Bolsheviks have few other means of rapidly increasing output at their disposal than those employed by every incapable and impoverished manufacturer— incessantly driving the workers to exert themselves to the full, while simultaneously reducing their wages.<sup>686</sup>

Kautsky pointed to the reduced quality of industrial goods emanating from the rushed campaign. Interestingly, he thought the reduction in unemployment benefits, and the lack of independent union activity only worsened the situation. He rightly pointed to the anti-Kulak campaigns being used as yet another tool of violent coercion. He also thought the push to collectivise and centralised agriculture into large-scale industries would never work. It would destroy the 'soundest and most productive section of the peasant population.'<sup>687</sup> Upon this point he was probably the most telling. Kautsky duly highlighted that exploitation of the peasantry as the basis for the entire system. Stalin's campaign would finally end the regime itself.

The consequences for the whole Russian people will be terrible... Economic collapse now becomes inevitable... The decay of agriculture means actual hunger, and finally starvation. And

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<sup>685</sup> Kautsky, *Boleshevism at a deadlock*, 45-46. He expanded these points in *Communism and Socialism*, trans. Joseph Shaplen (New York: American League of Democratic Socialism, 1932).

<sup>686</sup> *Boleshevism at a deadlock*.

<sup>687</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

in the process, the opposition of the large majority of the population — the peasantry — to the Communist Party grows.<sup>688</sup>

Kautsky assumed that there were still substantial democratic elements amongst Russian socialists. He did not think the destruction of the regime would necessarily herald a return to capitalism or reaction, though he was understandable vague about this. Nonetheless he was clear that he thought rapid industrialisation would lead to the collapse of the regime.

Kautsky was not the only one who thought collectivisation presaged danger. Theodor Dan thought the clash between the regime and the peasantry was an inevitable outcome determined by contradicting social forces that had initially supported the Bolshevik revolution. Since the Bolshevik revolution was a hastened affair, the new regime relied on a coalition between the industrial working class and the peasantry as a social basis of support. The NEP disrupted this alliance. Proliferation of market forces in the countryside created capitalists threatening the legitimacy of the regime. Since the Bolsheviks dedicated themselves to the abolition of market forces, and the NEP was only a temporary retreat, the government was threatened by the class politics forged by the New Economic Policy. The Nepmen in the countryside threatened the fragile pact between workers and peasants.

The development of the economic and social forces promoted by the NEP, which threatened to break the political envelope of the communist dictatorship, this has forced the dictatorship for its own sake to the repeal the NEP... It will have to continue along this path, as long as self-preservation remains its primary principle.<sup>689</sup>

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<sup>688</sup> Ibid., 57-58.

<sup>689</sup> Theodor Dan, "Zur Soziologie der russischen Revolution," *Die Kampf* 23, no. 8 (1930): 331-333.

Dan thought the entire point of collectivisation was to assure all peasant's toils went to the state. It meant the regime could maximally exploit them without having to provide them proper wages. The brutal expropriation of Russia's peasantry was akin to the 'extreme violence' seen during the civil war. This too threatened the social basis of the regime. Since the regime forced peasants off their lands and seized their livestock, 'the communist dictatorship tore apart the firmest threads that bound them to the revolution.' He astutely cited the various peasant rebellions that had emerged retaliating against collectivisation. This was historically determined since Dan thought collectivisation divorced a key social force from the regime. Dan had similar conclusions to Kautsky about the results of such a policy. When he turned his attention to the industrialisation drive, he was just as apocalyptic. Given the extreme autarky of the policy, he assumed that the Soviet Union would find it impossible to secure (much needed) loans from abroad. Furthermore, given the deteriorating international situation, it was likely that the capitalist world would renew hostilities towards it. Capital would once again organise against the regime. Capital would use the regime's crimes against the peasantry to undermine it; possibly installing a 'fascist dictatorship.' Like Kautsky, he clung to delusions of a proletariat backlash, replacing the regime with a Social Democratic one.<sup>690</sup>

Not all thought the Five Year Plan was an unmitigated disaster. Like in years past, the usual suspects sympathised ~~with the regime.~~ Otto Bauer, having always taken a moderated and relativistic view was more upbeat about Stalin's mass venture. Bauer thought rapid industrialisation was a Soviet manifestation of the rationalisation movement.

At the time when the economic boom in the capitalist world was approaching its end, the Soviet Union set about adopting the results of the period of rationalisation, transferring them to the

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<sup>690</sup> Ibid. Also see Theodor Dan, "Probleme der Liquidationperiode," *Die Kampf* 23, no. 12 (1930): 504-519.

Soviet Union, using them to build a large new industry and to reorganize agriculture, thereby laying the foundations of a socialist society.<sup>691</sup>

'Scientific management' was another technique adopted from capitalism. It seemed the Soviet Union had taken on the most productive elements of modern capitalism building them into their massive plan. Bauer thought the Five Year Plan was achieving its goal of constructing a modern and industrialised Russia. It was also solving the high unemployment that had occurred in the last years of the 1920s. Finally, the cities, with new industries propping up, had the means to absorb large labour reserves. It also took pressure of what he thought were 'overpopulated towns' by drawing their unemployed populations to the ever-growing cities.<sup>692</sup> The regime's ability to both grow its population and provide them jobs impressed him. Particularly at a time of dire unemployment in the capitalist world.

Bauer sympathised with collectivisation. Collectivisation was also part of the rationalisation process. It was well in line with the regime's history at temping to drag Russian agricultural techniques into the modern world. He agreed with the regime that large agricultural farms would benefit from vertical integration, the same as monopoly capital. Yet another example of the regime adopting capitalist methods. Bauer also pointed out that collectivisation put positive pressure on industrialisation, since new collective farms were in desperate need of mechanisation. The new industries needed to produce equipment for the collective farms that would in turn produce for the growing cities, where industries were themselves expanding. Interestingly he interpreted this industrialisation of agriculture as the regime's attempt at turning the peasantry into an industrial proletariat. The divide between peasants and workers, the two social groups making up the uneasy alliance

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<sup>691</sup> Bauer, *Kapitalismus und Sozialismus nach dem Weltkrieg*, 208.

<sup>692</sup> Ibid.

supporting the regime, would be closed. The abolition of class conflict was possible. 'There will no longer be any opposing classes in the Soviet Union, only workers of the nationalised industries.'<sup>693</sup>

Bauer was fully aware of the human cost of collectivisation. He admitted to the 'class warfare' between the peasants and the regime. He openly cited the large culling of peasant livestock in their opposition to state appropriation. Bauer relativised the barbarity in full knowledge of the awkward ethical dimensions of the matter. The fact that the regime was starting from such a low base, and its large populations wedded to antiquated modes of production made things worse.

This whole unprecedented upheaval is taking place under a terrorist dictatorship and can only take place under it. Only a terrorist dictatorship can force a people of more than 150 million people to face such severe privations in the present for the sake of a greater future. Only the terrorist dictatorship can enforce the forced relocation of the workforce to the new industrial areas. Only a terrorist dictatorship can enforce the collectivization of the peasant economy and violently destroy the kulaks. The spirit of the terrorist dictatorship permeates the whole life of the Soviet Union, it destroys all intellectual freedom, it locks the Soviet Union against the intellectual currents of the rest of the world... Even more dangerous, however, are the moral effects of this despotism.<sup>694</sup>

The economic viability of highly rationalised technology, combined with the monstrous inefficiency of the socialist restructuring of society under the historical and structural conditions of the Soviet Union. Most severe privations in the present are a prize for a future of prosperity.<sup>695</sup>

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<sup>693</sup> Ibid., 209.

<sup>694</sup> Ibid.

<sup>695</sup> Bauer, *Kapitalismus und Sozialismus nach dem Weltkrieg*. It is interesting to note that Bauer thought Stalin had been 'trapped' into undertaken breakneck industrialisation by those around him. This obviously could not be further from the truth but there was no way for Bauer to know that at the time.

Despite the regime's despotism Bauer believed in the 'prize of future prosperity.' Notwithstanding the various danger that lay ahead the regime, the further into the Five Year Plan they went, the closer they would be to socialism.<sup>696</sup>

Bauer was cognisant of the bias against consumer goods in the new system. As industry expanded, he hypothesised that the country could begin trading heavy industrial products for consumer goods. Once this occurred general living standards would improve. As living standards improved, there would be little need for state violence. 'The terrorist dictatorship will become superfluous and dismantled, and the Soviet regime will be able to be democratised.' Bauer clung to the notion democratic socialism lay at the centre of the Russian Revolution. He naively thought that once industrialisation was complete, the regime would abandon violence and embrace democracy. 'Such a development would show the world the possibilities of a social order of which a highly developed apparatus of production is no longer capitalist.'<sup>697</sup>

Bauer and others sympathetic to the Soviet Union were met with criticism. Both in their views on the democratic potential of the regime and the Five Year Plan's actual results. Kautsky brusquely challenged them.

Strangely enough there are still... Social Democrats who have held themselves aloof from communism, but whom the boldness of these schemes [referring to the Five Year Plan] has nevertheless impressed... Daring is a virtue in times of war, but it does not get one very far in the process of production.<sup>698</sup>

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<sup>696</sup> One of the dangers was a reactionary overthrow of the regime. Like Kautsky, he thought that it was highly likely that if this did eventuate, Fascism would come to Russia.

<sup>697</sup> Bauer, *Kapitalismus und Sozialismus nach dem Weltkrieg*, 225-231.

<sup>698</sup> Kautsky, *Boleshevism at a deadlock*, 29.

The audacious size and pace of the Soviet Union's drive impressed people like Bauer, others were far less sanguine. Soviet planning agencies still published economic results in *Pravda* and other publications. Despite the surely manicured nature of these reports, keen onlookers still managed to ascertain the shortfalls and human costs of the Soviet campaign. As exiled Menshevik leader Raphael Abramowitsch exclaimed,

It would be foolish to want to misjudge the strong impression made by the enormous dimensions and breath-taking speed of the Bolshevik "reconstruction work", which is so impressive against the economic stagnation in the countries of capitalism ... it would be utterly fatal if one wanted to close one's eyes to the fact that this juxtaposition, cleverly exploited by the powerful and well-organized Bolshevik propaganda, threatens to arouse pro-Bolshevik sympathies and illusions in Europe.<sup>699</sup>

Keen Soviet observer and able economist Judith Grünfeld inspected the Soviet drive closely. She too cautioned observers against believing Soviet propaganda. The Soviet government was 'inclined to praise its economic performance' but real-world industrial output 'lagged' seriously behind its stated goals. There were several reasons explaining this; one was the 'chaotic' manner of which planners encouraged various state-owned companies and factories to produce as much output as possible. Planners wanted them to exceed the goals of the Five Year Plan. This 'unleashed a race' for production. It forced managers to compete for 'scarce fuel, raw materials, and machines.' This created an incredible amount of disorder in a system that was supposed to be orderly in its planned outcomes. The economy failed to meet planned output figures. Grünfeld cited lagging oil production. In 1930 it produced 56.7 million barrels, with the aim to increase production to 83.6 million in 1931. The reality was that in 1931 they only produced about 52 million. The fall in oil production had flow on effects to other industries who were also following orders of the 'counter-plan' to

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<sup>699</sup> Abramowitsch, "Fünfjahresplan und Sozialdemokratie," 24.

over-produce.<sup>700</sup> Grünfeld neatly summarised one of the core failures of the Soviet planned economy.

The increased consumption of raw materials on the part of these companies created gaps in the supply for other companies, and in one way or another most of the companies and the whole economy got off the rails of the economic plan.<sup>701</sup>

Grünfeld also pointed to monetary issues in the Soviet economy. Due to meagre supply and transportations issues, largely resulting from 'poor technical management', factories were woefully inefficient. She rightly claimed that this was a 'widespread' phenomenon. The Plan had envisaged costs to be down 10 percent nationally, due to expected technical developments and the flow on in efficiency. However, overall costs 'officially rose by 2 percent.' This greatly affected the amount of notes issued in the country. From 1928 until 1932, the government planned on issuing 1250 million rubles. But come 1931 it had already issued 3.5 billion. At the beginning of the plan there was 1972 million rubles in circulation, at the end of 1931 it reached 5632 million. The Soviet Union was suffering from high inflation. 'Impressive industrial development is taking place on the basis of inflation with all the bitter consequences for workers as Germany had experienced.'<sup>702</sup> The peculiar manner in which the Soviet Union setup consumer stores made matters worse. There were three tiers of shops; stores for foreigners, 'commercial stores' for workers and state stores. The special stores for foreign visitors valued goods at 'real world market' prices and were in fact cheaper than the goods bought at stores for Soviet citizens. Grünfeld concluded that real wages were falling as prices 'galloped.' In Addition, consumer goods that were sold were of low quality and quantity. In her final analysis, Grünfeld

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<sup>700</sup> Judith Grünfeld, "Wirtschaftspläne und Planwirtschaft in Russland," *Rote Revue : sozialistische Monatsschrift* 11, no. 8 (1932).

<sup>701</sup> *Ibid.*, 240.

<sup>702</sup> *Ibid.*, 241-242.

thought that while some industries had benefited from fast industrialisation, the overall situation was a 'disastrous failure of the dictatorial planned economy for the working class and the consuming masses.'<sup>703</sup>

Both sides of the argument were correct, to a point. The Soviet Union's drive was barbaric, inefficient, and deeply contradictory. As the plan dictated industrial expansion, the regime encouraged managers to overproduce. Collectivisation was hugely costly. It sacrificed countless lives and material for meagre gains. At the same time the Soviet Union did succeed in constructing a significant heavy industry with an equally large military industrial complex. Victory on the Eastern Front proved both its military and industrial capacities. Nonetheless, nothing even close to a democracy Bauer envisaged evolved. The regime became more barbarous. However, the immensity of Stalin's revolution and the vastness of the planning required was of very keen interests to Social Democrats. G. D. H. Cole was correct in thinking the Soviet Union was the only country with a 'working model' that was not capitalist.<sup>704</sup> Regardless of how Social Democrats saw the Soviet Union, the fact it was a functioning state with a growing economy, all based on planning, without capitalist relations was of consequence.

## Conclusion

At a meeting of the leadership of the LSI in late September 1932, Bauer came to sobering conclusions for the movement.

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<sup>703</sup> Ibid., 242-243.

<sup>704</sup> G. D. H. Cole, *The intelligent man's guide through world chaos* (London: Victory Gollancz, 1933), 526.

We are now reaching the end of a period in the history of the labour movement, and we are at the beginning on a new one... We are entering a period of great distress... Hopes of reform are being destroyed by the pressure of facts; Socialist parties would never be the same as they were from 1890-1920. This was not something which would pass.<sup>705</sup>

Bauer's lamentation for Social Democracy's miseries was apt, particularly in regard to Central Europe. Five months later the Weimar Republic collapsed, and the Third Reich arose. The movement severely buckled in the face of the Depression. It fractured on both its left and right flanks, while losing ground to communists and being overwhelmed by fascism. It was continually out manoeuvred by the right, not just in Germany, but in Austria, France, and Britain too. The crisis did however force elements of Social Democracy, long frustrated with the movement's lethargy, into a moment of genuine creativity. The contours of these innovations are striking.

Centrist elements clung to orthodox modes of thought, despite being forced into new directions. They viewed Left Socialism as infantile, and its machinations as a continuation of their divisive politics from the early 1920s. Left socialism's insignificant electoral reach reflected a limited political clout offering little threat to the wider movement. While Left Socialism's political manoeuvrings radicalised, their ideas remained unchanged. Their call of all-encompassing nationalisation and mass mobilisation against capital were the same as a decade before. The Depression refocused their grievances with the mainstream of the Social Democracy, highlighting the movement's lack of success in realising socialism, particularly at moment of capitalist crisis. But few genuinely new ideas sprang from their revolutionary vigour. Their most significant conclusions remained their critique of the mainstream's tactics

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<sup>705</sup> *Meeting of the enlarged Bureau, Zurich, September 27-28*, Labour Party Archives: Labour and Socialist International, LSI Minutes 1921-1937, LSI Minutes 1932, 1932, People's History Museum, 248

against Nazism and the need for a United Front,<sup>706</sup> which proved to be prescient. Bourgeois parties would seek to use Nazism to keep the Left from power. Though this was astute political observation rather than an act of ideational creativity. Innovation came from the right of the movement. The right accepted, that for the time being, the capitalist mode of production would continue, despite its doldrum. Within this conclusion surfaced innovative thought. Through the right's acceptance of capitalism, or perhaps it would be better to say, within its acceptance of a limited capitalism, came various notions of planning. Thoughts on bringing rational planning to economic policy had existed since World War One, but never had it been done in such a level of detail and a genuine contemplative manner. The right attempted to redefine socialism. Market forces and state planning could go hand in hand. Blindly nationalising the means of production was a blunt affair without a wider eye to the rest of the economy

Liam Byrne, reflecting on the structural and ideological battles within the Australian Labor Party, notes the potential for sections of Social Democratic movements to engage in 'creative contestation.' He charts how ideological conflict between the left and right of the party provided it with a 'dynamism' sparking the development of new ideas.<sup>707</sup> Social Democracy in Central and Western Europe after 1929 went through its own process of creative contestation. The cataclysmic crisis of capitalism shook loose the ideological malaise that had set in the middle of the previous decade. Just as the movement saw a plethora of newly imagined futures being fought over, it was overwhelmed by the crisis. At a moment of contested creativity and innovation, it lost the wider systemic battle against fascism. The next chapter turns to its exile.

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<sup>706</sup> A United Front, despite its anti-fascist potential, was never a realistic aspiration. The chasm between the two socialisms at this point was unbridgeable.

<sup>707</sup> Liam Byrne, "Defining Labor: a study of the political culture of the Victorian Labor Party, 1901-1921" (PhD, University of Melbourne, 2016).

# Exile

The blood of the workers is flowing freely. Workers are dying in the fighting lines, in the shell-smashed buildings, in the hospitals, on the gallows, fascism is jubilant! Fascism is triumphant!

Otto Bauer, 1934<sup>708</sup>

The rise of the Third Reich heralded a new catastrophic phase in Europe's interwar saga. Nazi success spelt violent repression and bitter exile for Europe's most established Social Democratic organisation. German Social Democracy occupied a cultural, political, and sentimental hold over the entire movement. Its thinkers, like Kautsky, Bernstein, Bebel, and Luxembourgh towered over socialism, in all of its diversities. Weimar's downfall shocked the socialist world.<sup>709</sup> As the fledgling dictatorship clamped down on dissidence, remnants of the SPD went into exile. Exile produced a distinctive political and ideological reappraisal. Not just from German Social Democracy, but for much of the movement. There were compounding factors too. The fall of the Austrian Republic and the exile of Austrian Social Democracy was one aspect. The beginning of the Spanish civil-war and unrest in France contributed to a new stage of contestation. There was a sudden and inescapable re-embrace of revolutionary politics. Such revolutionary desperation forced Social Democracy to re-evaluate its relationship with communism. Now that Central European democracy lay in ruin, and new threats ascended in France and Spain, had the hour come for détente with communism?

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<sup>708</sup> Otto Bauer, *Austrian Democracy Under Fire* (London: Labour Publications Department, 1934), 7.

<sup>709</sup> For a transnational perspective of the German tragedy within Social Democracy see Horn, *European Socialists Respond to Fascism*, 119-122.

The victory of fascism on multiple fronts required a change in tactics. The contours of these shifts will be the focus of the chapter. The destruction of Weimar demanded a sudden embrace of revolutionarism by German Social Democrats. In the words of Alexander Schifrin, 'with an iron hand fascism has swept away all the prerequisites for a reformist labour movement'.<sup>710</sup> The formation of such a brutal dictatorship who snuffed out democracy at every turn meant revolution was the only answer. Traditional Marxist centrists like Kautsky and Hilferding openly embraced revolution and the organisation of illegal activity. When the Austrian Republic fell, and Austrian Social Democrats went into exile, they too embraced revolution. Nonetheless, familiar questions immediately resurfaced. What would be the course of revolutionary fervour?

Events in Spain and France magnified these debates while forging new inquiries. With democracy and organised labour under such strain, the most obvious tactical shift was a reassessment of relations with Communism and communist parties. The argument for a United Front became a point of contention. Central European socialists saw no choice but to form alliances with communists. Spanish and French socialists embraced Popular Front politics; a broad anti-fascist alliance with liberals and communists. Léon Blum's Popular Front had some success, but labourites in Britain refused to accept cooperation with communists. Of course, many centrist Marxists also refused any kind of relations with communism. The dispute had serious ramifications for the functioning of the LSI. While the International did not formally split on the issue, by 1937 it had become virtually non-functional.

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<sup>710</sup> Alexander Schifrin, "Revolutionäre Sozialdemokratie," *Sozialistische Revolution* 1, no. 3 (1933): 82.

Four themes divide the chapter. The opening theme outlines the two fascist victories in 1933/34. The first months of both the Third Reich, and Austro-Fascism saw organised labour subjugated. Fascism's first victims was its political enemies, namely socialism and communism. In the case of Germany, its particularly form of anti-Semitism also informed its repression of organised labour. Judeo-Bolshevism had to be crushed. The second theme reveals the contours of revolutionary politics. Germans and Austrians had little choice but to re-embrace illegal activity with the aim of revolutionary ferment. But the purposes of revolution were feverishly debated. Elements of Left Socialism embraced forms of Leninism. The third theme outlines the debates around the United Front and Popular Front. This too deeply divided the movement. The Spanish civil war produced a dysfunctional International. The final theme investigates Left Socialism's relationship with the politics of the Popular Front. While it embraced United Front and Popular Front tactics, events in France soured its outlook. It seemed that when communists formed alliances with Social Democrats and liberals, reformism was the order of the day. Once again, reformism thwarted revolutionary zeal.

