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SCIENCE AND DEMOCRACY (AND SOCIAL DEMOCRACY): SCIENTIFIC QUESTIONS FOR THE PARTY OF EUROPEAN SOCIALISTS (PES) IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Ettore Costa

Abstract

This paper argues that science and technology have been closely linked to the crisis of social democracy, as this political culture drew strength from the optimism about scientific progress. The paper reviews the literature on the decline of social democracy to assess how its role has been perceived. Then, it describes the evolving impact of scientific issues on the programs of PES in the 21st century, as it was central to new policies of economic intervention to build human capital. Finally, it shows elements of continuity with the rhetoric and policies of the Cold War era, despite attempts by supporters of the Third Way to present it as completely new.

Keywords: Party of European Socialists (PES), science and democracy, social democracy, Tony Blair, Third Way/Neue Mitte

1. Introduction

The decline of social democracy at the end of the 20th century and the first decades of the 21st century has been a common topic in history and political science literature. As Hindmoor says, "a series [of articles] on the future of the left is never a great sign for the left".[1] However, it is equally true that the argument that the left is in decline or that left and right have lost their meaning is a cliché that has regularly reappeared throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, more recently in the form of "End of Ideology" by Daniel Bell (1962) and the "End of History" by Francis Fukuyama (1992).[2] While a left-right cleavage continues to exist as a feature of politics, the main discontinuity in the 21st century is rather how the left space of the political arena is organized. In the second half of the 20th century, the

ideal model was a monolithic organization, where one party organizing the working-class was able to dominate the political space and became the sole expression of left-wing politics. The left was the working-class, the working-class was the labor movement, the labor movement was its organizations (party, trade unions and co-ops). This model assumed a perfect correspondence between class, subculture, political and economic self-organization. In truth, even then few nations such as Sweden had such a monolithic structure. In many nations, other cultural and ideological divisions produced working-class parties alternative to social democracy, such as Christian Democrats or communists. The 21st century saw a retreat everywhere from this model in favor of fragmentation: as working-class parties lose their ability to attract all shades of progressive opinion, alternative parties came to occupy the left-wing of the political spectrum, from New Left, to Green Parties, to New Radicals, to New Liberals, to Civil Rights, to Anti-Corruption.

How did social democracy lose its cohesive power and attraction? Many explanations have been presented, from the atomizing effect of consumerism, to the role of the welfare state in eroding class identity, to the scarcity of vote-winning policies available to parties in government. In many ways, this political fragmentation is simply a return to the politics of the 19th century, when parties were much weaker and competing political identities co-existed in the same side of the political divide. My contribution to this debate is arguing that social democratic parties have lost part of their amalgamating capacity because they can no longer rely on the attractiveness of pro-science positions in Western societies. A strong faith in scientific progress was a defining feature of socialism and one of the reasons for its success during the 20th century.[3]

According to Konrad Jarausch, the project of modernization was a driving force of the twentieth century and successful political families appropriated it and reinterpreted it according to their values.[4] By stressing the scientific-technological component of modernity – with its liberating, rationalizing and dynamic character – socialists could legitimize their project of social transformation. Science propped up faith in progress and provided technological tools that while neutral and open to misuse, could be put at service of the community. The 1970s saw a crisis of modernization, as progressive narrative of scientific progress and technological solutions were being challenged by skepticism about rationality and greater awareness of technological risks.[5] Technology became involved in more and more issues, while faith in technology

crumbled. This affected socialists and was one of the reasons for their decline.

Finally, what I intend to show is that one of the distinctive features of 21st-century social democracy is the contradiction between having to deal with enormous challenges from science and enormous challenges that can only be solved by science, but no longer being able to rely on a simplistic view of scientific neutrality and progress that has been integral to socialism since its origins.

This paper will explore the role of science in the political culture and fortunes of European social democracy in the 21st century and provide a historical perspective by tracing continuity and discontinuity with social democracy in the second half of the 20th century, during the Cold War era.

First, I will explore the literature on the decline of social democracy, focusing on books produced from the start of the decline of the social democracy in the late 1970s to the financial crisis of 2008. As mentioned, this is a rich field of research, where historians and political scientists have built multiple explanatory models involving a wide range of factors. My goal is to assess whether previous literature has accounted science and technology as one of the factors in the decline of social democratic parties and how it has conceptualized their effect.

Secondly, I will investigate the policy documents of the Party of European Socialists (PES) to reconstruct how social democrats approached scientific questions and the social role of science during the 21st century. The analysis will track the evolution of social democratic values and policies from the Third Way/Neue Mitte as promoted by Tony Blair and Gerhard Schröder in late 1990s to a greater radicalism after the 2008 financial crisis. The goal is to describe what role science and technology played in social democratic policies, culture and visions and how this changed over twenty years.

Thirdly, I will provide historical perspective by confronting the discourse on science and technology produced by social democrats in the 21st century with the discourse they produced in the Cold War era. The goal is to assess whether there has been continuity or disruption in social democratic culture.

Finally, I will connect the evolution within social democratic political culture to wider developments in Western societies in order to draw conclusions on how a change in attitude towards science and technology has contributed to the decline of social democratic parties.

2. Literature review

The historical investigation of European social democracy is usually focused on national parties and often relies on national exceptionalism to explain national peculiarities or the success or failure of such party. Histories of European social democracy or more generally of the European left are not uncommon and they contain precious insights. However, they are often limited to anthologies of national cases with a small attempt to synthetize shared developments.[6] On the other hand, comparative analysis is a favorite tool of political science.

Recently, Frank Bandau provided a survey of the explanations for the decline of social democracy, classifying causal factors.[7] Bandau has emphasized the role of social transformation, the limitation to economic policies, the penetration of neo-liberal ideas making social democratic offering less distinctive and the domination of middle-class activists who make the parties less attractive for the working-class. Bandau does not explicitly single out science and technological development as factors in these macro-explanations, though they occasionally account for contributing factors.

No book or article on the decline of social democracy has centered science and technology as a major factor. To salvage the most important contributions from the existing literature, it is necessary to conceptualize how these factors are integrated into general explanations. In the following paragraphs I propose ideal types to describe their role, focusing specifically on a distinction between external factors and substantial factors.

The most common strategy for integrating science and technology into explanations for the decline of social democracy is treating them as a factor that modified the context in which historical actors operated. I define this as "external" factor because these explanations assume a passive role of historical actors towards technological change, which put them into favorable or unfavorable situations with limited agency. While historical explanations must center material factors, often these explanatory models degenerate into technological determinism, underplaying the role of agency in adapting to these developments or even steering them.

In broad terms, the literature assumes technology to have external effects in three fields: electoral-social, economic, and communication. The electoral-social effect describes how technology modified the structure of society, transforming both the electors that social democratic parties needed to win and the class structure that shaped its class-based character.

The economic effect describes how technological change transformed production, distribution of income and trade, which changed the economic policies that were available to social democratic governments. Finally, the communication effect describes how technological change in the media transformed the way politics played out and politicians could reach electors.

The less common strategy the literature adopts is to treat science and technology as a substantial element of politics and political culture, which directly involved the agency of historical actors. Among the many ways science became a political issue, three are recurring in the literature. First, there is the way in which scientific and technological advancements propped up the myth of progress, which