### **Fascist Victories**

Immediately after Hitler became Chancellor there was violence. SA foot soldiers paraded in the streets. There were countless reports of attacks, particularly against Jews and communists. On February 3, Hitler made a speech to senior army officers assuaging their fears of Nazi intrusion in military affairs. He promised to restore conscription, fight the Treaty of Versailles, and destroy Marxism.<sup>711</sup> On February 15-

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<sup>711</sup> Evans, *The coming of the Third Reich*, 316.

17 Herman Göring, acting as Prussian Minister for the Interior, ordered the police to halt surveillance on the Nazis. Days later he established an 'auxiliary police force' made up of members of the SS, SA, and the DVP's Steel Helmets. Nazi street thuggery was now state sponsored. In the second half of February communists, Social Democrats and trade unions bore the brunt of Nazi repression. There was a 'rampage' against organised labour.<sup>712</sup> On February 28, chance favoured the new regime when a lone Dutch anarcho-syndicalist, Marinus van der Lubbe, set fire to the Reichstag. He was protesting unemployment. This elicited further crackdowns on the KPD. The regime threw 4000 KPD members, along with the party leadership, into the new and growing concentration camp system. They caught Ernst Thälman, the party leader and former Presidential candidate, on March 3. He was held at various concentration camps eventually being executed in 1944 at Buchenwald.<sup>713</sup>

Hitler called elections for March 5. He needed a majority in the Reichstag to overturn the republic. Hitler's main slogan was 'attack on Marxism'.<sup>714</sup> Stormtroopers intimidated the population. Armed SA members patrolled streets continually raiding SPD and KPD houses. Business threw in its lot with the new government. With the means of both capital and state, Nazi propaganda saturated Germany. On the election day itself, the regime had a monopoly on political propaganda, with no other party's literature and posters in sight.<sup>715</sup> The Nazis won a clear plurality with 44 percent of the vote but were still shy of a majority. The KPD secured 12 percent of the vote while the SPD won 18. Hitler was still unable to dump the constitution. He managed to strongarm and manipulate the Centre Party into supporting him by promising a

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<sup>712</sup> *The Third Reich in Power 1933-39* (New York: Penguin, 2005), 11.

<sup>713</sup> Nikolaus Wachsmann, *KL: A history of the nazi concentration camps* (New York: Macmillan, 2015), 51.

<sup>714</sup> Robert Gellately, *Backing Hitler: consent and coercion in Nazi Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 12.

<sup>715</sup> Evans, *The coming of the Third Reich*, 339-340.

Concordat with the Vatican. The Enabling Act was now allowed to pass. It gave broad sweeping powers to cabinet and the Chancellor, annulling the Reichstag's authority. There were 647 deputies, 444 voted in favour. All 81 of the KPD deputies were absent because they were languishing in prison or had gone into hiding. There were 120 SPD deputies, 94 voted against it, 26 were absent. They too languished in prison or were in hiding.<sup>716</sup> With the KPD suppressed, the SPD was the only party to vote against the formal destruction of German democracy. Otto Wels, leader of the SPD in the Reichstag gave one of the great anti-fascist speeches.

At this historic hour, we German Social Democrats pledge ourselves to the principles of humanity and justice, of freedom and socialism. No Enabling Law can give you the power to destroy ideas which are eternal and indestructible ... From this new persecution German Social Democracy can draw new strength. We send greetings to the persecuted and oppressed. We greet our friends in the Reich. Their steadfastness and loyalty deserve admiration. The courage with which they maintain their convictions and their unbroken confidence guarantee a brighter future...You can take our lives and our freedom, but you cannot take our honour. We are defenceless but not honourless.<sup>717</sup>

Like so much of Nazi rule, cumulative radicalisation accrued alongside its brutality. The destruction of the Left was one of the first aims of the regime. In a private speech in 1926, when the party was still a fringe organisation, Hitler said Germany would see no peace until 'the last Marxist was converted or exterminated.'<sup>718</sup> The Dachau concentration camp opened on March 22 in a disused munitions factory. Its first inmates were communists. Rounded up in February and March, thousands of

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<sup>716</sup> Ibid., 351-352.

<sup>717</sup> Quoted in Smaldone, *Confronting Hitler: German Social Democrats in Defense of the Weimar Republic, 1929-1933*, II, 248-249. Also see Landauer, *European Socialism: a history of ideas and movements from the industrial revolution to Hitler's seizure of power*, 1521-1522.

<sup>718</sup> Quoted in Wachsmann, *KL*, 45.

communists were brutally tortured. By the end of May the KPD was crushed.<sup>719</sup> In the first months of the Third Reich, not all camps were well orchestrated political prisons. Many were ramshackle affairs. Inmates were held and brutalised in disused buildings and apartments of SA members. Soon however converted workhouses and state prisons held thousands of fresh prisoners nabbed by the regime.<sup>720</sup>

In June/July the regime focused its terror on Social Democracy. With the destruction of communism complete, the Nazis now needed Germany's largest socialist movement extinguished. In a Berlin suburb in June, stormtroopers encountered resistance from Social Democrats who had killed three Brown Shirts. In response Brown Shirts arrested over 500 Social Democrats. Ninety-four died from extreme torture.<sup>721</sup> Prisoners most in danger were Jewish socialists. Fritz Solmitz was a Jewish Social Democrat, who was a local politician and journalist. Solmitz was held at the Fuhlsbüttel concentration camp. It was a prison hastily transformed to hold the regime's enemies. Ten guards singled out Solmitz brutally whipping him until his blood covered them. After regaining consciousness, they murdered him. Hours later, ten communists imprisoned with Solmitz were also murdered.<sup>722</sup>

Despite the collective oppression Social Democrats and Communists suffered through, tensions still existed between them in the camps. There were reports of fights between SPD and KPD inmates, both blaming each other for the Nazi victory.<sup>723</sup> By mid-1933, the regime had dealt with most organised opponents. With both the

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<sup>719</sup> Weitz, *Creating German Communism, 1890-1990: From popular protests to socialist state*, 293. KPD cells lingered on within the Third Reich, by 1939 most had been shut down.

<sup>720</sup> Wachsmann, *KL*, Chapter 1.

<sup>721</sup> Evans, *The Third Reich in Power*, 21.

<sup>722</sup> Wachsmann, *KL*, 56-57.

<sup>723</sup> *Ibid.*, 195-196.

political and the industrial wings of labour repressed, German socialism lay defeated. As an Austrian Social Democrat rightly observed,

The complete annihilation of German democracy was not carried out step by step... but in one stroke... Hitler accomplished what took Mussolini no less than four years... German fascism has ensnared the once free and powerful proletariat, which had a glorious history.<sup>724</sup>

While the regime suppressed socialism it purged untrustworthy members within state institutions. Most non-Nazi associations were not left standing, apart from military and Church groups. Universities forced out Jews. Synagogues sat defaced while Brown Shirts dragged Jewish judges and lawyers from courthouses.<sup>725</sup> Much of the terror in this early period was not necessarily orchestrated by top officials. The Nazi and Brown Shirt rank-and-file took it upon themselves to subjugate political opponents and racial enemies.

The fall of the Austrian Republic was the next shock to Social Democracy. Austro-fascism's cooperation with fascist Italy presaged exile for Austrian socialism. In January 1934 Fulvio Suvich, the Italian Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs arrived in Vienna demanding the destruction of the Austrian Left. As things became critical and members of Austrian socialism became radicalised, Bauer sought to intervene reminding his comrades that they must never forget the importance of democracy despite the failings of the liberal order.<sup>726</sup> The police began searches to rout out Social Democracy's paramilitary group the *Schutzbund*. On February 14, 1934, the leadership of the Linz *Schutzbund* resisted police searches. A firefight broke out. The entire *Schutzbund* quickly mobilised and called a general strike. Violence erupted in most major cities and towns including Vienna. Many members of the Social

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<sup>724</sup> 'Germanicus', "Hitler an der Macht," *Der Kampf*, no. 5 (1933): 194.

<sup>725</sup> Evans, *The Third Reich in Power*, 15.

<sup>726</sup> Otto Bauer, "Demokratie und Sozialismus," *Der Kampf*, no. 2 (1934): 55-65.

Democratic Party did not take up arms alongside the Schutzbund. After four days of fighting the brief civil war was decidedly won by the regime. Most controversially, Dollfuss allowed the army to use artillery against the famous Social Democratic housing projects in Vienna. Days after the entire Austrian labour movement was shut down and many arrested. Some of its leaders like Bauer and Julius Deutch fled to Prague.<sup>727</sup> Some, like Karl Renner, were left to their own accords. As Friedrich Adler proclaimed, 'the cannons of clerical-fascism have temporarily won!'<sup>728</sup>

### Radicalisation

The most organised resistance to the Third Reich came from the German labour movement. The SPD remnant, which included mostly party elites and senior journalists fearing for their lives, moved to Prague. The Czechoslovakian capital quickly became the centre for penniless German socialist exiles seeking refuge. The re-established SPD executive (Sopade) had no shortage of able and highly motivated recruits. Within a few months Sopade had organised a vast network of underground 'railways' gathering information of happenings within the Third Reich while keeping abreast with socialists still living in Germany.<sup>729</sup> Importantly, Sopade managed to re-establish its printing press. Sopade's organ and main outlet was *Neuer Vorwärts*. Crucially for this study, Sopade setup a new theoretical journal *Zeitschrift für Sozialismus*.<sup>730</sup> Unlike its predecessor *Die Gesellschaft* its authorship was more inclusive.

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<sup>727</sup> Jelavich, *Modern Austria*, 201-203.

<sup>728</sup> Friedrich Adler, "Ein Brief an die österreichischen," *Der Kampf*, no. 3 (1934): 99.

<sup>729</sup> Edinger, *Exile Politics*, 57.

<sup>730</sup> Interestingly the first edition was called *Sozialistische Revolution*. The succeeding editions were renamed *Zeitschrift für Sozialismus* since the executive worried about the connotations of the former title.

The new publication was not an exclusive mouthpiece for centrist Marxism, its writers included Left Socialists critics of Sopade and the SPD. This was reflective of a wider phenomenon of exile politics. Many Left Socialists re-joined the SPD remnant. Former KPD members also joined. For instance, Max Seydewitz, the breakaway leader of the SAPD, published frequently in it and was heavily involved in Prague politics.<sup>731</sup> The scene was set for an intensive debate about what next for German socialism.

Elected in April 1933, Sopade's executive carefully represented right and left wings equally.<sup>732</sup> Their first order of business was to proclaim a new period of 'revolutionary Social Democracy.' Nazi dictatorship had to be overthrown. In the front page of the first edition of *Neuer Vorwärts* the executive declared 'a violent call arises... Marxism and democratic socialism is immortal!' Though its revolutionary plea focused on Social Democrats exclusively, the manifesto took its time explaining the KPD's culpability for Weimar's destruction. Its denunciation of Social Democracy simply gave National Socialism further fuel against the labour movement.<sup>733</sup> The article became known as the 'Prague Manifesto.' Supposedly a new era of radical Social Democracy was upon the exiled labour movement. About a week before however, Otto Wels, member of the Sopade, wrote to the LSI assuaging any fears that their revolutionary plea represented a clean break from their reformist past. 'Our struggle is as before, for an order of society which will bring the German working class work and food, and German workers peace and liberty.'<sup>734</sup> Simultaneously, most Social Democrats understood the limitations of reformism. Serious oversights since the German Revolution were now abundantly clear. As right-winger Curt Geyer

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<sup>731</sup> Edinger, *Exile Politics*, 37-80.

<sup>732</sup> *Ibid.*, 24-25.

<sup>733</sup> "Zerbrecht die Ketten!," *Neuer Vorwärts*, 18 June 1933, 1.

<sup>734</sup> Quoted in Edinger, *Exile Politics*, 42.

conceded, 'After 1918, the SPD took the emerging democratic state as perfect, it made a fatal error in accepting stable democracy instead of pursuing revolution.'<sup>735</sup>

The manifesto was the starting gun for renewed contestation over what revolutionary Social Democracy would entail. In the words of Otto Bauer, Nazi victory had 'deeply shaken socialist thought.'<sup>736</sup> The first edition of *Zeitschrift für Sozialismus* (published in October 1933) echoed the growing intensity of the debate. It boldly began with 'the time for Revolution is now!' It however concluded on a somewhat ambiguous note. The new magazine would be an outlet for Social Democratic 'criticism' where lessons needed to be gleaned from defeat. The magazine aimed to explore the 'relationship between freedom and socialism... the answer cannot be found in idealised forms of democratic socialism or proletarian dictatorship.' Careful examination of the 'dynamics' of fascist countries (and democratic ones) would develop tactics needed to attain power. The new magazine aimed to 'clarify and solve' such questions to 'help bring about the triumph of freedom and socialism.'<sup>737</sup> The ambiguity symbolised clear divisions.

The LSI called an emergency conference (as opposed to a general congress) in August 1933 to confront the 'German catastrophe.'<sup>738</sup> It was here that frictions inside Sopade became apparent.

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<sup>735</sup> Max Klinger, "Der Rückfall in den Machstaat," *Sozialistische Revolution*, no. 1 (1933): 16. – Klinger was Geyer's pseudonym.

<sup>736</sup> Otto Bauer, *Nach der deutschen Katastrophe: Die Beschlüsse der Internationalen Konferenz der S.A.I. in Paris, August 1933, und die Rede des Berichterstatters Otto Bauer* (Zürich: LSI, 1933), 1. This was Bauer's speech from the LSI conference in Paris.

<sup>737</sup> "Die Zeit und die Aufgabe," *Sozialistische Revolution* 1, no. 1 (1933): 1-11.

<sup>738</sup> The LSI archives refers the conference as the 'Internationale Konferenz nach der deutschen Katastrophe'.

Meeting in Paris, the LSI sought to reset its tactics in the face of Nazi victory. I will return to this point later. For now, the speeches by those on Sopade's executive made painfully clear the rift forming within German socialism. Otto Wels, the now former SPD leader of the Reichstag, and leading right winger gave a speech justifying the party's tactics leading up to the Nazi takeover. It was a spirited defence of Weimar but conceded several points. Beginning from the German revolution of 1918, he outlined how various crises, early in the Republic, undermined German democracy, most particular the inflationary period. Nonetheless, the movement had to strive to re-establish German democracy. Siegfried Aughäuser, chairman of the Confederation of Employees during Weimar, was the senior leftist member of the executive. His speech struck a different chord.

In the midst of this great decisive struggle, little understanding for democracy as an immediate objective can be expected by the fighting proletariat...

He argued that when democracy functioned the 'bourgeois masses' abused its power to oppress workers. There needed to an 'educational dictatorship' that could 'gradually prepare' Germany for its path back to democracy. Such an 'educational dictatorship' would make 'fighters for true socialism out of those who followed pseudo-socialism.'<sup>739</sup> Despite such differences on display, there was another, more affecting incidence shaping the debate.

A small left-wing group within Prague's exiled community published a pamphlet sending shockwaves beyond German socialism.<sup>740</sup> The group called Neu Beginnen

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<sup>739</sup> *Proceedings of the International Conference of the Labour and Socialist International, Paris, August 21-25*, LSI Archives, ARCH01368, 930, 1933, IISH,

<sup>740</sup> For commentary on the pamphlet within Prague's Social Democratic milieu see Willi Müller, "Gegen Argumente des Konservativismus!," *Zeitschrift für Sozialismus*, no. 7 (1934): 226-234.

had its origins around 1929.<sup>741</sup> It was initially made up of hard leftist members of the SPD. Walter Lowenheim, its founding member, had been in the KPD but sometime in the mid 1920s switched to the SPD. Disillusioned by both parties he formed *Neu Beginnen* as a Leninist entriest grouping hoping to undermine the SPD and the KPD. It included members of the SPD, KPD, and even the 'right communist' KPO. Its core leadership managed to escape to Prague.<sup>742</sup> Written by Lowenheim in August 1933 under the pseudonym Miles, *Neu beginnen! Faschismus oder Sozialismus* called for radical departures within German socialism.

The pamphlet began with a damning recount of the movement's systemic failures leading up to the Nazi takeover. Reliance on electoral contestation was its Achilles heel. The SPD's faith in democracy allowed the Nazis to take Germany and repress the extensive labour movement with little resistance.

The large and once so powerful working class organisations, geared only to public mass agitation under legal-democratic conditions, turned out to be completely unable to adapt to the new conditions of the fascist struggle.<sup>743</sup>

The SPD's fault did not just stem from its moderation since 1918. 'Even before 1900, the party repeatedly avowed its interest in the defence of the father land.' Since the SPD's early years, Miles reckoned the party had fallen under illusions of bourgeois reform. The 1918 revolution transformed the party into a 'conservative party'. It now had a vested interested in maintaining the already corrupted institutions of the

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<sup>741</sup> There is some contestation about the year of its formation. Edinger dates its formation in 1931, while Nolan dates it in 1929. Edinger, *Exile Politics*, 84. Mary Nolan, "Antifascism under Fascism: German Visions and Voices," *New German Critique*, no. 67 (1996): 44.

<sup>742</sup> "Antifascism under Fascism," 45. Miles was ousted from his leadership position in 1935. He no longer believed revolution was possible within Germany, only external forces could overthrow the regime. The group had cells in Berlin, by they were purged by the regime in 1937 and 38.

<sup>743</sup> Miles, *Neu beginnen! Faschismus oder Sozialismus: Als Diskussionsgrundlage der Sozialisten Deutschlands* (Karlsbad: Graphia, 1933), 5.

republic. The SPD had little interests in overturning capitalist relations. Miles took direct aim at Kautsky.

No one more clearly characterised the nature of this policy than Karl Kautsky... when he earnestly and approvingly declared: "The German Social Democratic Party was transformed, after the revolution of 1918, into a conservative party, for a revolution after the revolution is inconceivable" (*Der Bolshevismus in der Sackgasse*). In this he is clearly expressing the fact-of which most sections of the party are unaware that the political objective of the German socialists is a bourgeois republic, and not the socialist state, and that its social objective is a "reformist" capitalist system. For socialism presupposes a second revolution after the bourgeois revolution... the proletarian revolution.<sup>744</sup>

Miles specifically pointed to Sopade and its aging leadership to come to terms with their mistakes. The 'old functionaries' had to allow for a new generation of militant socialists to redraft the movement. The pamphlet did not just aim at radicalising the SPD but its 'fraternal parties in the LSI' too. The 'fighting spirit' of the international also required restoration.<sup>745</sup>

The Communist Party fared little better in Miles' view. They too were 'creatures of bourgeois democracy' who held a 'religious faith' that workers had innate revolutionary and anti-fascist desires. The 'awakening' of such yearnings was all that was needed. Miles rightfully pointed to the fact that many within the exiled SPD held these views. 'It too expects the end of fascism to come from the spontaneous uprising of the masses.'<sup>746</sup> Miles blamed the KPD's dogmatic and doctrinaire attitudes seeing the world as what they wanted but not as it was. The KPD's unrelenting campaign against Social Democracy made it as impotent and as culpable in Nazism's success as the SPD.

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<sup>744</sup> Ibid., 39-40.

<sup>745</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>746</sup> Ibid., 6.

The Third Reich undermined Marxist assumptions about the historically determined proletarian revolution. Even with decreased living standards the mass propaganda machines meant public grievances were channelled elsewhere. The destruction of organised labour made this worse. Miles' solution was ambiguous. Miles thought an alliance between socialists and communists was an unquestioned necessity. He also conceded the need to involve bourgeois anti-fascists too. This was only the first step. Avoiding another 1918 revolution was something of keen import. The new revolution had to defeat Nazism and secure socialism for the long term. A new republic in the guise of Weimar would just culminate into fascism again. For Miles, the outcome of a new German revolution was a 'refutation of earlier 'conceptions of democratic socialism.'<sup>747</sup> After the revolution, like in 1918, other 'groups and classes' would do their utmost to secure their place in the new Germany. In this scenario a socialist party should have but one aim.

To secure the right and privileges of the working class and to limit the rights of the exploiting classes as far as the militant strength of the masses behind them permits... The party should not advocate bourgeois democracy, but the democracy of workers... The socialist party must impede the consolidation... of a new Weimar Republic'.<sup>748</sup>

Once workers secured the new republic, the next phase was rapid socialisation of the means of production. Miles intended on destroying capitalist social relations once and for all. These invariably led to fascism. While Miles avowedly shied away from violent 'terrorist tactics', the implications of his proposal did not exactly corroborate. If a socialist party was going to secure a new republic at the expense of non-socialists, while using their support for the initial thrust against Nazism, violence was implied.

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<sup>747</sup> Ibid., 25. - Austrian social democrats concurred with this too. See 'Germanicus', "Hitler an der Macht."

<sup>748</sup> Miles, *Neu beginnen!*, 59.

Indeed, militant violence was the only way around various quandaries such a situation would give rise to.

The small publication had wide reach being translated into a number of languages.<sup>749</sup> Notably, the ILP's H. B. Brailsford wrote the preface to the English edition.<sup>750</sup> There were others outside the group that felt the old guard of the SPD had to be moved on. Fritz Bielig, a member of another left faction wrote 'Revolutionary struggle requires revolutionary organisation. The old apparatus is no longer; attempts to revive it do not correspond to the new conditions of struggle.'<sup>751</sup> Centrist Social Democrats had little choice but to respond giving credence to the publication, written by an otherwise minor subgrouping of Social Democracy. Even when they were not responding to it, many were forced into defensive postures justifying their reformism.

In March 1933, just a month after Weimar's fall, Kautsky penned his thoughts on 'what next'. Kautsky admitted the limited scope of the 1918 revolution was an important element in Nazi victory. As explained in earlier chapters, Kautsky felt that the war had thrust democracy and power onto workers prematurely. The republic's institutions reflected this, particularly in the elevated position of the Reich President (he wanted the position abolished). Salvador's intellectual biography on Kautsky points to his thoughts on how the Weimar delegates were inspired by the US system when they created the Reich President.<sup>752</sup> Kautsky also admitted that the Junker backed military was a problem, and that a future republic would need to abolish a standing professional army, replacing it with a people's militia. He echoed a similar

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<sup>749</sup> Nolan, "Antifascism under Fascism," 45.

<sup>750</sup> See Miles, *Socialism's new start: a secret German manifesto* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1934). – It is unclear who translated it.

<sup>751</sup> Fritz Bielig, "Die revolutionäre Organisation," *Zeitschrift für Sozialismus* 1, no. 7 (1934): 234.

<sup>752</sup> Salvadori, *Karl Kautsky*, 359.

sentiment in 1919.<sup>753</sup> By this point, Kautsky was well and truly a veteran of Social Democratic debates, easily foreseeing potential for militant radicalisation.

Anyone who demands a dictatorship in general...always implicitly presupposes that the dictator will think just like the one who demands him. The desire for an anonymous dictatorship is the desire for one's own omnipotence. A very understandable wish. But not one on which a certain, successful policy can in reality be built...The essence of social democracy cannot be reconciled with the essence of dictatorship.<sup>754</sup>

Kautsky repeated this line with increasing vigour as he published more on the topic. He reminded fellow socialists that the victory of Hitler did not 'provide the occasion to become ruthless in our methods, as we are now frequently urged to become.'<sup>755</sup> However Kautsky confirmed Mile's criticism of socialist proclivity in assuming proletarian revolutionary zeal.

The circumstances that made Hitlerism are temporary. The German working class, however, remains basically the same as it was before the World War and will again do its duty when circumstances change and make possible the overthrow of the Hitler regime.<sup>756</sup>

Kautsky was one of the first to respond to Miles' pamphlet. In his typical fashion, Kautsky derided Miles' reductive narrative of SPD reformism. He accused Miles of misunderstanding Social Democracy's role in their contemporaneous circumstances. The movement, while representing the 'special interests of workers', now represented the interests of the 'community as a whole... and consumers.' Miles' narrow view of who Social Democracy should defend worried Kautsky. Kautsky accused Miles of

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<sup>753</sup> See Kautsky, *Richtlinien für ein sozialistisches Aktionsprogramm*. Kautsky had been arguing this point since the late 1890s.

<sup>754</sup> *Neue Programme: Eine kritische Untersuchung* (Leipzig: Prager, 1933). Also see "Einige Ursachen und Wirkungen des deutschen Nationalsozialismus," *Der Kampf*, no. 6 (1933): 235-245.

<sup>755</sup> *Hitlerism and Social Democracy* (American League for Democratic Socialism, 1934), Chapter 5.

<sup>756</sup> *Ibid.*

rejecting the 'democratic republic form of government.' Social Democracy should have no part in creating a 'dictatorial centralised' state.<sup>757</sup>

Kautsky's protégé, Hilferding, gave a more spirited defence of the SPD.<sup>758</sup> During the anti-socialist law period, he argued the party was not in position for mass agitation. The struggle for socialism 'remained largely abstract.' The objective was material struggle through German trade unions and, to a limited degree in parliament. Little else was possible in the face of overwhelming force. 'The ideology was radical and revolutionary; the practice was reform, to the point of abstinence.'<sup>759</sup> He then turned to the left's call for a more militant dictatorship of the proletariat. He, like Kautsky, insisted that dictatorship of any variety could easily turn on those who placed it there. 'Who will guarantee that amid all the great difficulties of the transition period that the dictatorship does not transform itself into a dictatorship against the working class?'<sup>760</sup>

Hilferding admitted that the period for reform was over. The only goal was the revolutionary overthrow of Nazism. Illegal activities needed expansion. However, the only way forward was a Menshevik style decentralised 'mass party.' Given the firm grip Hitler had over Germany, the movement would have to wait until large sections of the German population tired of fascism. Hilferding though offered slightly more radical imaginings than Kautsky. If democracy was to prevail it would likely have to fight a civil war, and that if workers won, they would, before elections, had to sow seeds for a lasting democracy. This included revolutionary councils trying fascist

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<sup>757</sup> Karl Kautsky, "Eine Diskussionsgrundlage," *Zeitschrift für Sozialismus*, no. 2 (1933): 51-57.

<sup>758</sup> Miles' attack on Kautsky was also a de-facto attack on him. He, like Kautsky, placed great amounts of faith in the Weimar Republic's institutions and their amiability towards socialism.

<sup>759</sup> Richard Kern, "Revolutionärer Sozialismus," *Zeitschrift für Sozialismus* 1, no. 5 (1934): 145-152. Hilferding used Richard Kern as his pseudonym.

<sup>760</sup> Ibid.

criminals, hasty nationalisations of key parts of the economy, including the seizure of the Reichbank. But he concluded with a warning. Whatever obstacles befell the new republic, turning to dictatorship would be a corrupting influence.<sup>761</sup>

There were other more left-wing elements that radicalised. Max Seydewitz had re-joined the SPD in exile. One of the most public faces of Left Socialism, Seydewitz was sceptical of democracy's potential to foster, or at least, allow for socialist transition. He reiterated previous assertions that the capitalist crisis was 'not temporary.' And that the labour movement's servile attitudes towards reformism allowed for fascist takeover. Nazi victory was not historically determined but made possible by reformism. He reminded socialists that capital viewed democracy as a question of 'expediency rather than conviction.' As long as parliamentary procedures suited capital's aim it would be left intact. However as soon as it ceased to be useful, capital would mobilise fascism to do its bidding. Socialists could not afford to re-establish a system that would habitually betray them. The 'democratic route cannot be used to attain power.' He worried that, as in Weimar, socialists would be forced into defensive positions, 'incapable of fighting on terrain dictated to by its class enemies.'<sup>762</sup> The democratic route would always doom socialism to continually fight rear-guard actions against the ruling classes. The working class 'had no choice' but to accept the 'dictatorial route to power.' Proletarian dictatorship was the only way workers were going to win democracy for the long term. He went further; once a revolutionary government reigned it needed to continue 'consolidating and extending its reach.' Seydewitz then took a somewhat circa 1917 Leninist turn. Socialism's objective was

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<sup>761</sup> Ibid.

<sup>762</sup> Max Seydewitz, "Die Überwindung der faschistischen Diktatur," *Zeitschrift für Sozialismus* 1, no. 6 (1934): 198-207.

not to hand over 'parliamentary rule' but to 'rests its power on organs of the working class... on the soviets of the working class.'<sup>763</sup>

Left and right revolutionaries disagreed with whom the revolution should benefit. The left, while conceding the need for alliances beyond the working class, ultimately believed that the next Germany should be a workers' state. After the formation of a new republic, workers through various means of proletarian dictatorship would instil socialism, washing away both capitalist and fascist Germany. The right wanted a more inclusive, broad based democratic revolution. Geyer best encapsulated these stark differences.

The universal danger of Hitler's regime must be overthrown by mobilising a broad stratum of people. Only blind vulgar Marxism can indulge in the illusion that the vast majority of the most ideological committed people are proletarian.

He went further warning that anything that smacked of Bolshevik radicalism would doom the revolution. 'Bolshevik labour camps would replace Nazi labour camps.'<sup>764</sup> The Right and Centre had become revolutionary, but the left had clearly adopted a far more radical and, at times, a semi-bolshevised view of a new German revolution.

There was some optimism in the first years of Nazi rule that the dictatorship would fall. Socialists had witnessed, firsthand, the contradictions unleashed by the Depression. They thought Nazi Germany would fare little better than Weimar. Soon after Nazi take over, Alfred Braunthal saw danger for the new regime. The Depression could not entirely explain Nazism's success; he cited various anti-democratic forces that resided in German society after 1918. Economic crises amplified these forces.

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<sup>763</sup> Ibid. Seydewitz continued arguing that the dictatorship was not the ends, but the means of attaining power and building socialism.

<sup>764</sup> Curt Geyer, *Revolution gegen Hitler: die historische Aufgabe der deutschen Sozialdemokratie* (Karlsbad: Graphia, 1934), 11-14.

Braunthal argued that the German economy, before Hitler's takeover would have slowly recovered. Nazi victory had now put this into question. This was a problem for the regime since it promised to quickly end Germany's economic quagmire. These expectations would soon shatter. Braunthal pointed out that the Nazi promise of state funded work creation projects would find opponents in industry, and that the party would easily submit to capital's will. The middle classes who supported the party would soon be 'disillusioned'.<sup>765</sup>

Hilferding cited similar arguments. He thought the regime faced three key threats. First, it was following a doomed agricultural policy. At a time of agricultural over-production with low prices in primary industries, the regime was seeking to expand domestic agriculture. This in turn would undermine the country's exporting industries. The Nazi party's aim for autarky informed such policy, with obvious implications for foreign policy too. This was dangerous since it would degrade the agricultural problem further. The regime's economic policies were even more 'acute.' Hitler had delegated major economic policy making to 'representatives of the capitalist class and the medium-sized producers and traders.' This promoted protectionism. Capital's tendency towards monopolisation would sharpen under such conditions, lowering competition further derailing the economy. The various contradicting social forces that Nazism wooed to support would become dissatisfied. If the regime did not reconcile these differences, and Hilferding's implication was that this was almost impossible, popular revolt would stir.<sup>766</sup>

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<sup>765</sup> Alfred Braunthal, "Die ökonomischen Perspektiven der deutschen Gegenrevolution," *Der Kampf*, no. 5 (1933): 205-218.

<sup>766</sup> Richard Kern, "Die deutsche Krise," *Zeitschrift für Sozialismus* 1, no. 11 (1934): 337-351. For a similar argument see Paul Sering, "Der Faschismus," *Zeitschrift für Sozialismus* 2, no. 26/27 (1935): 839-856.

Seydewitz thought The Night of the Long Knives elicited ominous signs for the regime. Hitler was able to carry out the Nazi revolution by way of garnering mass support from a well organised 'apparatus.' The SA provided the Nazi Party and Hitler with the means to both carryout revolution and to keep capital at bay. The Brown Shirts acted as a kind of conduit of revolutionary zeal that both propped up the Nazi Party while keeping 'the old apparatus of the capitalist state in check.' The execution of Ernst Röhm and other leaders of the SA, along with the organisation's diminished position after, cut Hitler off from his revolutionary base. Hitler had shown his true nature. He was not a revolutionary. He had now made peace with the traditional order, 'big business, the Junkers, and conservative reactionaries.' Seydewitz thought this exposed Hitler to the failings of capitalist Germany, and that as the economy worsened, the regime would find it more difficult to justify its existence. It was now tied to the old order. Seydewitz drew a somewhat petty parallel to Social Democracy in 1918. 'Like the Social Democrats of 1918, he [Hitler] contented himself with reforming the state apparatus... the state will remain intact...as a tool of capitalist dictatorship.'<sup>767</sup> One Austrian observer even proclaimed the incident as the 'Nazi Thermidor.'<sup>768</sup>

Otto Bauer's *Austrian Democracy Under Fire* was written only months after the socialist defeat in Austria. He, like many, blamed the Depression on radicalising members of the middle classes. And that the more reactionary elements of Austrian society used Austro-Fascism to crush organised labour. He thought the Dolfuss regime would 'not last long.' Unlike Mussolini and Hitler, it did not have a reliable revolutionary and paramilitary organisation to rely on. It had no equivalent to the 'SA, or the SS, or

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<sup>767</sup> Max Seydewitz, "Hitlers Konterrevolution," *Zeitschrift für Sozialismus* 1, no. 11 (1934): 355-356. Also see Alexander Schifrin, "Der Riß in der Diktatur," *Zeitschrift für Sozialismus* 1, no. 11 (1934): 357-364.

<sup>768</sup> W.M., "Deutscher Nazi-Termidor?," *Der Kampf*, no. 4 (1934): 138-142.

Mussolini's Brownshirts.' Austro-fascism relied on 'middle class Jews terrified of Hitler, aristocratic royalists and lower middle class Catholics.' Bauer thought it likely the regime could not contain such contradictions. Even more menacing for the regime was the increasingly violent and well organised Nazi underground. Bauer argued that to fend off Nazism Dollfuss would try to pursue 'peace with Hitler or seek to restore the Habsburg dynasty.' 'The overthrow of Social Democracy in Austria has opened either the path to Hitler or the path to the Habsburgs. Both paths lead to war.'<sup>769</sup> Bauer's anxiety about the return to monarchy was not well founded, but his assessment on Nazism in Austria was sharp. On July 25, 1934, Austrian Nazis assassinated Dollfuss.

Like their German comrades, exiled Austrians turned to revolutionary politics and illicit activity.<sup>770</sup> One exiled Austrian socialist rightly pointed to, 'the conditions of Austria [socialists] was the same as other fascists countries.'<sup>771</sup> Gone were the days of a mass democratic organisation of 'hundreds the thousands of members' proclaimed Bauer. The new movement would have to be a 'an organisation of close-knit cadres.'<sup>772</sup> But even before the fall of the Austrian Republic, the destruction of Weimar meant they were aware of what lay ahead of them. As one Austrian expounded in 1933, 'the

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<sup>769</sup> Bauer, *Austrian Democracy Under Fire*, 49-52. Also see "Der Austrofascismus nach dem Naziputsch," *Der Kampf*, no. 4 (1934): 129-131.

<sup>770</sup> For more minor figures in Austrian Social Democracy who called for illegal organisation and revolutionary activity see Paul Maresch, "Illegale Parteiarbeit," *Der Kampf*, no. 10 (1935); Anna Gärtner, "Erfahrungen und Aufgaben sozialistischer Schulungsarbeit," *Der Kampf*, no. 6 (1936).

<sup>771</sup> Gustav Richter, "Organisation und Politik der "Revolutionären Sozialisten"," *Der Kampf*, no. 9 (1935): 411-421. Richter was concerned that others within the International were not taking Austrian socialists as seriously as the other exiled parties from Italy and Germany.

<sup>772</sup> Bauer, *Austrian Democracy Under Fire*, 49.

German catastrophe has imposed an obligation for all the working class around the world to review their tactics.<sup>773</sup>

The LSI began to organise funds to support Austrian Social Democrats, particularly in Vienna. Friedrich Adler, the tireless secretary of the LSI, was the public face of the now exiled and defeated movement, as was Bauer.<sup>774</sup> The party established itself in the city of Brno. The party renamed itself 'Austrian Revolutionary Socialists.' It managed to continue publishing *Der Kampf*. Unlike the SPD, Austrian socialists were less disconcerted by the revolutionary task ahead. This was probably because the Austrian party was always more left-leaning than the SPD.<sup>775</sup> Also, less of the movement made it to exile. This meant that the exiled organisation in reality confined itself to helping families of victims of the civil-war, producing and disseminating anti-fascist propaganda, and training new cadres.<sup>776</sup> They had nothing like the vast networks at the disposal of Sopade. Adler, Bauer, and Deutch became the most senior Austrian socialists. Bauer, who already was one of the party's more senior theoreticians further cemented his role as the now exiled elder socialist. He also led the party's foreign office in Berne.<sup>777</sup>

In 1936 Bauer wrote *The Illegal Party* (published posthumously in 1939). Bauer rejected reconstructing the party structures of old. There needed to be a new party with different edifices and a radicalised ideology. He understood that his generation were

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<sup>773</sup> Käthe Leichter, "Die beste Abwehr," *Der Kampf*, no. 11 (1933): 446. For similar arguments from Austrian socialists see Oda Olberg, "Der Nazisieg in Deutschland und seine Lehren," *Der Kampf*, no. 5 (1933); Oskar Pollak, "Zwischen zwei Faschismen," *Der Kampf*, no. 7 (1933).

<sup>774</sup> Adler, "Ein Brief an die österreichischen," 97-104.

<sup>775</sup> For more on this see Czerwińska-Schupp, *Otto Bauer*, Chapter 8. Though there was debate at the party congress over revolutionary matters.

<sup>776</sup> *Ibid.*, 343.

<sup>777</sup> *Ibid.*

old and could only offer so much for a new Austria. Bauer admitted that his generation should not have a direct hand in forming the new party, instead it had a duty to pass on 'experience, knowledge, and values that come out of life and struggles.' Bauer envisaged new organisation in similar style to the Leninist vanguard model. It needed to be a disciplined unit, hierarchical in structure, based on highly skilled cadres within a democratic centralist system. Bauer attempted to balance these ideas with references to old notions of reformism.<sup>778</sup> One historian suggests that this was to strike a balance between former members drifting to communism, and that there needed to be a bridge between the old and new wings of the party.<sup>779</sup> Nonetheless, in Bauer's last years he radicalised further to the left, imagining a party reborn with revolutionary and militant organisational capacities.<sup>780</sup>

The politics of exile saw momentous shifts in both Austrian and German Social Democracy. Both parties, well established in their polities, had been quickly and easily vanquished. Despite contestation revolution was the order of the day. The next query was one of tactics and strategy. Social Democrats, regardless of their factional standings, knew that adversarial relations with the KPD was a factor in the Nazi's success.<sup>781</sup> In the face of fascist ascendancy did the two socialist camps, both in retreat but both at loggerheads since 1917, need to forge a new relationship? In the words of Max Seydewitz,

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<sup>778</sup> Otto Bauer, *Manuscript of "Die illegale Partei"*, LSI Archives, Otto Bauer Paper ARCH000026, 26, 1938, IISH,

<sup>779</sup> Czerwińska-Schupp, *Otto Bauer*, 334.

<sup>780</sup> He outlined his case in other publications. See Otto Bauer, "Auf dem Wege zur sozialistischen Demokratie," *Der Kampf*, no. 7 (1936): 261-270; "Der Sozialismus und die deutsche Frage," *Der Kampf*, no. 1 (1937): 1-7; "Revolutionäre Kritik," *Der Kampf*, no. 12 (1937): 465-470.

<sup>781</sup> For the Austrian part of this narrative see "Kommunisten und Sozialisten in Österreich," *Der Kampf*, no. 3 (1934): 104-116. It is worth noting that not all thought the KPD /SPD relationship was to blame for the fall of Weimar. See Olberg, "Der Nazisieg in Deutschland und seine Lehren," 197.

In the course of developments, it will become increasingly clear that the rebirth and resurgence of the Germany Labour movement... and the victory of the proletariat against fascism in Germany will depend... on a revolutionary United Front.<sup>782</sup>

### **The Politics of Popular and United Fronts**

As socialist opposition in Germany was being crushed there were some movements towards a United Front. On February 19/20, 1933, the Bureau of the LSI appealed to communist parties. 'The LSI was always convinced that working class unity amounted to power for workers.'<sup>783</sup> On March 11, the Executive Committee of the Communist International issued a statement to a similar effect. The Comintern called upon its constituent parties 'to attempt to setup the United Front of struggle with Social Democratic workers.'<sup>784</sup> This filtered down, and there were some half-hearted attempts to establish links between communist parties and Social Democrats. It was well known that given the hostility between the two camps, despite the situation in Germany, such moves would come to nothing. This was the case in Britain.

In Britain there was dialogue between the Labour Party, the ILP (who were now disaffiliated to the Labour Party), the British Communist Party, and the trade unions. In early March, the ILP National Council announced intentions that in light of reports 'of the campaign of repression and persecution... against all working class parties in

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<sup>782</sup> Max Seydewitz, "Eine Arbeitklasse, eine Partei," *Zeitschrift für Sozialismus* 2, no. 17 (1935): 544.

<sup>783</sup> LSI Bureau, *Appeal by Bureau of the LSI, February 20, LSI/17-18, 18/3/2, 1933*, People's History Museum,

<sup>784</sup> Executive Committee of the Communist International, *Communist International's Great Manifesto on Anti-Fascist Fight*, LSI/17-18, 18/3/6, 1933, People's History Museum, This was made both in response to the LSI's statement but also was affected by the elections Hitler called after the Reichstag fire. For more on the context of this source see "ECCI statement on the German situation and on the United Front," in *The Communist International 1919-1943 Documents*, ed. Jane Degras (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), 248-250.

Germany', a United Front with Labour and the Communist Party was necessary.<sup>785</sup> The central committee of the British Communist Party soon followed with a more expanded statement on the need for 'united action.'<sup>786</sup> But by the end of the month dialogue came to a standstill. The Labour Party, predisposed to scepticism on the matter, halted talks. J.S. Middleton, the assistant secretary of the Labour Party wrote to the ILP's John L. Patton stating that Labour could not progress forward without approval and further discussion within the LSI.<sup>787</sup> This was likely a delaying tactic, but there was also truth in this. Given the fall of Weimar, and the SPD's recent exile, a United Front had serious ramifications for the LSI. The Communist Party of France likewise approached the SFIO. The SFIO at the time also could not approve of such action without LSI approval. As Blum asked, how could his party be a 'section of the international' if it did so. Nonetheless, Blum thought an 'understanding between the two internationals' would maintain the movement's 'strength in spirit'.<sup>788</sup> Blum was more favourable to an opening with communists than Labour.

The LSI met in late August 1933 in Paris. The conference was called to deal with the 'German catastrophe'. The conference revealed the various fissures that beset Social Democracy. The ideological divisions not only were internal to each party, but more importantly for the International, began to take form along national lines. Not all embraced such revolutionary vigour. The divide was obvious. The parties living in exile, or feeling directly threatened by fascism like France, embraced a more radical politics. Social Democratic Parties in established democracies where fascism was less threatening maintained reformist moderation. The British Labour Party felt little

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<sup>785</sup> J.S. Middleton (Labour) to J. L. Paton (ILP), March 6, LSI/16/1, 16/1/9, 1933, People's History Museum,

<sup>786</sup> Central Committee of the Communist Party of Great Britain, *For United Action Against the capitalist offensive and fascism*, 10 March, LSI/16/1, 16/1/9x, 1933, People's History Museum,

<sup>787</sup> J.S. Middleton (Labour) to J. L. Paton (ILP), March 22, LSI/16/1, 16/1/9V, 1933, People's History Museum,

<sup>788</sup> Léon Blum, "L'unité ouvrière," *Le Populaire*, 9 mars 1933, 1-2.

reason to embrace revolutionarism. But for many, the loss of German democracy revealed the need for reconciliation with the Comintern. The two socialisms had failed to stop Hitler despite their extensive grassroots organisations.

Friedrich Adler gave the opening address. He announced the need for an 'international front against fascism on a firmer basis than before.' Blum's speech too reiterated the importance of working class unity. A few weeks before though, he made his position abundantly clear. 'The Social Democratic leaders in Germany were more afraid of the temper of which the communists were arousing in the streets, than of the officers who hated the whole republic.'<sup>789</sup>

Hugh Dalton, Labour's representative spoke of the need to empower the League of Nations to halt the spread of fascism, imploring it to impose sanctions on dictatorships. He wanted the LSI to undertake a more intensive alliance with its sympathising trade union international, the IFTU. This was meaningless. It was by now obvious the League was powerless to halt imperialism and there was no telling how Hitler was going to deal with it. More importantly, the LSI was already close with the IFTU, so this was superfluous. Dalton only dealt with the question of a United Front vaguely.

My point is this; each of the Socialist parties . . . must judge of their own conditions in the light of the possibilities which present themselves in each country to promote Socialism and international peace, and I shall say no word which would seem to be in any way an interference in the decisions of each of those parties as to the right course to pursue to strengthen democracy, Socialism and international peace.<sup>790</sup>

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<sup>789</sup> "L'état présent de l'Internationale," *Le Populaire*, 6 août 1933, 1.

<sup>790</sup> *Proceedings of the International conference of the Labour and Socialist International, Paris, August 21-25, ARCH01368, 930/2, 1933, IISH,*

Sweden, Norway, and Denmark likewise were sceptical of any kind of alliance. Revolutionary zeal, and the desire for working class unity only went so far.

Bauer responded to British and Scandinavian scepticism. He soberly reminded delegates that the loss of Germany had shaken the very foundations of Social Democracy. Dalton's strategy was too moderate for the new world they were living in. 'The need to defend democracy does not need further discussion. The problem of how to defend democracy is much more serious.' And it was at this point Bauer pointed to the weakness of democracy insinuating there needed to be more radical options available to the movement.<sup>791</sup> What was desperately needed was a united working class. Bitter lessons in Germany attested to this.

That is why, after the German defeat, the longing for overcoming the split and for the end of the fratricidal war within the working class lives more than ever in the working class. The dispute between the Communist International and us has determined the whole history of the international workers' movement since 1918. But an infinite amount of what was said in this controversy has now been settled by the lessons of history itself... the split the working class could never be justified, it can be justified today less than ever.<sup>792</sup>

The resolutions of the conference were anti-fascist but did not answer the burning question. Given the controversial nature of a United Front, particular with British Labour's cold reaction, risking a split within the LSI was dangerous. However, the conference did not denounce a United Front either. Clearly, there was some room to manoeuvre. Imlay notes that the conference effectively left it up to its constituent parties to make their own decisions.<sup>793</sup> In the coming year and with events rapidly

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<sup>791</sup> Kautsky spoke out against Bauer directly on the matter. See Karl Kautsky, "Gedanken über die Einheitsfront," *Zeitschrift für Sozialismus* 2, no. 26/27 (1935): 825-838.

<sup>792</sup> Bauer, *Nach der deutschen Katastrophe*, 13-14.

<sup>793</sup> Imlay, *The Practice of Socialist Internationalism*, 253.

unfolding in France and Spain, elements of the LSI did pursue relations with the Comintern. And so too did a number of the LSI's constituent parties.<sup>794</sup>

The 6 February crisis in France accelerated the path to both United and Popular Front politics. As France was feeling the brunt of the Depression, the Radical-led government became surrounded by scandal. In particular, a number of Radical Deputies became mixed up with the fraudster Alexandre Stavisky. Stavisky was born in Kiev to a Jewish family. He moved to Paris and became a citizen in 1910. He was involved in several illicit activities and in the 1920s was caught selling millions of francs of worthless bonds. Though arrested in 1927, his trial was continuously postponed. Stavisky's connections within government circles, particularly amongst elements of the Radical Party, kept him from prison. In December 1933 he attempted to flee France. On January 8, 1934, police found him in Chamonix with gunshot wounds to the head. The police reported that he had committed suicide but the press, as well as the evidence itself suggested that he was in fact murdered by the police, most likely to cover up his high-profile connections. His death sparked a political crisis. The press unveiled his long history with senior French politicians and involvement with high-ranking ministers. This led to the resignation of the Radical Prime Minister Camille Chautemps. Édouard Daladier replaced him. Daladier's first

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<sup>794</sup> For a slightly different perspective of the conference see Horn, *European Socialists Respond to Fascism*, 43-45. Horn argues that the conference demonstrated the first signs of left wing revolt against the mainstream of the movement. In my opinion, he is right only so far as many Social Democrats radicalised after the fall of Weimar. Horn rightly points to Bauer as an example of this. Therefore, the left of the LSI expanded. But as I demonstrated in Chapter 3 and 4, there was significant tensions on the left before 1933. The LSI conference in July/August 1931 proves this. However, the leftward trend amongst Social Democrats should not be mistaken for Left Socialism. Left Socialism, came to similar arguments, was far more sceptical about the LSI. Bauer and other Social Democrats who became more left-wing after exile were never of this ilk, even when they embraced forms of Leninism. It is not clear if Horn has made this distinction.

move was to sack the prefect of the Paris Police Jean Chiappe. Chiappe's dismissal sparked the violent riots on February 6.<sup>795</sup>

Chiappe was a committed anti-communist and notoriously soft on far-right agitation. Several far-right paramilitary groups came out against his dismissal. The largest and most infamous of these groups was the monarchist Ligue d'Action Française. Rioters converged on the Place de la Concorde and armed protesters clashed with police. Daladier attempted to clamp down on protests, even threatening to declare a state of emergency. However, members of the police and judiciary resisted forcing him to resign. Gaston Doumergue, who replaced him, was a right-wing Radical and the new government was far more conservative than the last.<sup>796</sup>

The riots and Daladier's resignation had far-reaching implications. In the days following, the SFIO and trade unions organised a general strike to protect the republic. The PCF initially was sceptical of working with socialists, it was still immured in its 'third period' mentality. However, on 10 February the PCF's Politburo allowed communists to join the strike alongside socialists. Tens of thousands struck across the country against the French far right. But soon after the PCF returned to its Third Period policy. However, there was a change in leadership of the European section of the Comintern. Stalin appointed the Bulgarian George Dimitrov. In late April the two most senior PCF leaders, Maurice Thorez and Jacques Doriot were ordered to Moscow. Directed to change tactics, they were to begin dialogue with the SFIO.<sup>797</sup>

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<sup>795</sup> Brian Jenlins and Crhis Millington, *France and Fascism: February 1934 and the dynamics of political crisis* (New York: Routledge, 2015), Chapter 3.

<sup>796</sup> Jackson, *The Popular Front in France: defending democracy, 1934-1938*, 5.

<sup>797</sup> *Ibid.*, 30-33.

By July 1934 both parties were openly discussing 'joint action in the face of fascism.' The National Conference of the PCF passed a resolution that the 'Communist Party desired at all costs to achieve unity of action of the masses against the bourgeoisie and against fascism.' More importantly, the resolution effectively ceased 'Third Period' tactics. And, within a Marxist framework, bourgeoisie democracy necessitated protection against reactionary threats.

[The Communist Party] have always defended, and will continue to defend in future, all the democratic freedoms won by the masses themselves, especially all the rights of the working class. The Communists not only oppose with all their energy, now and in the future, every attempt on the part of fascism and the bourgeoisie in general to suppress or limit these freedoms; but they continually strive to extend their scope... The Communists strive sincerely to setup the United Front for the anti-fascist struggle.<sup>798</sup>

The question of dialogue with the PCF was less fraught with difficulty within the SFIO but still not without its complications. The SFIO's national council unanimously accepted the opening of dialogue with the communist party. Léon Blum wrote a number of articles justifying the historic pact.

The desire for unity... undoubtedly latent for many years, has suddenly appeared on the surface under the impact of the fascist assault on the 6 February...The fascist uprising have allowed the Communist International to execute a change in policy... after Hitler's accession to power... The Nazi victory has confronted the Russian Revolution with the gravest of dangers...<sup>799</sup>

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<sup>798</sup> "Resolution adopted by the National Conference, July 1934, Communist Party of France (PCF)," in *Marxists in the face of Fascism: Writings by Marxists on Fascism from the Inter-War Period (1930)*, ed. David Beetham (Chicago: Haymarket, 2019), 173-174.

<sup>799</sup> Léon Blum, "The Socialist-Communist Pact (1934)," in *Marxists in the face of Fascism: Writings by Marxists on Fascism from the Inter-War Period (1930)*, ed. David Beetham (Chicago: Haymarket, 2019), 176-177. Also see "Les problèmes de l'unité," *Le Populaire*, 7 juillet 1934, 1; "Les conditions de l'action commune," *Le Populaire*, 9 juillet 1934, 1-2; "L'objet de l'action commune," *Le Populaire*, 10 juillet 1934, 1; "Les conditions de l'unité organique," *Le Populaire*, 11 juillet 1934, 1. "La défense internationale contre le fascisme," *Le Populaire*, 13 juillet 1934; "Unité d'action," *Le Populaire*, 14 juillet 1934.

Blum's invocation of the Nazi threat to the Russian revolution was interesting. It demonstrated that some within the Social Democracy saw danger to themselves and democratic Europe if the Soviet Union was somehow supplanted by a war with Germany.<sup>800</sup>

In May 1936, the Popular Front won the legislative election. It secured 376 seats while the right claimed 222. This did not necessarily herald a significant shift to the left by French voters. The PCF saw its vote increase, going from ten seats to seventy-two, picking up support in industrial regions. The SFIO went from having ninety-seven seats to 146. The Radicals suffered. They went from 159 seats to 116. In the end, the right only lost seventy thousand votes. Much of the French middle class were clearly fearful of voting for a coalition with communists, or even an agenda that was anti-fascist, openly ruling out socialism as its *raison de'être*.<sup>801</sup>

Léon Blum became Prime Minister in June; he was the first from the Socialist Party to hold office and was France's first Jewish Prime Minister. A significant feat only a few decades after the Dreyfus Affair, and a few years before Vichy. The Popular Front government was a beacon of hope across the socialist movement, not just for Social Democrats, but for communists too. Reflecting sixty-six years after the election, Eric Hobsbawm, a communist at the time, explained its allure amidst defeat. 'And then for a brief moment, France became not only the refuge of civilisation, but the place of hope.'<sup>802</sup>

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<sup>800</sup> This theme is explored in the next chapter.

<sup>801</sup> Mulholland, *Bourgeois liberty and the politics of fear*, 199.

<sup>802</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, *Interesting times: A Twentieth Century Life* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2002), 336.

From the outset, Blum made it clear that his government was not going to transform France into a socialist republic. 'We are socialists, but the country did not give the majority to the Socialist Party... it gave the majority to the Popular Front... Our goal is not to transform the social system.'<sup>803</sup> And while Blum promised to govern via consensus amongst the varying creeds of the Popular Front, large scale strikes breathed radical zeal into the new government. In June 1936, over 1.8 million workers struck.<sup>804</sup> The Depression was now bearing down on France. It was the largest industrial action in the Third Republic, dwarfed only by the strikes in 1968. The CGPF, the CGT, and the Popular Front entered negotiations to deal with the crisis. They agreed upon a significant set of reforms. The right to strike was legalised, collective bargaining was formed, annual leave was enacted, a 40-hour working week was introduced, wages were raised, and more.<sup>805</sup> By the beginning of 1937, Blum announced a 'pause' in the government's new program. So much had been done so swiftly. These were the heady days of the Popular Front, and socialists looked on with great hope for what it represented. One Austrian Social Democrat wrote in July 1936 that Blum needed to 'herald a new epoch in the history of Europe.'<sup>806</sup>

As the PCF and SFIO formed a pact that eventuated in one of the high points in the socialist camp in the late 1930s, within months the LSI began opening dialogue with the Comintern. Events in Spain also had an influence. In October 1934 the Radical led government invited members of the catholic conservative party to hold ministries. Fearing restoration of the Monarchy, socialists led an armed uprising in October. The

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<sup>803</sup> Quoted in Adrian Rossiter, "Popular Front Economic Policy and the Matignon Negotiations," *The historical journal* 30, no. 3 (1987): 663.

<sup>804</sup> Jackson, *The Popular Front in France: defending democracy, 1934-1938*, 85-86.

<sup>805</sup> Ibid.

<sup>806</sup> Gregor Bienstock, "Léon Blums großes Experiment," *Der Kampf*, no. 7 (1936): 274.

revolutionaries managed to seize the province of Asturias, though the military managed to quash the rebellion.

France had led the way in demonstrating the need and the desire, in both camps, for cooperation between Social Democracy and Communism. The complicating factor for the LSI was not just to conjure the wherewithal to trust the Comintern, but to come to an accommodation within its own camp. Even after far-right threats in France, and then Spain, elements of the LSI refused reconciliation with communism. People like Kautsky decried that Stalin's dictatorship was squarely directed against Social Democrats and their allies.<sup>807</sup> Nonetheless, talks took place.

On October 10, 1934, Marcel Cachin and Maurice Thorez sent a letter to Friedrich Adler. Enclosed in it was a copy of a resolution of the executive committee of the Comintern. The resolution charged Marcel Cachin to 'enter immediately into relations with the representatives of the Labour and Socialist International.'<sup>808</sup> As the letter circulated, within days discord was apparent. Amongst British members of the LSI, such a move was unthinkable. On the October 15, Labour's representative on the LSI Bureau, William Gillies, sent a note to James Middleton, the General Secretary of the Labour Party, informing him about how senior elements of the LSI were contemplating talks with the Comintern. Adler's support particularly concerned them. Gillies immediately protested upon receiving the news of the Comintern's invitation; he was a hardened anti-communist.<sup>809</sup> Gillies confronted Adler. Adler was adamant that such

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<sup>807</sup> Kautsky, "Gedanken über die Einheitsfront," 837.

<sup>808</sup> *Marcel Cachin and Maurice Thorez to Friedrich Adler, October 10, LSI/17-18, 18/1/5, 1934, People's History Museum,*

<sup>809</sup> Collette, *The International Faith: Labour's attitudes to European Socialism, 1918-39*, 6.

a meeting was impossible to refuse.<sup>810</sup> Gillies countered with 'he [Adler] had no authority to speak on behalf of the British Labour Party... I retorted that this was likely a manoeuvre to split the LSI'. Adler agreed, but given the situation and the open invitation, ignoring it was destructive. 'Refusal even to talk would make it impossible for parties in some countries.'<sup>811</sup> Obviously this was a reference to the French pact. At the same time Danish Social Democrat Alsing Andersen cabled the LSI also vehemently opposing talks.<sup>812</sup> Gillies was likely correct. The Comintern knew that their opening would sow discord. They were perfectly comfortable entering negotiations with a disunited LSI. The executive hastily met and quickly took a vote.<sup>813</sup> Adler had in fact called Gillies twice on October 10, pleading him to vote in favour but to no avail.<sup>814</sup> Denmark and Britain voted against Comintern talks while the rest voted in favour of negotiations. Interestingly the SPD representative Otto Wels abstained.<sup>815</sup> Obviously, Sopade was split on the issue. In the end the ayes had it with support from the Italians, Spanish, Belgians, Austrians, and the Mensheviks. As LSI parties feverishly cabled one and other attempting to either halt or sanction talks, the meeting went ahead. On October 15 at 6PM at the hotel Metropole in Brussels, the rival Internationals of European socialism sat down in dialogue for the first time in twelve years.

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<sup>810</sup> *To the members of the LSI Bureau, October 17 [This was a report on the voting on October 15], LSI/17-18, 18/1/22, 1934, People's History Museum,*

<sup>811</sup> *Gillies to Middleton Administrative Committee of the LSI, LSI and the Communist International, October 15, LSI/17-18, 18/1/10, 1934, People's History Museum,*

<sup>812</sup> *Alsing Anderson, Response to the Comintern question on the United Front, LSI/17-18, 18/1/5, 1934, People's History Museum,*

<sup>813</sup> The documentation of this meeting could not be found but Adler and Vandervelde interestingly explained the detail of it when they met with Cachin and Thorez on October 15. Apparently, the partial executive was meeting for other reasons and then upon receiving the Cominter's letter quickly held a vote. This is known from the footnote above.

<sup>814</sup> *Draft Note for Monthly Report of the National Council of Labour,, LSI/17-18, 18/1/11, 1934, People's History Musuem,*

<sup>815</sup> *To the members of the LSI Bureau, October 17 [This was a report on the voting on October 15], LSI/17-18.*

Four men sat opposite one and other. From the LSI was Belgium Labour leader and LSI President Emile Vandervelde, and the venerable secretary Friedrich Adler. On the Comintern's side was the editor of L'Humanité Marcel Cachin and the national secretary of the PCF Maurice Thorez. Vandervelde opened the meeting admitting that the Comintern's letter was divisive amongst the LSI. He outrightly said that while countries like France, Austria, and Spain were in favour, Britain, Holland, and the Scandinavian countries thought otherwise. The 'psychology of the parties were very different'. 'We are bound to tell you that we are not in a position here to speak in the name of the International.' Both Adler and Vandervelde confessed that while they could not formalise any arrangements, they personally were both in favour of United Front actions. Adler read out a statement which would be a provisional arrangement with the Comintern. Most of the points were regarding Spain. It called for both to engage their respective trade unions to 'prevent the transport of troops and munitions for the benefit of the Lerrox government.' There needed to be 'material assistance for Spanish workers engaged in struggle.' It called for more general cooperation regarding anti-fascist agitation, particular within France along the border to Spain.<sup>816</sup>

While such actions were in common agreement, there were icy moments too. Adler pointed out that *Pravda* had continued to attack British Labour over Spain, despite now admitting a desire for unity. This only proved that the Comintern was only interested in 'manoeuvrers.' Thorez ignored the comment and eventually outlined his 'disappointment' that there could be no formal commitments made, particular since the situation in Spain was degrading. He deliberately emphasised the Comintern's

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<sup>816</sup> *Verbatim Report: Meeting between representatives of the LSI and the Comintern, Brussels, October 15, LSI/16/2, 16/2/1, 1934, People's History Museum, The meeting was conducted in French and then the shorthand minutes was translated into English by the LSI's translations teams. Interestingly, I could not find the French copy.*

initiative at organising negotiations. Thorez exclaimed it would be a tragedy to disappoint the countless workers who were relying on a united working class. Adler pointed out that such a radical turnabout required careful deliberation, reminding Thorez and Cachin that it was only months ago that they were denouncing Social Democrats and the LSI as 'social fascists.' Thorez responded, 'We know something of your conferences too.' Everyone laughed, but the meeting was stuck in this position. The LSI was split and nothing more was possible without further deliberation. There would be a communique released after the meeting, but, for the moment, things could not progress further.<sup>817</sup>

A few weeks later the LSI's executive met but still could not reach a position. Again, the usual suspects lined up for and against United Front relations. The Bund threw in their lot for those in favour. Interestingly, the Bund was in favour despite the previous year being duped by the Comintern, who pulled out of United Front talks on the eve of signing a pact.<sup>818</sup> The only wording for a response to the Comintern's letter agreed upon summed up the LSI's position well.

We therefore obliged to conclude that under present conditions there is no possibility of reaching a general agreement of unity of action- which, moreover, you have not proposed.<sup>819</sup>

Into the next year the LSI was split. The various parties became further entrenched in their positions.

Tensions within the LSI became more fractious in 1935/36 but as the situation in Spain deteriorated, there was relative unity in material support for the Spanish Republic. The LSI executive decided to raise money to arm the beleaguered republic. In August

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<sup>817</sup> Ibid.

<sup>818</sup> *Executive Comittee, Paris, November 12-16*, Labour Party Archives: Labour and Socialist International, LSI Minutes 1921-1937, LSI Minutes 1934, 1934, People's History Museum,

<sup>819</sup> Ibid.

1936 an LSI report exposed the grave danger the republic faced. Disorganisation plagued its armed forces. There needed to be a 'miracle of organisation to avoid catastrophe.'<sup>820</sup> Italian socialist Pietro Nenni pleaded to Adler that the republic needed arms and that the LSI needed to intervene to this end.<sup>821</sup> The LSI setup a fund in June and quickly raised £305,000 by September 1936.<sup>822</sup> But when Blum declared that the Popular Front government would be neutral, Left Socialists took notice, adding further disunity to an already straining movement. In March 1937, the LSI held its last conference. It was specifically held to deal with questions over Spain, as the 1933 conference had been for the German crisis. Spanish socialists pleaded for more assistance as German and Italian arms flowed into the hands of Franco's forces. But given the deteriorating international situation, and the Third Reich's adventurism, the LSI officially adopted a position of non-intervention. The SFIO and the Labour Party pressured the movement in this direction. Emil Vandervelde, usually a moderate, decried the motion a 'deathblow' to the International.<sup>823</sup> Despite being reversed a few months later, it did demonstrate the divisiveness of the issue.<sup>824</sup>

### **Left Socialism and the Popular Front**

Left Socialism wholly embraced United Frontism. Since the formation of the Vienna International in 1919 leftists had been calling for joint action.<sup>825</sup> In 1935 the International Bureau of Revolutionary Socialist Unity met in Paris, narrowly voting

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<sup>820</sup> *Brief Report on the Mission to Spain, August*, LSI/19-20, 19/3/7, 1936, People's History Museum,

<sup>821</sup> *Pietro Nenni to Freidrich Adler, August 21*, LSI/19-20, 19/5/8, 1936, People's History Museum,

<sup>822</sup> *International Solidarity Fund for Spain, September 4*, LSI/19-20, 19/5/9, 1936, People's History Museum,

<sup>823</sup> Fenner Brockway, *Workers' Front* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1938), 28.

<sup>824</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>825</sup> This is explained in chapter 1.

against the formation of a new International.<sup>826</sup> While Left socialists formerly remained in the LSI, the lack of movement towards unity frustrated them. As Fenner Brockway pointed out,

It would be difficult to find anyone who now believes that unity can be secured in the Second International. So far from showing any promise united the workers it is becoming divided within itself.<sup>827</sup>

However, it was more sceptical of Popular Front politics. Popular Front governments, with their coalition of socialists, communist and liberals, delivered reformism. Left socialism, and its revolutionary vigour, was once again disappointed, not only by those on its right (the Social Democratic mainstream) but by communists on its left.

Shortly after the announcement of the Popular Front agreement in France in May 1936, the Bureau of Socialist Revolutionary Parties released a report sceptical of the new government. It honed its contempt for the PCF.

The Policy of the French Communist Party has been crowned with the success. As a result of giving up all ideas of revolution and all forms of propaganda in the army, and of changing their party in to a new democratic party with nationalist tendencies and a pseudo-Jacobin ideology. The French Communist Party have succeeded in forming a front stretching far into the bourgeoisie camp...The Spontaneous revolutionary movements within France have been nipped in the bud by the communist party.<sup>828</sup>

In late October 1936 the Bureau hosted its first of only two congresses. It still had not formally split from the LSI, with many of its constituent parties maintaining membership, but it was acting in clear contradiction of the Social Democratic

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<sup>826</sup> "Is a new International necessary? Revolutionary Parties of Ten countries meet in Paris," *New Leader*, February 1935, 1. This was not a congress. It was a meeting of the executive.

<sup>827</sup> Fenner Brockway, "Steps towards world workers' unity," *New Leader*, February 15 1935, 2.

<sup>828</sup> *The Situation in France: The People's Front and its effects*, The archives of the ILP . Series II, Minutes and related records (microform), 71, 1936, Bodleian Library, Brighton.

mainstream. More importantly, it doubled down on its revolutionary discourse challenging Popular Front politics. It also doubled down on its anti-militarism, opposing any kind of armaments expansion, despite the now rearming Germany. One of its resolutions called on socialists to 'refuse all national unity governments with capitalist governments and the capitalist class.'<sup>829</sup>

The key sticking point for the congress was Spain. The French Popular Front government had declared neutrality attempting to calm German nerves, and to be in line with British foreign policy. Such an act, particular when the Spanish government was of the same ilk, outraged Left socialist. It demonstrated the weakness of Popular Front politics. At the conference Fenner Brockway ventilated such grievances.

The French Government chose the alliance with the British capitalist class rather than with the Spanish Working class. It tore shreds the basis of class solidarity...The French Socialists and Communist Parties under the impression they that were strengthening resistance to fascism, agreed to enter into alliance with the Radical Socialists, a Capitalist-liberal Party...In other words, the French Socialists put their alliance with the Liberal capitalists of France before their solidarity with the Spanish working class.<sup>830</sup>

Two years later, at the Bureau's second and last congress, Brockway was harsher. 'The second and third internationals approximate even more the defence of "democratic capitalism".'<sup>831</sup> Much of Left Socialism were bitterly disappointed by the Popular Front, despite its many reforms. Its lack of revolutionary vigour would not satisfy

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<sup>829</sup> "Program of Action," in *A lead to world socialism: Report of Revolutionary Socialist Congress, Brussels, October 31 - November 2* (London: POUM, 1936).

<sup>830</sup> Fenner Brockway, "The Basis of Revolutionary Socialism," in *A lead to world socialism: Report of Revolutionary Socialist Congress, Brussels, October 31 - November 2* (London: POUM, 1936). He reiterated this position the following year. See "What's hapenning in France? Perils of the Popular Front," *New Leader*, January 5 1937.

<sup>831</sup> "The Internaitonal Working class movement and our tasks," in *A new hope for socialism: Resolutions adopted at the Revoltionary Socialist Congress, Paris, February 19-25* (London: Lonon Bureau of Revoltionary Socilaist Unity, 1938).

their demands and was an unreliable alliance against fascism. It merely upheld capitalism.

The SFIO itself suffered a formal split in 1938. Marceau Pivert, a long time leader in the SFIO's left could no longer tolerate reformist tendencies of Popular Frontism. He formed the Workers' and Peasants' Socialist Party (Parti socialiste ouvrier et paysan). The aims of the new party were overtly revolutionary, admonishing any kind of alliance with parties of capital.

Only the immediate expropriation of economic and financial oligarchies favourable to international fascism can protect our freedoms.

Only the redistribution of the sources of primary materials torn from capitalism can remove fascist social base and protect peace.

The "Revolutionary Left" proclaims its determination to remain attached under all circumstances to international socialism, to its revolutionary solutions and to the lessons of working class experience ... during which all attempts at the collaboration of the proletariat with its bourgeoisie have led to the weakening of the socialist movement, terrible defeats, and the inevitable triumph of its worst fascist enemies.<sup>832</sup>

Left socialism believed Popular Front alliances with liberals ended class struggles. France's neutrality on the Spanish civil-war was a painful example of this. There were elements of Left Socialism that did accept Popular Front politics. The SAP entered a German Popular Front committee with the SPD, KPD, and Liberals. They were vocal in their Support of the French Popular Front. The London Bureau by and large saw a great necessity for a United Front, but alliances with liberals was a bridge too far.

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<sup>832</sup> Marcea Pivert, "Down with National Unity!," 1 October 2021  
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/pivert/1938/national-unity.htm>.

## Conclusion

In the aftermath of the fall of Germany and Austria, much of the movement went through a period of intensive reflection. Revolutionary trends proliferated amid a milieu of defeat and radicalisation. Revolutionism provoked familiar arguments. It was a revisiting of the debates between Leninist conceptions of revolution versus more open and democratic forms. What was noteworthy was that large sections of the Social Democratic movement, not just from the left but elements of the centre, reformulated their views in the aftermath of the fall of the German and Austrian republics. Radicalisation was a necessary consequence in the face of fascism and the hasty destruction of organised labour. Central European Social Democrats were desperate to foment revolution against the fascist governments that exiled them. Such losses forced reconsiderations of Social Democratic politicking during the Weimar years, leading to the obvious conclusion that there needed to be an alliance with the Comintern. This placed further pressure on the international movement, where many, particularly in the more established democracies like Britain, where communist parties were small, and the threat of fascism minor, to further entrench their dedication to reformism. Some could not fathom constructive relations with communists. This went against their commitments to democratic politics. And in Labour's case, was probably electorally unwise.

While most of the 1930s were years of retreat for Social Democracy, Blum's Popular Front government was, briefly, a shining light. It proved to some at least, that anti-fascist coalitions could hold the far-right at bay whilst conducting Social Democratic reform. Nonetheless, the Spanish civil-war, and the sceptical attitudes of parties like British Labour, meant that the international movement became dysfunctional. Blum's

government adhered to diplomatic norms. They would not, officially anyway, support a fraternal government in Spain. Germany's rise provoked anxiety. The politics of both the United and Popular Fronts were fractious, and whilst many believed in their importance as defences against fascism, they were limited in their success. The Social Democratic movement through the LSI could not come to a position, and instead left it up to its constituent members to make their own decisions. While this was not as immediately destructive as 1914 was for the Second International, it was corrosive. Once again, national demarcations became fractures within an institution dedicated to internationalism.

After the fall of both Popular Front governments in France and Spain, Social Democracy went into further retreat. In the face of another European wide war, Social Democracy had to come to terms with an emerging order where democracy was in retreat and Nazi Germany threatened conquest. This is what the final chapter delves into.

# Apocalypse Rising

The central political fact of the present is the total crisis of Europe, which is threatened and exacerbated by the fascist bloc, primarily by the Third Reich. It is the crisis of total preparation for war. There is not a single secure zone in Europe that is not threatened by war or counter-revolution - or by both together. The assumption that in any European country the proletariat could live and fight quietly, in peace and freedom, is an illusion.

International socialism has never conceded, even when it stands before a European crisis of such magnitude... The big questions socialism faces are peace or war? Freedom or fascism? Socialism or capitalism?

Alexander Schifrin, 1938<sup>833</sup>

By 1937/38 Europe was hurtling towards conflagration. Hitler was pressing German power in Central Europe. Rearmament was in full swing, while the Third Reich began intensifying and codifying its anti-Semitism. A new order emerged from Germany's adventurism. The Third Reich was an aggressive power with colonial ambitions across the continent. The reconfiguring of Europe in the final interwar years accentuated reflection within Social Democracy. With the end of Blum's Popular Front government in 1938, the movement was in retreat. Social Democracy, had to now contend with this new order. Many Social Democrats had spent the better half of the decade in exile, watching organised labour lose ground. As war became inevitable many pondered how Social Democracy should react as much of their movements' lay in waste or were in opposition. This caused further radicalisation from parts of the

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<sup>833</sup> Max Werner, *Sozialismus Krieg und Europa* (Strasbourg: Sebastian-Brant, 1938), 1-2. – Werner was Schifrin's pseudonym.

movement, who, amid such polarisation, saw little need to carry on with established reformist traditions. Given the extent of the crisis, and Nazi Germany's growing confidence, the Soviet Union looked to be the only socialist bulwark against the looming threat of war. Serendipitously, some of Second International's most established intellectuals died of old age. As the international movement became dysfunctional as some of its most valued thinkers aged, the outbreak of war brought the Second International period to an end.

War was a difficult question confronting Social Democrats. Clearly, Hitler was pursuing a cumulatively more radical and expansive foreign policy. By 1938, France and Britain were rearming. The Soviet Union had been building up a massive army since 1928. Social Democracy became wedged between embracing an anti-fascist alliance therefore condoning war, or would it fall-back on its anti-militarism? Some Social Democrats indeed embraced the need for war and began thinking in geopolitical terms. They reconsidered how Social Democracy should relate to communism. Since the chasm between the two socialist camps was the cause of so much turmoil, did they need to come to ideological terms with one and other? A United Front was not enough, conceptual reconciliation was needed.

By 1939, Hitler's regime had been in power for 6 years and had carried out its own revolution from above. It had segregated its Jewish population, forcing many to emigrate. After taking Austria, the regime conducted a nationwide pogrom. The Nuremberg laws governed Germany with strict racialised regulation. Social Democrats continued to theorise Nazism, following movements of the regime closely.

Six themes divide the chapter. The opening section highlights Germany's growing aggression on the Continent. Hitler's ambition for Germany and the expansion of Nazism into other parts of Europe was a major concern for Social Democracy. The

second theme deals with how socialists reflected on the crisis of democracy and socialism. The third theme investigates the emerging theories and ideas of fascism. Given fascism was now cemented in Germany, Austria, and Italy, socialists had the space to further develop their theories. The fourth theme discusses Social Democratic reactions to the drift to war. Social Democracy was again confronted with a looming conflict. What were the contours of debates on war and peace? The fifth theme expands on Social Democratic attitudes towards the Soviet Union. Given the extent of socialist retreat, many sort to bridge the divide between Europe's two main forms of socialism. Finally, the chapter outlines how the outbreak of the World War Two marked the formal end of Second International Socialism.

### **Hegemony Contested**

By the end of 1935 the Third Reich had segregated its tiny Jewish population, avowed rearmament and reintroduced conscription (something the Versailles Treaty forbade) and grabbed hold of the Saar. With Germany now off the Gold Standard, and Hitler's eye towards rearmament to reposition Germany as a European hegemon, the economy was picking up. While the uptick began in the last years of Weimar, the new regime continued and expanded vast public spending schemes. Between 1933-34 public investment doubled. There were employment schemes, industrial, and construction projects. In 1935 public spending rose by another 60 percent. Sustained public expenditure clawed Germany back from the economic brink. Growth did not fill the pockets of the working class. With the destruction of labour unions and the extreme authoritarianism of the government, wages were easily kept low. Consumers

suffered since goods were scarce and of low quality. Industrial expansion came first. Rearmament was the ultimate priority.<sup>834</sup>

From the 1935 onwards rearmament went into full swing. Military projects replaced civilian employment initiatives. From 1935 to 1938, military spending accounted for 47 percent of the total national output. Of all the goods and services purchased by the German state, the Wehrmacht consumed 70 percent, in 1938 it was 80 percent.<sup>835</sup> In 1934 4.2 billion Reichmarks was spent on the military, it rose to between 5 and 6 billion the year after.<sup>836</sup> Germany was raising new divisions, expanding its tank-park, rebuilding its navy with new ships and submarines, and enlarging its air force.<sup>837</sup> In 1936, Hitler ordered a new generation of all-metal aircraft. France and Britain took notice. In 1935 France lengthened its conscription by two years and Britain began a major rework of its defence policy.<sup>838</sup>

In 1936 Hitler's desire for European hegemony became apparent. In March, 3000 German troops marched into the Rhineland. The French government anxious about the upcoming election (which it was about to lose) chose to withhold a counteraction. In clear violation of the Versailles Treaty, Germany remilitarised the Rhineland. After another bogus plebiscite, it became official. The move profoundly changed the dynamics of geopolitics in Europe, and for the regime.<sup>839</sup> Hitler became further

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<sup>834</sup> Clavin, *The Great Depression*, 177-179.

<sup>835</sup> Adam Tooze, *The wages of destruction: The making and breaking of the Nazi economy* (London: Penguin, 2007), 206-207.

<sup>836</sup> *Ibid.*, 208-209.

<sup>837</sup> It is important to note that at this point the actual tanks being produced were not of high equality. The Mark I and II were light tanks armed only with machine guns. The more battle-hardy Marc III and IV were not planned for production till at least 1938. France built more medium and heavy tanks by this time.

<sup>838</sup> Tooze, *wages of destruction*, 207.

<sup>839</sup> Evans, *The Third Reich in Power*, 637-639.

emboldened by his exploits and by the European powers' inaction. The Spanish civil war was Hitler's next gambit. Soon after the election of the Popular Front government and the subsequent officers' rebellion Hitler and Mussolini decided to aid the rebels. Both officials and businessman pressed Hitler to act. But he had his own reasons for doing so. The Popular Front was yet another example of Judeo-Bolshevism asserting itself.<sup>840</sup> By June/July German troops, armour and aircraft were supporting Franco's nationalist forces. Germany's Condor Legion honed German military tactics. Particularly prophetic of Germany brutality was the infamous bombing of Guernica. Bombing civilians became common practice in the war-to-come. German power was getting a decent work out in tiding for the now inevitable larger conflict. In October 1936, Germany and Italy signed the Italo-German protocol, and Germany and Japan signed the Anti-Comintern Pact (Italy joined a year later).<sup>841</sup> Western European hegemony (mainly France, and Britain), along with its imperial holdings in the Pacific was being countered. Soviet power was also clearly being threatened.

By the beginning of 1937 France and Britain resigned themselves to German expansion into Central and South-Eastern Europe. They knew Austria was square in its sights.<sup>842</sup> In early 1938, Germany began pressuring the Austro-fascist regime. Kurt Schuschnigg, Dolfuss's successor, attempted to avoid German invasion by calling for a plebiscite on Austrian independence. German officials demanded Schuschnigg postpone the plebiscite and resign his position. They wanted the Austrian Nazi Arthur Seyss-Inquart to replace him. Schuschnigg accepted postponement of the plebiscite but refused to resign. Hitler sent Schuschnigg an ultimatum which he rebuked. But

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<sup>840</sup> Tooze, *wages of destruction*, 206.

<sup>841</sup> For a Marxist analysis of this see Wilhelm Schlosser, "Der Führer, der Duce und die Samurai," *Der Kampf*, no. 10 (1937): 374-377.

<sup>842</sup> Zara Steiner, *The Triumph of the Dark: European International History 1933-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 361-362.

upon appealing to London in a futile effort for support, he resigned. However, he refused to appoint Seyss-Inquart. Schuschnigg announced that Austria would offer no resistance to annexation. On March 12, German troops entered Austria. A day before local Austrian Nazis rampaged through the streets of towns and cities. German troops were warmly welcomed, and on March 13 the Austrian military swore allegiance to Hitler. Anschluss was complete.<sup>843</sup> In September 1938, Germany annexed the Sudetenland and obtained the infamous Munich Agreement with Chamberlain. Germany took the rest of Czechoslovakia in March 1939. Germany had established itself as the burgeoning Hegemon in central Europe. But it was not the only country intensely rearming.

The Soviet Union began rearming in earnest in the late 1920s. As discussed previously, Stalin's revolution from above intended to hastily modernise Russia's economy, but also to rapidly expand its military. War with the capitalist West was thought to be inevitable. From 1926/27 to 1935 gross production of arms supplies increased by 32 percent.<sup>844</sup> But this was not enough, in 1934 the army wanted more investment, no doubt in response to the recently formed Third Reich. In 1939-41, on the eve of Operation Barbarossa, the Soviet Union had produced more planes, tanks, and had a larger army. It had 25,000 tanks, 18,000 fighter planes; three to four times the amount the Wehrmacht had amassed.<sup>845</sup>

Such a material assessment of the situation seems noteworthy of a different study. But Social Democrats noted these assessments. They may not have had access to Soviet

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<sup>843</sup> Ibid., 552-554.

<sup>844</sup> R. W. Davies, *The Years of Progress: The Soviet Economy, 1934-1936* (London: Palgrave, 2014), 77.

<sup>845</sup> Kotkin, *Stalin: Waiting for Hitler, 1929-1941*, 999. – Soviet tank production had been expanded in 1930 and many of their tanks were light tanks of lesser design than the latest German tanks. Nonetheless, tank production far outpaced Germany.

archives and top-secret documents now available to historians, nonetheless they followed Stalin's industrialisation closely. It was clear the Soviet Union had been rearming as a part of its industrialisation drive and became a key component of Social Democratic geopolitical thinking; particularly when trying to carve a pathway to the destruction of Nazi Germany. Germany's push for European hegemony amid Social Democratic retreat was a central concern for the movement Nazism had set out to eradicate. The rise of Germany hegemony evidenced a wider crisis of democracy.

### Democracy in crisis

As discussed in the opening chapter, socialists celebrated the spread of democracy after WW1. Such expectations fell well short, and in the late interwar years democracy was in retreat. British Socialist Ivor Thomas thought the general collapse in liberalism would benefit socialist parties. 'The Labour Party comes not to destroy, but to fulfill, the liberal creed which is now passing.'<sup>846</sup> While Thomas was weighing in on the fall of liberalism in the British context, Central and Western European socialists could not be so sanguine. The collapse of democracy corresponded with the collapse of proletarian power. As Bauer announced in 1935, 'the destruction of labour movements in many counties is now complete.'<sup>847</sup>

As early as 1933, Laski lamented how the crisis of capitalism quickly became a crisis of democracy. Watching abroad as Central Europe descended into authoritarian quagmire, Laski warned of the dangerous road ahead. The extent of the crises was

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<sup>846</sup> Ivor Thomas, "The Collape of Liberalism," in *New trends in socialism*, ed. C. E. G. Catlin (London: Dickson & Thompson, 1935), 16-17.

<sup>847</sup> Otto Bauer, "Triumph des Kapitalismus?," *Der Kampf*, no. 1 (1935): 1.

civilisational in scope. Laski, rightly, described grim and 'profound disillusionment in art, literature, and music.' 'The foundations of our civilisation are subject to criticism more thoroughgoing than in any other period since Rousseau.' The central problem Laski pointed to was the corrosive nature of the 'liberal state'. Liberalism promised an age of untapped freedom, more so than any 'previous social order.' The reality was that liberalism merely 'exchanged one privileged class for another.'<sup>848</sup> Men of capital replaced aristocracy. The disconnect between political freedom and the emancipation from material want was a contradiction that the Depression laid bare. The right-wing Christian Social Democrat Eduard Heimann, looking back in 1938 came to similar conclusions. Persistent crises and unemployment punctuated the era of industrialised capitalism. The liberal capitalist structure was 'rigid' and had 'critically awaken' the working masses operating the machines of capital. 'Capitalistic democracy' had failed to solve this disjuncture.<sup>849</sup>

In 1936, Otto Bauer published his last, and perhaps his most underrated, large work *Zwischen zewi Weltkriegen? Die Krise der Weltwirtschaft, der Demokratie und des Sozialismus*. The book covered the entire interwar period up until 1936, focusing on the fall of democracy and alternative paths for socialism amid defeat. It ultimately explored how Social Democrats should react to the looming war with fascism. I draw on it extensively in this chapter. Bauer dedicated close to 150 pages on the crisis of democracy, beginning his analysis from 1918. He outlined that the dialectical struggle between labour and capital intensified after the end of World War One. As reformist socialism made considerable inroads in the 'nutrient soil' of democracy, with higher wages, better hours and expanded social policies, capital brought to bear more

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<sup>848</sup> Harold J. Laski, *Democracy in Crisis* (London: George & Allen, 1933), 62.

<sup>849</sup> Eduard Heimann, "Building our Democracy," *Social Research* 6, no. 4 (1939): 445-446.

pressure on the working class. The depressed economics of the 1920s and 30s made this worse.

In the severe economic crises that followed the world war, the achievements of reformist socialism appeared to the capitalist classes as obstacles to the 'normal' determined movements of the rate of profit. Capital became determined to revoke concession made to the working class... democratic institutions made this difficult.<sup>850</sup>

At first capital responded by technical efficiency attempting to drive down labour costs, increasing the rate of profit up. This caused further economic instability. Finally, when there was a total economic meltdown in the early 1930s, capital aligned itself with fascism to assure organised labour could not gain such power again. Capital used fascism, not to quash revolution, but to subdue reformist socialism.

While 'fascists liked to justify themselves to the bourgeoisie by saying that it saved them from "Bolshevism"... The capitalists and landowners did not hand over state power to fascists to protect themselves from proletarian revolution. They did so for the purpose of lowering wages; to destroy the social achievements of the working class, to shatter the unions and the political of power of the working class; not to suppress a revolutionary socialism, but to smash the achievements of reformist socialism.<sup>851</sup>

Ellen Wilkinson, Labour politician and radical thinker, saw the crisis as being firmly planted in the growth of the middle classes. 'The pioneers of socialist thought seem to us to have lived in a simpler age. Then there were the triumphant big capitalists... facing them were the masses of workers.' The middle class professionals were a small subset whom Marx thought would fade away within the struggle between workers and capital. 'In our chaotic time we see a middle class extending instead of narrowing... we have seen it realize its organising powers as a class.' These

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<sup>850</sup> Otto Bauer, *Zwischen zwei Weltkriegen? Die Krise der Weltwirtschaft, der Demokratie und des Sozialismus* (Bratislava: Prager, 1936), 127.

<sup>851</sup> *Ibid.*, 126.

'organising powers' Wilkinson referred to the fascist takeovers in Italy and Germany. The central problem for socialists, Wilkinson outlined, was how it needed to deal with a reactionary middle class who were far larger than expected. The only way to confront the crisis of democracy was to confront a newly class-conscious professional middle class.<sup>852</sup> The new and numerous middle classes required deradicalisation away from fascism.<sup>853</sup>

### Fascism Cemented

By the end of the interwar period socialists had more than half a decade to deliberate on fascism. Materialistic explanations of fascism continued. Social Democrats reflected on the reformation of class politics in the wake of economic upheavals. Socialist took particularly note of rearmament. The political economy of rearmament ostensibly confirmed suspicions about linkages between fascism and capital's profit margins. Many like Emil Lederer, thought that the drive to produce new and numerous arms was 'financed entirely by the far-reaching exploitation of workers.'<sup>854</sup>

In 1935 Richard Löwenthal wrote that the fascist state was a peculiar 'special historical form of the bourgeois state.' On the one hand the social basis for fascist regimes was the same as other forms of bourgeois rule; the middle classes. However, the manner of which this manifested was different and obviously authoritarian. In Löwenthal's

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<sup>852</sup> Ellen Wilkinson, "Socialism and the problem of the middle classes," in *New trends in socialism*, ed. C. E. G. Catlin (London: Dickson & Thompson, 1935), 203-217.

<sup>853</sup> Laura Beers expands upon the primary source above, rightly arguing that Wilkinson was trying to pressure the Labour party into offering these middle classes appeals to vote for it. See Laura Beers, *Red Ellen: the life of Ellen Wilkinson, Socialist, Feminist, Internationalist* (London: Harvard University Press, 2016), 319.

<sup>854</sup> Emil Lederer, "Who pays for German Armament?," *Social Research* 5, no. 1 (1938): 70.

dialectical style, he thought there was a contradiction between a social base that at once supported authoritarian rule, but in the recent past accepted more democratic forms of government. This could be exploited. This 'special contradiction was the starting point of revolutionary anti-fascist politics.' He thought that fascist regimes were well aware of these contradictions and sort to pacify them. Fascists governments tended to 'subordinate all its forces to the imperialist goal of increased war capability.' Fascist regimes pursued autarkic politics to this end; including reorganising the entire economy for rearmament. Through this process the rate of exploitation substantially increased further squeezing workers. Both the regime and capital hoped to make as much profit (and arms) as possible. 'Both the domestic and foreign policy of fascism is the planned, concentrated, and ruthless violence, because this is its only chance.'<sup>855</sup> The regime had to continuously counterbalance gaping contradictions to stave off revolt or societal breakdown. Similarly, Alexander Schifrin thought Germany's drive for war was to alleviate the internal contradictions of German capitalism. The Third Reich 'fled to war' for the 'preservation of sick capitalism... and from fears of revolution.'<sup>856</sup>

Like so many socialists, Löwenthal and Schifrin mistook fascist foreign policy as serving a self-sustaining political end; the survival of the regime in cahoots with capital's expansion and exploitation through rearmament. It was a schemata of classical Marxian political economy. Imperial expansion would enlarge capital's access to markets warding off a crisis of accumulation.<sup>857</sup> While German capital did

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<sup>855</sup> Sering, "Der Faschismus," 839-856. Löwenthal used Sering as a pseudonym.

<sup>856</sup> Werner, *Sozialismus Krieg und Europa*, 37-38.

<sup>857</sup> Some socialists became interested in the exploitation of workers in Germany's rearmament program. Exiled social democrat economist and sociologist dedicated sometime on the matter. See Lederer, "Who pays for German Armament?," 70-83.

generously profit from rearmament,<sup>858</sup> it was not the fundamental driver of Nazi foreign policy. This was the same mistake that many made with anti-Semitism. They failed to consider war as an intrinsic ideological component wholly separate from the profit motive. Hitler in particular saw war as the path to national salvation and as a critical element of the 'race war' against 'Judeo-Bolshevism.'<sup>859</sup> War was an ideological tenant of fascism; Nazism refracted it through its racial lens.

Bauer continued to draw upon his notion of class equilibrium to explain the success and weaknesses of fascist regimes. He began his analysis with Social Democracy's institutionalisation after the Great War. In the midst of economic turmoil, Bauer argued that Social Democracy tended to stand in the way of the bourgeoisie's thirst for intensifying the rate of exploitation via deflationary policies.<sup>860</sup> Social Democracy's looming threat over halting deflation however exposed the fragility of class relations. While reformist socialism was strong enough to frustrated deflation, violence was needed to break Social Democracy's influence over democratic systems. But social democracy was unable to defend itself from such violence. When it did so, it exposed itself as a conservatising force defending a system that the masses saw as driving them into poverty. In Bauer's view fascism exposed this contradiction. As revolutionary attitudes abounded in such an environment, fascism filled this fissure. Social Democracy, ironically, was unable to take advantage of the revolutionary situation the Depression had created.

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<sup>858</sup> Jacques R. Pauwels, *Big Business and Hitler*, trans. Raymond Dugan (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company, 2017), Chapter 6. Pauwels rightly argues that big business was also all too happy with the repression of Social Democracy and communism.

<sup>859</sup> Paul Hanebrink, *A Specter Haunting Europe: The myth of Judeo-Bolshevism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018), 84.

<sup>860</sup> This is an interesting argument since the established narrative is that Social Democracy while was not supportive of deflation, did not exactly oppose it either. Many in the mainstream saw little alternative to the course of deflation, or at least a less intense version of it. See Chapters 3 and 4.

... holding fast to democracy as the position which provides its chief source of strength, it appears to the broad masses of the petty-bourgeois, peasant, and proletarian strata as an 'establishment party', as participant and beneficiary of that very bourgeois democracy which is unable to protect them from the impoverishment brought about by the economic crisis. It is consequently unable to attract the masses who have become revolutionised by the crisis, and who flock instead to its deadly enemy, fascism. The result of this balance of forces, or rather of the weakness of both classes, is the triumph of fascism, which serves the capitalists by crushing the working class, and yet, despite being in their pay, so far outgrows them that they cannot help making it the undisputed master over the whole people, themselves included.<sup>861</sup>

While fascism exploited the weaknesses of both classes, once the dictatorship established itself antagonistic class relations resumed. Bauer thought that in the short-term capital subordinated itself to the new dictatorial regime. Soon however, capital would make its mark, and the fascist state, despite its all-encompassing violence and its need for submission 'becomes unavoidably the executive organ of the needs, the interests of that same class.' As in the previous liberal order, capital would clasp its hands on the fascist state. Much like Löwenthal, Bauer saw rearmament as a return on capital's initial investment in throwing its support behind fascism, particularly in the case of Germany. And as Löwenthal and others suspected, the process of rearmament ruthlessly exploited the working classes, particularly now that trade unions were prohibited. The rate of exploitation would increase without the usual working class backlash this would entail.

One of the most substantive works on fascism published after 1933 was *Why Fascism* (1934). Written by Ellen Wilkinson and the exiled German socialist academic Edward Conze, it took aim at rigid Marxist interpretations of fascism.

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<sup>861</sup> Bauer, *Zwischen zwei Weltkriegen?*, 128-129.

To earnest believers in the class-war theory a Fascist Party is simply a monstrosity. So incompatible are the sections which compose it, so obviously in conflict are their economic interests, that such a collection ought not to exist as a party. But it does exist.

According to Wilkinson and Conze fascism was the product of epochal transition. Like the passage from feudalism to capitalism, the transition was now from an 'individualistic' society to a 'collective' society. Fascism was a reactionary outcome of the crisis of capitalism. Wilkinson and Conze pointed to Stalin's Russia as a socialist response to the crisis. They coined this 'socialist reconstruction.' In a similar vein this was happening in Germany but under a different ideological guise. Germany, like Roosevelt's New Deal, was undertaking 'planned capitalism.' Fascism was a 'unity of contradictions' attempting to solve the economic crisis. Fascism attempted a tightrope between preserving elements of capitalism without the chaos market forces wreaked. 'Fascism united tendencies to preserve capitalism with tendencies to destroy capitalism.' But this was not an entirety uniform rule that defined every fascist state. The argument was more nuanced. Anti-capitalists' inclinations tended to occur in more industrial countries where fascism existed in. So accordingly, the Third Reich, the most advanced fascist state was also the most anti-capitalist. They then fell back on a reductionist Marxian explanation. Since the rate of profit was no longer viable, fascism had to expand markets in an imperialist fashion. Fascism was able to win over workers since it guaranteed them employment and larger salaries; by 'offering them socialism.' Simultaneously, it preserved the economic order which actually 'paid their wages.' In this sense they could accomplish what the SPD could not. Nazism could guarantee high living standards and the preservation of the economic order. During Weimar, the SPD could only give workers higher wages at the expense of capital's profits, which came back to bite them. While the Left were 'willing to destroy capitalism...Communism and Social Democracy were unable to convince workers

they could run industry themselves.’<sup>862</sup> In Laura Beers biography of Wilkinson, Beers writes the book was a damning account of the failure of the SPD and the KPD to capture the ‘imagination of the working class.’<sup>863</sup>

In September 1935 the Third Reich enacted the Nuremberg Laws. The laws forbade Jews from marrying or pursuing sexual relations with non-Jews. Jews were also stripped of their citizenship being made stateless in their own home. The laws were a new phase in the increasing racialisation of anti-Semitism in German life. Soon after, British socialist and publisher Victor Gollancz published a damning account of Nazi anti-Semitism. It did not fall into the materialist trap made by many socialists. It took Nazi racism as an important aspect unto itself. Gollancz opened the book with a stark warning to many who viewed anti-Semitism in Germany as but a passing trait of a regime wanting to cement itself.

Until quite recently, many well-meaning people both in Germany and outside it believed that the persecution of Jews in the Third Reich was only a sort of cataclysm that might temporarily cause great hardship to individual Jews, but which was bound to pass in time. In all countries there were optimists who hoped for and expected a gradual tolerance, the attainment of some, if an inferior, form of equilibrium... It was the decrees which were unanimously passed by the Reichstag on 15th September, 1935, which finally dispelled this illusion.<sup>864</sup>

Gollancz’s book went on to outline the various ways the regime had segregated its Jewish populations, barring them from the economy. He made special mention of the extensive concentration camp system that had emerged. Jews were amongst the most numerous of the inmates and were particularly targeted for more deplorable treatment, all along ‘racial grounds.’ He had gathered detailed anecdotes of these crimes and made sure to painstakingly describe them. He also included the various

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<sup>862</sup> Ellen Wilkinson and Edward Conze, *Why Fascism?* (London: Selwyn & Blount, 1934), 70-77.

<sup>863</sup> Beers, *Red Ellen*, 294-295.

<sup>864</sup> Victor Gollancz, *The Yellow Spot: the outlawing of a half million human beings* (London: Victor Gollancz LTD, 1936), 15.

racial laws, translated into English, making sure the reader knew that anti-Semitism was now a legally binding extension of Nazi governance. He made particular note of crimes committed at the Dachau concentration camp.<sup>865</sup> After the outbreak of war, Gollancz campaigned and raised public awareness of the Nazi genocide. In late 1942 he penned a short but powerful pamphlet outlining the genocide of Jews. He went into detail about the death camps the Third Reich had constructed, and the manner of which they operated. Gollancz had in effect openly warned and detailed the Holocaust in real time.<sup>866</sup>

### War and Peace

By 1937/38 a major conflict was upon Europe with Germany as its catalyst. Of course, the contours of the war were unknown, but Hitler's colonial and imperial ambitions were clear to see. As Alexander Schifrin artfully penned,

German Fascism demands colonisation areas in a subjugated Eastern Europe, the creation of a German Fascist Empire in Central and South-East Europe, and a successful war of revenge for the establishment of German hegemony in Western Europe.<sup>867</sup>

At the core of Nazi ideology was the racial necessity for war. War was the only way the Aryan master race was going to reclaim its mantle in the race-struggle. Nazi world view conflated racial and ideological struggle. The destruction of Judeo-Bolshevism and Jewish capitalism was essential.<sup>868</sup> Nazism's thirst for war was obviously anti-

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<sup>865</sup> Ibid.

<sup>866</sup> See Victor Gollancz, *Let my people go: some practical proposals for dealing with Hitler's Massacre of the Jews and an appeal to the British Public* (London: Victor Gollancz LTD, 1943).

<sup>867</sup> Max Werner, *The Military Strength of the powers*, trans. Edward Fitzgerald (London: Gollancz, 1939), 169. – Schifrin's psydyoynm

<sup>868</sup> Hitler conflated both communism and capitalism as a singular Jewish threat. He particularly regarded American capitalism as being pervaded by Jewish control. See Tooze, *wages of destruction*, 658.

Semitic, but also deeply anti-Marxist and anti-Socialist. The destruction of Marxism was one of the primary goals of the Third Reich, both in its domestic and foreign policies. Schifrin continued decrying that 'German fascism organises European counter-revolution...not all reactionary regimes join the German-fascist coalition, but only counter revolutionary regimes become allies of the Third Reich.'<sup>869</sup> Hitler had made no qualms about his expansionist vision. Rudolf Breitscheid was precise in stating Hitler's ambitions for German foreign policy had 'remained unchanged since he wrote *Mein Kampf* ten years ago.'<sup>870</sup> Social Democrats understood war with Germany was going to be a totalising affair. As Emil Lederer pointed out in 1938/39, a Nazi victory would mean a 'new age of slavery.'<sup>871</sup> Convincing all Social Democrats to accept war against Germany as the only way forward was another matter.

How did Social Democracy react to the drift to war? Socialists understood the threat fascism posed to European civilisation, and more specifically to socialism. Social Democracy's attachment to anti-militarism and anti-imperialism coupled with its determined anti-fascism posed a complex quandary. Would Germany's imperialism, and its open threat to democratic Europe necessitate an aggressive posturing by Social Democracy, abandoning its anti-militarism? The fall of Blum's Popular Front government in 1938 complicated this. Henceforth, parties of the right governed all major European powers. Social Democracy viewed these governments' anti-German foreign policies as imperialistic, only having capital's interest at heart. Could Social Democracy support rearmament if they had to place faith in anti-worker governments? Social Democratic thinkers had to devise uneasy and at times

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<sup>869</sup> Werner, *Sozialismus Krieg und Europa*, 38-39.

<sup>870</sup> Rudolf Breitscheid, "Hitler und Europa," *Zeitschrift für Sozialismus* 3, no. 28 (1936): 889-896.

<sup>871</sup> Emil Lederer, "Ende der Klassengesellschaft? Zur Analyse des Faschismus (1938/39)," in *Kapitalismus, Klassenstruktur und Probleme der Demokratie in Deutschland 1910 - 1940* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1979), 252.

convoluted positions to justify aggressive stances towards fascism. They rejected the so-called imperialism of right-leaning governments, placating the movement's anti-militarism, all while calling for an anti-Fascist alliance. Adding to the fractures the international movement was already buckling under, Left Socialism rejected all forms of militarism.

Shortly after his leadership of the Labour Party, George Lansbury, a committed pacifist, published *My Quest for Peace* in 1936. Lansbury starkly recapitulated his pacifist stance. He retold his encounters with German officials when he visited the Third Reich. He met Hitler and admitted the chaotic and violent nature of the regime. While he deplored its anti-Semitism, he was also nonchalant about the New Germany too.

The Nazi salute has taken the place of the old fashioned military salute, and instead of long live Kaiser, they say Heil Hitler... it is extraordinary how easily the people appear to have settled down and accepted the new order of things... It is true there is a tremendous system of control... When we acquired about this we in turn were asked if we knew of any revolutionary period when such things did not happen.<sup>872</sup>

Lansbury was all too clear by the end of the book what he thought. Averting another European war was fundamental. This meant accommodation with the Third Reich. However, he did make note that the Third Reich's rejection of the Versailles treaty spelt danger beyond rearmament. Lansbury's pacifism was extreme but did represent an element of socialist thinking. It would be difficult for some to remove themselves from socialism's anti-militarist past.

Rudolf Hilferding, a socialist in exile looked to Lansbury with dismay. Though he agreed with him about Versailles, Hilferding tried to push Social Democrats into

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<sup>872</sup> George Lansbury, *My Quest for Peace* (London: Michael Joseph, 1936), 133.

embracing an anti-fascist alliance. German rearmament needed serious consideration. He pointed to the formation of new divisions and the expansion of its air force as sobering signs. More importantly, rearmament characterised how Nazi ideology dictated Germany's foreign policy. Germany expansion was a near total 'ideological victory' for the regime. Hilferding thought that the Western powers had failed to contain Germany diplomatically. Hitler did not need to worry about any ramifications of his rearmament efforts. 'Diplomacy without power is leading Europe to the abyss.'<sup>873</sup> The decay of the League enfeebled fortifications against fascism. Hilferding feared the hollowing of the League of Nations, and the lack of unity between France and Britain during the Abyssinia crisis presaged danger. Britain's threat of sanctions against Italy was never going to work since France was unsupportive. 'The future of the working class can only be saved if the two great democracies work together'.<sup>874</sup>

Clement Attlee, after taking leadership of the Labour Party in 1935 penned a semi-autobiographical account of his own history in the British labour movement. Attlee was all too aware of the pacifist element of the Labour Party; many came from ethical socialist traditions. Attlee rejected pacifism. While socialists had to rebuff all forms of imperialism, the defence of Britain and the empire 'whatever is complexion' was the 'duty of any government.' Attlee clearly wanted a reconfigured empire but for the moment, and given the situation, the defence of Britain and democracy was chief. While unwritten, Germany's rearmament hung at every turn of the page of the foreign policy chapter.<sup>875</sup>

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<sup>873</sup> Richard Kern, "Macht ohne Diplomatie - Diplomatie ohne Macht," *Zeitschrift für Sozialismus* 2, no. 19 (1935): 584-604.

<sup>874</sup> "Das Ende der Völkerbundspolitik," *Zeitschrift für Sozialismus* 2, no. 20/21 (1935): 637.

<sup>875</sup> C. R. Attlee, *The Labour Party in Perspective* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1937).

In 1935 some of the LSI's most senior leaders wrote a pamphlet outlining what the position of the International should be. Otto Bauer, Theodor Dan, and Jean Zymromski penned *Die International und die Krieg*. Adler's foreword read the 'Dan-Bauer-Zymromski thesis is an attempt to bind all socialist parties to utilise the war crisis moment for a proletarian revolution.'<sup>876</sup> The reality was that the pamphlet's call for revolution was ambiguous, though Bauer did recapitulate this argument a year later. The pamphlet was attempting to drag the International into supporting an anti-fascist alliance with capitalist governments. Firstly, the International had to do everything in its power to avoid a 1914 debacle. The movement was not to be 'taken by surprise and thus be driven into a hast, ill-considered attitude.' The second point was its most important.

The victory of National Fascism in Germany, and the elevation of the Soviet Union and the agreement concluded between her and certain countries have completely modified the situation. The International must, in time, free itself from the traditional opinions which are no longer accordance with the reality of the situation.

For some, the new reality was a bitter pill to swallow. It meant an acceptance of right-wing governments that were traditionally anti-labour. The movement's anti-war posture required reappraisal. Most controversially, the Soviet Union was going to be a central ally in the fight against fascism. More than that, its position as Europe's most powerful socialist government was important in promoting working class interests. 'The situation was most unlike 1914 where the two camps were imperialist and capitalist.' If Nazi Germany was going to face off with the Soviet Union, 'the International must stand against Germany and its allies.' The pamphlet went even further, calling for a 'revolutionary' defence of the Soviet Union. Social Democracy

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<sup>876</sup> Thoedor Dan Otto Bauer, Jean Zyromski, *Die International und die Krieg*, LSI Archives, ARCH01368.1184, 1184/1-42, 1935, IISH, - Forwarded by Friedrich Adler

was to 'subordinate their claims for fighting for the interest of the working class.'<sup>877</sup> If Germany defeated the USSR, its vast territory would 'fall pretty to the blood thirsty counter-revolution.' Most strikingly, it outlined the strength and success of socialism within Russia. The Soviet Union's drive to industrialise and nationalise necessitated emulation in the coming revolutions after Germany's defeat. The 'evolution of the Soviet Union would create a model of a socialist society... greatly enhancing socialist ideas all around the world.'<sup>878</sup>

The pamphlet called for cooperation with capitalist governments in the fight against fascism. All at once it wanted socialists to support capitalist governments against fascism but also warned that at any given moment such governments could turn on workers. There was to be no illusions of their imperialism either. 'In the course of events we may indeed be forced to turn also against these government and mobilise the masses against them.' Finally, the pamphlet concluded that once Nazism fell, capitalist countries would seek to 'enslave and plunder Germany... our aim was for revolution.' The defeat of Nazism would supposedly open the way for a socialist revolution, just as the collapse of the front in 1918 heralded the end of Wilhelmian Germany.<sup>879</sup> While Social Democracy desired socialist revolution in Germany, there needed to be some serious strategic considerations for socialists. None of them, apart from the Soviet Union, had access to a modern fighting force.<sup>880</sup>

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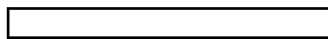
<sup>877</sup> Ibid. It should be noted that there was a paragraph dedicated to the need for the self-determination of nations within the Soviet Union, but reminded Social Democratic parties that such calls were to be put on hold in the interests of unity against fascism.

<sup>878</sup> Ibid.

<sup>879</sup> Ibid.

<sup>880</sup> Also see Theodor Dan, "Nochmals: Krieg und Sozialismus," *Der Kampf*, no. 6 (1937).

Left socialism was adamantly against both fascist and capitalist imperialism. Fenner Brockway did not conceive of the coming conflict as a war between democracy and fascism. Both sides were imperialistic and relied on working class exploitation for their own ruling classes' and expansionist ends. Civil liberties may have existed in Britain, but in its empire were 'half-starved peasants and coolies' or 'sweated workers in mills and factories.' The British empire allowed British capital to export brutal labour conditions to overseas holdings, eliding the true form of capitalist cruelty. The system, in Brockway's mind, was little better than the fascist one. Fascism was merely more overt in its exploitation.<sup>881</sup> And while German and Japanese imperialism threatened the Soviet Union, the Soviet Union had to be just as wary of British imperialism.<sup>882</sup>



In February 1938 the Left Socialist London Bureau convened for the last time. Disappointed by the Popular Front and the LSI, it chartered a course rejecting militarism and imperialism altogether. It directed its constituent parties to 'expose and fight against every open or hidden defence of imperialists domination... this applies to both the Second International and the Communist International.' It implored socialists to expose domination in all forms of colonialism across all empires. The resolution concluded with eviscerating the Popular Front, since its 'inevitable consequence was the betrayal of the struggle against colonialism.'<sup>883</sup> The conference

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<sup>881</sup> The ILP saw itself as the party of peace and Labour as the party of war. See "Is Labour a war party?" *New Leader*, April 10 1936, 1.

<sup>882</sup> Fenner Brockway, "Should we make war on Germany?," *New Leader*, September 24 1937, 2.

<sup>883</sup> "Resolution V," in *A new hope for socialism: Resolutions adopted at the Revolutionary Socialist Congress, Paris, February 19-25* (London: Lonon Bureau of Revoltionary Socialist Unity, 1938). Also see "Resolution on Soviet Russia," in *A new hope for socialism: Resolutions adopted at the Revoltionary Socialist Congress, Paris, February 19-25* (London: Lonon Bureau of Revoltionary Socilaist Unity, 1938). – The conference denounced the repression by the 'Stalinist bureaucracy.' This is an interesting note since the resolution went further in denouncing the crimes of the Soviet Union more than any other LSI resolution ever did.

also passed a particularly scathing resolution on Russia. It denounced the Soviet Union's alliances with capitalist government, and that the Comintern had become a tool of Russian foreign policy (on this they were of course correct). Franz, a German socialist, argued that it was necessary to 'fight stronger against Stalinist policy, and thus withhold working-class support from Stalin.'<sup>884</sup>

Left Socialism by this point had become contrary to both the LSI and the Comintern camps. The main enemy was not fascism per se, but imperialism. Imperialism was a universal phenomenon produced by the capitalist world system. Left socialism made no distinction between fascist, Communist, or more traditional moulds of empire. Richard Löwenthal, the author of Miles pamphlet simply wrote in 1939 that 'imperialism is the politics of the modern bourgeoisie.'<sup>885</sup> The aim of fascism was to conquer as much ground as possible, snuffing out democracy and organised labour wherever it could reach.<sup>886</sup> The aim of western powers was to prevent working class revolution after the overthrow of fascism, supporting reactionary forces for the new regimes.<sup>887</sup> The capitalist crisis had produced a desperate international scene. When Brockway opened the congress, he said that

we are living through a period of capitalist decay, which is seen in a succession of crises... the constant danger of war hangs over the whole world... These demonstrate the correctness of Marx's prophecies when he said that capitalism would finally result in permanent crisis, war, and the open dictatorship of the possessing class.<sup>888</sup>

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<sup>884</sup> 'Franz', "Soviet Russia," in *A new hope for socialism: Resolutions adopted at the Revolutionary Socialist Congress, Paris, February 19-25* (London: Lonon Bureau of Revoltionary Socilaist Unity, 1938), 50-51.

<sup>885</sup> Richard Löwenthal et al., *Der Kommende Weltkrieg* (Paris: Selbstverl, 1939), 10.

<sup>886</sup> There were those on the left that felt once war had began revolution in Germany became more likely. See "Will revolution in Germany end the war?," *New Leader*, September 15 1939, 1.

<sup>887</sup> Richard Löwenthal et al., *Der Kommende Weltkrieg*, 10.

<sup>888</sup> Brockway, "The Internaitonal Working class movement and our tasks."

The menace of war led socialists to conceive of new notions of geopolitics. The expansion of Germany's armed forces along with Hitler's bellicose foreign policy meant Social Democrats began to comprehend European affairs in strategic terms. Just as western observers obsessed over Soviet military activities during the cold war, socialists began closely observing German rearmament. When war did occur, how could Germany be defeated? More importantly, how did this relate to socialist and class politics?

Alexander Schifrin, a double exile from Russia as a Menshevik, and from Germany as a Social Democrat,<sup>889</sup> became particularly interested in these questions. In 1935 he published an article outlining the importance of the Red Army in the new Europe. Responding to the Bauer, Dan, and Zyromski thesis, he refracted their conclusions through a military analysis. The most 'significant opponent is fascist Germany!' The most important army to counter Nazism was therefore the Red Army. This was critical not just because the Soviet Union had developed Europe's largest military, but because the Soviet Union was a 'revolutionary state.' A part of the Soviet Union's revolutionary drive was the modernisation and growth of the Red Army. Its 'revolution in military technology' through mechanisation and the huge expansion of its air force, made it a bulwark against Germany. It was the 'only army in Europe that was comparable to the German Wehrmacht.'<sup>890</sup>

Schifrin followed this up with an extensive assessment of the various armies of Europe and their preparedness for war. Many post-war scholars underestimated the strength of the Red Army before 1939. It is only in the past few decades when military historians accessed Soviet archives with Russian language skills when they corrected

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<sup>889</sup> For a full analysis of exiled Mensheviks from Germany see Liebich, *From the other shore*, Chapter 7.

<sup>890</sup> Alexander Schifrin, "Die Wehrmacht der Sowjetunion," *Der Kampf*, no. 11 (1935): 493-500.

this.<sup>891</sup> But Schifrin fully comprehended the significance of the Red Army's build up, and how this was directly related to its breakneck industrialisation. He also took careful note of the recent purges undertaken and how it could have potentially undermined the fighting ability of the Red Army.<sup>892</sup>

When assessing the 'new Germany' army he noted the prominence of both technological and strategic development. It would be a war waged by 'lightening decision' where modern tanks and aircraft would make 'swift use' of the terrain they were invading. Schifrin correctly underscored the colonisation drive guiding German rearmament. Noteworthy was his description of the new German army as being guided by 'totalitarian warfare.' It was a 'war of total destruction, it will be waged not only against the military forces of the enemy, but against the enemy population as a whole.' 'German hegemony' was its final goal.<sup>893</sup> It is not an accident that Schifrin was remarkably prescient with his analysis. Socialists, unlike liberals and conservatives had keen insight into Nazi ideology; knowing full well that its powerplays were apart of wider ideological drives attempting to construct a new Germany.<sup>894</sup>

Another book on the looming war was G. H. Cole's *The War on the Home Front*. Cole rightly foresaw a 'proliferation of laws, orders and regulations under the conditions of modern warfare' that were necessary when waging war 'against a totalitarian enemy.' Cole, fully understanding the implications of total war, and that a war waged

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<sup>891</sup> See Kotkin, *Stalin: Waiting for Hitler, 1929-1941*, Chapter 1; David M. Glantz, *Stumbling Colossus: The Red Army on the eve of World War* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998), 9-24.

<sup>892</sup> Werner, *The Military Strength of the powers*.

<sup>893</sup> *Ibid.*, 166.

<sup>894</sup> Schifrin's work is cited by some economic historians as being telling in its analysis on its emphasis on 'economic potential' in deciding outcomes of wars. But there nothing on its socialist content, and little acknowledgment on that fact that Schifrin was a Social Democrat, with a specific worldview that informed his analysis. For instance, see Martin Kahn, *The Western Allies and Soviet Potential in World War II* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 14-15. Kahn does not recognise that Werner was Schifrin's pseudonym.

against a highly ideologically driven and authoritarian regime required regulation in people's lives far in excess of the previous war. Society now needed planning and regulation hitherto unseen. Planning and its success in winning the home front would lead the way for socialism in peacetime. 'While the war continues, we have to do all we can to build the foundations of a democratic socialist system.'<sup>895</sup> Cole's notions were not far from the truth. Much of the Labour Party's campaign in 1945 rested on notions that planning had peacetime application.<sup>896</sup>

The question of how to confront Nazi Germany's growing hostility became another vexing issue for the movement. Its historic attachment to anti-militarism along with its anti-imperialism made this an awkward quandary. But in the face of an armed Third Reich such notions were defunct. The Nazi war machine had set itself the task to rid Europe, amongst other things, of socialism. The response had to be in kind. The Soviet Union was Europe's most heavily armed country standing in defiance of Nazi imperialism. It was revolutionary in demeanour. It may have not been democratic, but it was socialist and was a fundamental bulwark against Hitler. Therein lay potential of spreading socialism amidst the ruins of fascism.

### **The USSR in the face of fascism**

By 1939 Stalin's industrialisation drive had been expanding for over a decade. As Beatrice and Sidney Webb concluded in their epic two volume study of the Soviet Union; the USSR had indeed constructed a new society with the absence of market

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<sup>895</sup> G. D. H. Cole, *The war on the home front* (London: Fabian Society, 1939), 5.

<sup>896</sup> See Alex Burston-Chorowicz, "Labour's Finest Hour: Labour Electoral Victories after the Second World War in Britain and Australia, 1945 and 1946," *Labour History Review* 82, no. 2 (2017).

forces. 'Soviet Communism differs essentially from the characteristics of the western world of today.'<sup>897</sup> Stalinism had clearly transformed Russia, and now on the eve of hostilities with the Third Reich, had by far the largest and most modern army in Europe. When Social Democrats reflected on the turmoil of the 1920s and 30s many came to sobering conclusions about the fractious and counter-productive nature of the Social Democrat-Communist divide. With the movement in retreat and the spectre of fascism haunting Europe the Soviet Union was supposedly the last hope. Crucially, Russia could proliferate socialism after the defeat of fascism. The gulf between both camps needed bridging. Some even saw the distinction at this point to be superfluous.

The Dan-Bauer-Zymromski group placed the Soviet Union as the last 'bulwark' against German imperialism. The Soviet Union could also act as a countervailing force against the reactionary western powers in case of revolution in Germany, or after the defeat of the Third Reich. The survival of the Soviet Union was not only a military necessity, but an ideological one too. The USSR could spread socialism to other parts of Central and Eastern Europe. Once war broke out, the Soviet Union would wage war with great revolutionary vigour.<sup>898</sup> The French Revolutionary Wars offered a convenient historical parallel.

Bauer, in his final years, built upon this line. To Bauer, the Soviet Union was not merely a strategically important socialist government. The formation of a new society

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<sup>897</sup> Sidney Webb and Beatrice Webb, *Soviet Communism: A new civilisation? Vol II* (London: Longmans, 1935), 1122. Also see *Soviet Communism: a new civiliation? Vol 1* (London: Longmans, 1935). The question of what kind of society the Soviet Union had constructed was debated. British trade unionist Walter Citrine had extensively visited the Russia and was more circumspect in his conclusions than the Webbs. While market forces had been eradicated, the standard of living was still very low for workers. He commented on crowded dwellings and the like. The regimented nature of the Soviet economy led him to believe that it was not a socialist society but a 'state capitalist' one. See Walter Citrine, *I search for truth in Russia* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1937).

<sup>898</sup> Die Internationale und die Krieg, ARCH01368.1184.

within Russia predisposed it as *the* propagator of European socialism. When the Soviet Union unveiled its new constitution in 1936, Bauer thought it was the culmination of the Russian Revolution. It was proof that the Soviet government had succeeded in purging capitalism and building socialism. The constitution was a 'historic event of great importance', it represented that 'revolution was the fundamental principle of society.' This burgeoning revolutionary society embedded the 'right to work.' The eradication of market forces and the socialisation of the means of production made this so. 'The October Revolution has raised equality for all its citizens before the law.'<sup>899</sup> Bauer admitted that while the Soviet Union was not democratic, the constitution was 'yet another advance' in this direction. Moreover, Bauer believed the various planning bureaus were in 'contact with the masses' despite not being controlled by the masses.<sup>900</sup> This functioned as a kind of democratic influence. Bauer had always been sympathetic to the Bolshevik revolution, by his later years he had embraced it. As one historian fittingly affirms, Bauer's assessment was 'idealistic and wishful'.<sup>901</sup> While he maintained a certain kind of relativism, knowing that such methods would be unsound for Western Europe, he had traversed from dispassionate sympathy to a wholehearted embrace. 'In a few years time, the Soviet Union will prove to all the world the superiority of a socialist order.'<sup>902</sup> This shaped his geopolitical thinking.<sup>903</sup>

If the Soviet Union went to war with Germany the dynamics of the conflict would change. If Germany just faced off with Western powers, the war would be strictly an

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<sup>899</sup> Bauer, "Auf dem Wege zur sozialistischen Demokratie," 261-270.

<sup>900</sup> Czerwińska-Schupp, *Otto Bauer*, 43.

<sup>901</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>902</sup> Bauer, *Zwischen zwei Weltkriegen?*, 211.

<sup>903</sup> In 1936, Bauer thought Germany's main target was the Soviet Union. He thought Hitler would fortify its western borders with extensive defences like the Maginot line, focusing all of Germany's efforts on the east. See "Die Internationale und Hitler-Deutschland," *Der Kampf*, no. 4 (1936): 133-139.

imperial affair. Soviet involvement would sculped the war into a contestation of conflicting economic, social, and ideological systems.

If the Soviet Union is involved in a war, this war inevitably becomes a decisive battle between capitalism and socialism. For every victory of the Soviet Union in war will increase its reputation, its attraction, and its influence as a role model.

A Soviet-German war would not only pit capitalism against socialism; Bauer envisaged Soviet victory as having a multiplying effect on European socialism. It would not just 'revolutionise the workers of Europe' but would awaken 'the slave nations of Asia... to shake the entire capitalist world.' This was also the reason behind Imperial Japan's aggression towards the USSR. It worried about the 'advancement of Bolshevism in China.' Soviet victory would unleash 'social revolution in Europe and Asia.'<sup>904</sup> While Bauer's vision of socialist revolution was democratic and organic, it is remarkable how in a certain way he was correct; albeit that the USSR imposed socialist governments on Eastern and Central Europe after the war. The Chinese revolution in 1949 however had an important organic component. The Chinese Communist Party had won significant support in the countryside, contrary to Soviet communism.

Bauer's vision of the USSR as the great proselytiser of revolution led him down another avenue; reconciliation between reformist socialism and revolutionary socialism. Since 1917, Social Democracy and communism had been at loggerheads. The disunity of the working class had led to nothing but victory for its enemies. Given the recent history of socialist defeat, the successful construction of socialism in Russia, and the threat of fascism, there needed to be a new conception of socialism. One that moulded the two irreconcilable camps. An alliance between the two socialisms was not enough, the time had come to 'overcome the Social Democratic thesis and the communist antithesis into a new higher synthesis.' The main task of socialism was to

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<sup>904</sup> *Zwischen zwei Weltkriegen?*, 227.

outline a new 'manifold approach', a 'unified theory' that dialectically composed both socialisms. He called this praxis 'integral socialism. It needed to incorporate all struggles, from the most moderate like British Labour to the radical Bolsheviks. Bauer was aware that integral socialism could not 'abolish' the contradiction between the two socialisms, it did however seek to alter how the two related to one and other. In a rather longwinded manner, Bauer implored the two socialisms to adopt a historical and relativistic approach to each other. One that was dialectical in its understanding. Revolutionary socialists had to understand that reformism was an 'adaptation of a certain historical stage' and was only a 'transitory' moment. Reformists had to 'transmit the great legacy of the struggles of democracy' as the revolutionaries likewise had to expound the importance of proletarian revolution and its power to overcome capitalism 'freeing humanity from exploitation, unemployment, fascism, and war.'<sup>905</sup> Integral socialism would guide the two movements, creating a uniform and cooperative existence between Social Democracy and Communism. Towards the end of his life, Bauer, a towering figure in Social Democratic Marxism, and an influential leader of Second International Socialism, no longer saw the need for division between the socialist camps. Communism and Social Democracy were to be as one. Czerwińska-Schupp's intellectual biography correctly asserts that Bauer insufficiently explained how the divide between the two socialisms could be bridged. Bauer's thesis also contained no critique of Social Democratic strategy, apart from its fraught relationship with Communism.<sup>906</sup> Bauer died before the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact.

Alexander Schifrin viewed the Soviet Union's revolutionary character as much as an asset than the Red Army. The Soviet Union's construction of a revolutionary society

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<sup>905</sup> Ibid., 324.

<sup>906</sup> Czerwińska-Schupp, *Otto Bauer*, 201.

had 'filled it with revolutionary patriotism.' In the likely event of war, the Soviet Union would be capable of waging a 'jacobin war with modern military technology and the most effective propaganda weapons.'<sup>907</sup> Combining its modern military with revolutionary vigour the Soviet Union would be an effective fighting force. But in his view, such a force would not just be useful against Germany. He thought a Soviet alliance with the Western Powers would embolden socialists and the working classes in places like France and Britain. If such an alliance would defeat fascism it would unleash socialist uprisings throughout Western Europe. With Western European socialists and the Soviet Union now locked in a socialist alliance, a new German revolution was conceivable. However, unlike in 1918, the new Germany would not make the same mistakes. It would rid the country of the 'old reactionary forces that strengthened National Socialism.'<sup>908</sup> Interestingly, Schiffrin went into detail about how a new socialist Germany would function as a revolutionary centre of power. 'East of the Rhine, socialist Europe will be based on the cooperation of the major socialist powers... the industrial-agrarian Soviet Union and industrial Germany.'<sup>909</sup> In a similar manner to Bauer's wish for a socialist Europe, Schiffrin's vision was partially made true. Though Germany would be split in two, and the socialist Germany would be an authoritarian dictatorship.

August 23, 1939, dashed visions for a post-fascist Europe guided by Soviet power. An aghast chorus of Social Democrats and Communists met the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact.

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<sup>907</sup> Werner, *Sozialismus Krieg und Europa*, 113.

<sup>908</sup> *Ibid.*, 122-123.

<sup>909</sup> *Ibid.*, 156.

Léon Blum wrote that it was a 'truly extraordinary event... the astonishment is intensified when one remembers Hitler's hatred of communism.'<sup>910</sup> With one fell swoop Stalin extinguished any hope of a renewed United Front, or the possibility of any of the visions listed above becoming reality.<sup>911</sup> One observer decried 'socialism is a universe apart from Stalin.'<sup>912</sup> The reality was however that Stalin's Russia, and its right arm in the Comintern never viewed Social Democracy as one and the same as themselves. However, Bauer and Schiffrin visions point to larger themes within elements of Social Democracy in the late interwar years. Since 1917 two distinct camps divided European socialism. And while Left socialism attempted to bridge this divide, few spoke of an ideological reconciliation. Besides, by 1938 Left Socialism had rejected the LSI, the Comintern, and Stalin. But there were elements of Social Democracy that wanted to redefine socialism, incorporating both reformist and revolutionary components.

### **The death of Second International Socialism**

By 1938 some of the stalwarts of the international movement had died from old age. Arthur Henderson, one of the architects of the LSI died in 1935. In 1938 three Social Democratic stalwarts passed. Emile Vandervelde (December 27), Otto Bauer (July 4), and Karl Kautsky (October 17). Bauer and Kautsky were towering intellectual figures. Kautsky was the great proliferator of Marxism in the 1890s and 1900s. 'The pope of Marxism'. It is of little doubt that without Kautsky's persistence, Marxism as mode of

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<sup>910</sup> Léon Blum, "Après le coup de theatre du Kremlin," *Le Populaire*, 23 août 1939. Also see John Aplin, "No Good can come of the Soviet-German Pact," *New Leader*, August 25 1939, 3.

<sup>911</sup> For the ILP response to the USSR's invasion of Poland see "Stalin has betrayed socialism by seizure of Eastern Poland," *New Leader*, September 22 1939, 3.

<sup>912</sup> *Ibid.*

thought would be much less influential, particularly in Europe and perhaps in the anglophone world too. While his reputation was waning on the eve of World War One,<sup>913</sup> and was much diminished after, he remained a constant intellectual producer. This study is a testament to that. Otto Bauer's works was of equal stature. He was one of the first prodigious innovators of Marxian thought within Social Democracy. His work on the national question was hugely influential, not just amongst Austrian socialists, but shaped the ideology and politics of the Jewish Labour Bund.<sup>914</sup> While Lenin and the early Soviet Union rejected Bauer's positions, they were invariable shaped by the discourse it produced.<sup>915</sup> Bauer was also a keen politician who over saw the growth of his party, being one of the key leaders during the interwar period. Vandervelde had been a key leader in the Belgium Labour Party since the turn of the century and was also a leading figure in the International. Suffice to say, that on the eve of war, along with the movements much-diminished political position, some of its key thinkers had passed.

When Germany invaded Poland, the LSI was already under significant strain. On the eve of war Adler warned that the LSI's very mission of uniting working-class parties was defunct. He questioned the existence of his position as secretary and the organisation itself.<sup>916</sup> In December 1939 he wrote, 'As there is no policy of the International, there can be no political secretary of the International.' His position had

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<sup>913</sup> Geary, *Karl Kautsky*, 9.

<sup>914</sup> Joshua D. Zimmerman, *Poles, Jews and the Politics of Nationality: The Bund and the Polish Socialist Party in the Late Tsarist Russia, 1892-1914* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), 258-261. The Bund embraced national cultural autonomy, though Bauer himself did not think Jews constituted a nation.

<sup>915</sup> See Terry Martin, *The affirmative action empire: National and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (London: Cornell University Press, 2001), 30-33.

<sup>916</sup> Friedrich Adler, *The position of the LSI*, LSI/21-22, 22/4/1, 1939, People's History Museum,

been 'reduced' to a position of pure administration.<sup>917</sup> By late 1939 traveling had become next to impossible. Even the administrative tasks were difficult to complete with war being waged. Finally, after almost two decades of being secretary of the 'Two-and-a half' international followed by the LSI, Friedrich Adler acquiesced his position. The long-suffering Adler could no longer cope with the ineffectiveness of the organisation. He resigned on March 2.<sup>918</sup> Soon after the LSI Bureau established a commission for the reconstruction of the International once the war was over. On April 3, 1940, the Labour and Socialist International dissolved itself.<sup>919</sup> Second International Socialism was dead.

Finally, the invasion of Western Europe saw many Social Democrats captured or murdered by German forces. Vichy captured Blum. He was kept in a concentration camp for the duration of the war. Blum was transitional Prime Minister during the formation of the Fourth Republic. The Gestapo captured Hilferding attempting to escape France. He was brutally tortured dying in prison. Hilferding, the SPD's senior theoretician and Jew, was high on the Gestapo's hit list. Others escape to Britain and United States returning home after the war.<sup>920</sup> However, many did not return to Europe.

## Conclusion

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<sup>917</sup> *To the members of the administrative committee of the LSI, December 9, LSI/21-22, 22/5/54, 1939, People's History Museum,*

<sup>918</sup> *To the members of the LSI executive, March 2, LSI Archives, ARCH03168.598, 598/5-6, 1940, IISH,*

<sup>919</sup> *Bureau, Brussels, April 3, LSI/4-5, 4/22/2, 1940, People's History Museum,*

<sup>920</sup> Adler managed to escape to the United States, setting up an organisation for Austrian socialists in exile.

The final interwar years saw the movement become ineffective and disunited. Parts of Social Democracy radicalised while others moderated. Nonetheless, the left leaning elements sort to reimagine socialism in their exile, particularly in relation with communism and the Soviet Union. As war loomed another period of reflection preoccupied Social Democrats. After a decade of bitter defeat, some attempted to reimagine socialism amidst a rising Germany. The Third Reich's battle for European hegemony and the reconfiguring of geopolitics on the continent forced much of the movement to rethink its line. This covered not only foreign policy, alliances with communists and liberals, but the definition of socialism itself. As the movement was in retreat, the existential crisis forced an ideological reimagining. This did not always lead to radicalisation. Social Democrats in established democracy were never further from their more radical comrades living in exile than they were in 1938/39. On the eve of war, the international movement had ceased to effectively function. The beginning of a new world war finally ended Second International socialism.

## Conclusion

This thesis has uncovered important aspects of Social Democratic thought in the interwar period. It has investigated key features of Social Democratic political economy, the changing dynamics of its revolutionarism, the role of democracy, its theoretical responses to the rise of fascism, and finally how it reconceptualised socialism in the face of a rising Third Reich. Ideas and debates quickly took new forms as the various crises of interwar Europe interceded in socialist thinking. A rehash of the overall narrative of Social Democratic thought proves this.

Bountiful optimism punctuated the beginning of interwar Social Democracy. By 1939 however, Social Democracy was in full retreat. Social Democratic thinking went through an excursion; from being filled with revolutionary vigour in the hope of a new world, to succumbing to a malaise soon after the revolutionary period of 1917-1919, to embracing new forms of political economy in the face of the Depression. Finally, confronted with fascism, it returned to its revolutionary roots. Not all embraced such radicalism. British and Scandinavians decidedly rejected radicalisation.

Left Social Democracy was a different story. It had, from 1917, been sceptical of the wider movement's embrace of liberal democracy but came to an uneasy accommodation with it in the 1920s. By the mid-1930s Left Socialism had all but abandoned mainstream Social Democracy. Its embrace of an all-encompassing definition of imperialism, conflating traditional modes of empire with fascist expansionism, had a nihilistic effect on its attitude to wider socialisms. Communism even disappointed Left socialism since it threw in its lot with the Popular Front.

Not only did Social Democracy end the interwar period in political retreat; its ideology had fractured. Parts of it radicalised while others moderated. By 1939 Social Democracy, for all its intellectual contestation and production of new ideas, lay defeated. But this is not where the story should end. There are several theses we can draw from Social Democratic ideology in the interwar period.

### **Proletarian Agency**

Proletarian agency is at the heart of Social Democracy. Social Democrats believed it was *the* agent of historical change. These conceptions however altered during the interwar period. They oscillated between viewing workers as active agents of socialism, to being more passive observers, emphasising their electoral power instead of their strike potential. Between 1917 and the early 1920s, workers were the progenitors of a new, democratic world. They were bearers of democratic revolutions that established republican polities. Social Democrats celebrated the new-won freedoms for workers. Socialism was now a reality. Social Democratic thought posited the democratic state as a class neutral institution. The proletariat could now mould it through electing Social Democratic parties. Universal suffrage in Britain likewise allowed a similar arrangement where workers could have direct input in the economy. The democratic moment offered workers a role in the formation of these new states and their institutions. Social Democratic future imaginings held up the proletariat as the prime movers and shakers of historical progression. Working class agency was limitless in scope about what it could achieve within the new, ostensible, democratic epoch.

As the democratic moment lulled, and bourgeois stabilisation took place, Social Democratic thought shifted. Setbacks in the Central European republics saw socialists lament the haste of revolution. Many thought war had thrust agency onto the working class in a premature fashion. The movement was yet mature. Its lack of unity meant bourgeois forces easily subverted socialism. Republican democracy flourished without socialist economics. Electoral politics became the prime arena for class antagonism. Meanwhile, deflation, a return to the pre-war Gold Standard, and a general trend to de-radicalise labour shifted politics to the right. Long term unemployment set in too. An intellectual malaise formed as future imaginings stagnated. Present crises needed addressing.

While Social Democracy's electoral clout was significant, it did not yield the dominance needed for socialism. Social Democratic thought turned its attention to a march through institutions in a manner that lacked its previous revolutionary vigour. In this new arrangement, workers needed to exercise their agency through suffrage. Their role was now an electoral force expected to throw support behind established political parties governing on its behalf.

Passive conceptions of proletarian agency were one of the catalysts behind a revolt by a younger generation of socialists. People like Henry De Man lambasted such mechanistic views of history and its pacifying tendencies towards proletarian agency. Moderation and coalition partnerships with bourgeois parties was defensible if 'scientific' views of history preordained socialist victory. The role of the working class in the historical process became contested.

The Depression jolted Social Democracy out of its malaise. Working class agency was at the forefront of the burgeoning responses to the Crash. Ideological fissures already present widened. As the centre and right called for either palliative tinkering with

economic policy, or wholesale redefinition of socialist political economy, the Left Socialism would have nothing of any of it. Revolutionaries saw such technocratic toying as proof of long-held passive conceptions of working-class agency. Coalition building with parties of the Centre, and docile responses to the Depression, proved to many that faith in liberal institutions was finally bearing its rotten fruits. The rise of Nazism attested that Social Democracy no longer held working class agency as its *raison d'être*. The left's response was revolution. Working class agency required rekindling through mass mobilisation. Without this, the movement would lose its organic link with the working class, driving the masses further towards fascism. For the various plannists, working class agency meant emancipating workers from joblessness. Working class agency in historical processes was an academic query, not suited to tackling the Slump. It was not realistic unless employment stabilised.

As Germany and Austria succumb to fascism, working class agency took on a forthright character. Overthrowing fascism necessitated proletarian revolutionism. With democracy obliterated, many assumed that labour would resume its revolutionary role as it had in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Moderate Social Democrats took up the cause of revolution. Interestingly, it was Left Socialism that doubted the proletariat would automatically support revolution. Hitler's propaganda state was weary of such agency and did everything it could to divert grievances elsewhere. For the left, working class agency was incompatible with liberal institutionalism. Weimar had proven this to be destructive. More traditional Social Democrats also came to this conclusion. Bauer's call for the reorganisation of the Austrian Party along vanguard lines attested to this. The firm hand of a conquering proletariat would guide a new Germany or Austria. On the eve of World War Two, some thought the Soviet Union and its Red Army could augment proletarian agency in Central and Western Europe. Obviously, the Molotov-Ribbentrop pack dashed any hope of this.

## **Political Economy**

Political economy always looms large in any kind of socialist thinking. This study has focused on Social Democratic conceptions of political economy. Closely linked with ideas of proletarian agency, notions of political economy rapidly changed and evolved. Establishing the historicity of Social Democratic political economy was part of this project.

Firstly, democratisation reformulated Social Democratic political economy. The democratic moment offered socialists not just the opportunity to govern. More importantly, they thought it offered them the chance to begin the transformation of capitalism to socialism. Socialising the means of production became the central theme from Marxists in Central Europe to British Labourites.

The Depression marked the high point of Social Democratic innovation in political economy. More right leaning thinkers began to postulate socialism beyond Marxian political economy. Broad sweeping socialisation was defunct. Mixed economies were the future of productive socialist governance. This was a reconceptualisation of socialist political economy. There did not need to be a total transformation of the state and the economy. Parts of the economy required nationalisation, while the private market would be left to its own devices. In many of these examples, the state, in a broad but limited manner would prop up credit and consumption. Working class consumption thus became something central to Social Democrats during the Depression. Socialism became something different. It was no longer a blueprint for a new world millenarian in scope, it was malleable. It could balance the rapacious forces of monopoly capital with state intervention without upturning the capitalist mode of production. Left Socialism rejected such palliative measures. Apart of their

revolutionary foment was the total socialisation of the means of production. However, these were not new ideas. They had been calling for such totalising socialism since 1917.

While Marxism was not the only focus of this study, it is a distinct feature in Social Democratic thinking. This thesis has made some inroads in examining the history of Marxism. Social Democratic Marxism centred around the changing mode of capitalist production. Marxists believed World War One transformed capitalism. Laissez-faire capitalism had passed, monopoly capital now dominated. Monopoly capital, with its large corporations and concentrated wealth was antithetical to the free market. Some like Hilferding, believed this new era was amiable to socialism. Monopoly capital's need for regulation and planning was compatible with the types of policies Social Democrats hoped to achieve.<sup>921</sup> The Depression proved that capitalism was still crisis prone. The Great War and the boom in fictitious capital markets, along with new modes of short-term credit, drove capitalism to its worst crisis. Left Socialists thought that the crisis was *the* final crisis of capitalism.

The rise Nazism after 1930 forced many to reconsider class relations. Long term unemployment, and the pauperisation of large swaths of the middle classes did not translate to socialist support. Despite the destitution of sections of the bourgeoisie, they clung to their distrust of organised labour. But they had also grown scornful towards monopoly capitalism. For many Marxists, this disjuncture explained the success of Nazism. Its nebulous but disenable anti-capitalism, alongside its anti-Marxism made it a perfect vehicle for middle class disillusionment. Marxian analysis complicated the schemata of the base-superstructure model. Cultural analysis became part of their

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<sup>921</sup> See Hilferding, "1927 Speech on 'Organised Capitalism'."

wider materialism. The middle classes, now impoverished, still viewed themselves and their interests as very much distinct, and still in contradiction with the proletariat. As Marxists explained this, it forced new directions in dialectical modes of thought. This particular point has been missed by historians.

### **Communism and Social Democracy**

Lenin's seizure of power confronted Social Democracy in a profound manner. The wider discourse produced by Social Democrats on the Russian Revolution elucidates a relationship which was simultaneously hostile, and one marked by intrigue. To view the divide between the two camps as strictly hostile is reductive.<sup>922</sup> Communist influence on Social Democracy was considerable and complex. The controversy surrounding the Russian Revolution reveals noteworthy features about Social Democratic ideology.

From October 1917, the two socialisms parted ways. Lenin's vanguard model of revolution severed its link with Social Democracy. Soon after the October Revolution, the new regime hastily nationalised the means of production. Centrist Marxists could not tolerate Lenin's hard-line rule, nor his 'skipping' over of Marxian stages of development. Many saw the seizing of the means of production as historically premature. To people like Kautsky and Bernstein, the regime was thus determined to fail. However, those more on the left were sympathetic and relativistic in their analysis. Russia's unique historical circumstances required consideration. It had inherited a backwards economy and a reactionary countryside.

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<sup>922</sup> For a prime example of this see Linden, *Western Marxism and the Soviet Union*.

The survival of the revolution after the Civil War continued confounding Social Democratic teleology. The NEP complicated this. Centrist Marxists thought it proved that Lenin's abolition of Russian capitalism was premature. And yet the NEP's results, despite the various contradictions it produced, brought the Soviet economy back from the brink. Likewise, Stalin's revolution from above transformed the Soviet state into an agent of vast historical change. Again, centrist Marxists continued to foresee the regime's demise. Yet, despite the countless polemical pieces produced by Kautsky and co, there was always solid groupings that were more open to the Soviet State. Soviet modernisation enthralled many socialists. The vast nature of Stalin's industrialisation drive was awe-inspiring. This was rigorously contested, with many seeing through Soviet propaganda. However, many regarded the Five Year Plans as pioneering in their attempts to master supply and demand.

The politics produced by the defeat of Central European democracy radicalised Social Democracy opening it to rapprochement with Communism. Moderate Social Democrats however would have no part in this. The politics of the Popular Front was always an uneven affair.

The Russian Revolution acted as a contorted mirror to Social Democratic ideology. From the moment the Bolsheviks seized power, it challenged key assumptions of Social Democracy. Social Democrats were never going to have this kind of power. For all its brutality, Social Democrats constantly looked to Russia with immeasurable interest. Afterall, it was the only socialist state in existence. Social Democrats surely ponder if their dedication to institutionalism would ever offer them the opportunity to overturn capitalist relations in one generation. Even Kautsky, the stalwart of anti-Soviet Marxism, knew that happenings inside Russia were important for the entire socialist world. That's why he wrote in 1931 that 'socialist parties of all ... have always

been aware of the importance of events in Russia in connection with the struggle for the emancipation of the proletariat all over the world.'<sup>923</sup>

The Soviet Union was an uncomfortable reminder that socialism was attainable through dictatorship, and that such a dictatorship could yield ostensibly impressive results. Democratic reform was not necessarily a prerequisite for socialism. The Soviet Union's ability to construct a kind of socialism, had an immeasurable, and at times peculiar effect of Social Democratic thought. While the validity of Soviet socialism was always intensely contested, it nonetheless was seen by many as a marker of historical progress of socialism. For people like Kautsky, their crusades against the Soviet Union, in part, likely stemmed from their insecurity that the regime *would* prove stable and successful. Leninist dictatorship did not just contradict Marxian historical development, it threatened Social Democratic dedication to democracy. During the Weimar crisis, communism seemed as much as a threat as Nazism. Even after the rise of the Third Reich, Kautsky's anti-Soviet polemics continued with the same ferocity as they had before.<sup>924</sup>

The relationship between Social Democracy and Communism was a peculiar and lopsided dialectical relationship. The Soviet regime's existence immeasurably affected Social Democratic thinking. Social Democratic influence on communist thinking was far less complex. For the most part, the Comintern rejected Social Democracy. Stalinism made it difficult for proper internal discourse amongst communists anyway.

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<sup>923</sup> Kautsky, *Boleshevism at a deadlock*, 23.

<sup>924</sup> See "Marx und Marxismus," *Die Gesellschaft*, no. 3 (1933); "Marxism and Bolshevism: Democracy and Dictatorship," in *Socialism, Fascism, Communism*, ed. Joseph Shaplen and David Shub (New York: American League for Democratic Socialism, 1934); *Grenzen der Gewalt: Aussichten und Wirkungen bewaffneter Erhebungen des Proletariats* (Karlsbad: Graphia, 1934); "Gedanken über die Einheitsfront.," *Social Democracy versus Communism*, trans. David Shub and Joseph Shaplen (Rand School, 1946); Eley, *Forging Democracy*.

But Soviet socialism's influence on Social Democracy was immense. The Leninist turn made by some Social Democrats at the end of the interwar period is a stark testament to both the measure of communist influence, and the one-sided manner of this influence.

### **Contribution**

This thesis has demonstrated the complexity and contestation of Social Democratic thought in the interwar years. The everchanging economic, political and social circumstances that punctuated the period had a dramatic impact on Social Democratic ideology. From 1917 to 1940 Social Democratic ideology went through a discernible journey. These pressures challenged old notions, as new ideas emerged. This study has demonstrated the plethora of new intellectual constructions the movement fashioned. During the onset of the Depression in particular, Social Democratic thinkers produced novel notions of political economy. The rise of fascism heralded changes in the way socialists constructed class politics. The destruction of Weimar itself led to a return to revolution, but with a distinct scepticism towards the liberal democracy Social Democracy had not long before sanctimoniously upheld. There also remained a revolutionary element who never wholeheartedly accepted the institutional bounds of liberal democracy.

This study is an important intervention in the historiography of Social Democracy, and particularly in the historiography of Second International Socialism. Many histories of socialism, and Marxism posit that the most intellectually innovative period was from the 1890s until 1914. After the Great War, the lack of revolution meant that

the movement's intuitionism ossified its intellectual creativity.<sup>925</sup> The implication is that revolutions produce intensified social dynamics that spur intellectual creativity by those hoping to build a new world. While this is certainly true, this study has nuanced this thesis. It has shown that the interwar period, while a continuation of certain pre-1914 trends, produced new, and innovative ideas. Revolutions may be purveyors of radical new directions, but no more so than long term unemployment, depressions, the rise of fascism, the destruction of democracy, and the haunting spectre of a new World War. These crises too alter social relations in all kinds of profound manners. Through a diverse range of sources, this thesis has indeed demonstrated the richness and complexity of Social Democratic thought in the 1920s and 30s. The interwar period saw many Social Democratic modes of thought flourish amid a period of cumulative systemic crises.

### Further Directions

This line of research offers potential. More focused studies are needed on how the ideological strands, outlined in this thesis, carried over to the post-war period. Social Democracy's moment of institutional zenith in the post-war period needs connection to interwar ideological developments. British Labour's 1945 victory, or Willy Brandt's coalition, or Austria's Bruno Kreisky, are seen as highpoints of Social Democratic history. How did interwar dynamics shape these governments? It is of interesting note that the SPD formally dumped Marxism in the 1959, in the context of the Cold War.<sup>926</sup>

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<sup>925</sup> Anderson, *Considerations of Western Marxism*, Chapter 1.

<sup>926</sup> Berger artfully explains other factors too, like the SPD lacklustre showing at elections. Its suspicion of market economies was a factor here. See Stefan Berger, *Social democracy and the working class in the nineteenth and twentieth century Germany* (Harlow ; Longman, 2000), 188.

Surely, the radicalisation of sections of German Social Democracy after 1933 goes some way in explaining this. The radicalisations explicated in this thesis were quickly forgotten come 1945. More needs to be done to explain the continuity, or the discontinuity of the ideological contestation of the interwar years. Are these debates merely lost worlds, or did they influence post-war Social Democracy in more profound ways?

This thesis hopes to prompt further reflection on Marxism. This could eventuate in several avenues. More national studies on Marxist thought would be appropriate. The much-vaunted intellectual innovations of Austro-Marxism did not cease in 1914. This thesis has revealed some of these innovations, but there is more to uncover. Comparative and transnational works would also reveal these narratives. For instances, comparisons between Left Socialisms around Europe would further nuance Social Democratic history.<sup>927</sup> As this thesis has shown, revolutionary elements persisted in the movement after the Spartacus Uprising. Wider ideological histories of the Left could be beneficial. Interwar communism or anti-colonial socialism could also prove valuable studies.

Finally, half of this thesis was written during a moment of capitalist crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic was, for many countries, the most sever crisis since World War Two. Capitalism has not come as close to the precipice at it had since 1931/32. We are still living with both the virus, and the resulting aftereffects of the 'lockdowns.' The pandemic forced me back to Melbourne, the city that suffered through the longest cumulative lockdowns in the world.

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<sup>927</sup> An example of this is Horn, *European Socialists Respond to Fascism*.

But even before COVID, as Donald Sassoon prompted, we are living through our own 'crisis of legitimacy.'<sup>928</sup> There is a widespread loss of faith in institutions, as employment is precarious, and new forms of xenophobia are abundant. Cost of living pressures are at all-time highs, as unending property bubbles punctuate many major cities. Faith in liberal democracy has been shaken with authoritarian politics taking hold in several countries. The institutions of state, once held in high regard as unshakable in their ability to oversee economic growth and political stability, have ossified. International politics has not been spared this ossification. Russia's brutal invasion of Ukraine is another symptom of decay. Post-war geopolitical expectations and norms have also eroded.

This thesis has shown that at moments of polarisation and crisis, new ideas form hoping to solve the forces that created them. In the interwar period, the mainstream of Social Democracy wanted to carry on with established orthodoxies. Now, we must not be afraid of new ideas seeking to overcome contemporary contradictions. The past, present and future are intertwining themes comprising all politics. They are dialectical components constantly interacting and competing with one and other, shaping the contours of all political discourses. For a future politics seeking to overturn capitalist relations or transform them in a manner that is less barbarous and environmentally sustainable, we will need to imagine new orthodoxies. The futures of old are not the futures of tomorrow. While we need to understand the various histories that brought us here, we also must not be afraid to let go of old worlds too.

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<sup>928</sup> Donald Sassoon, *Morbid Symptoms: Anatomy of a world in crisis* (London: Verso, 2021), 22.

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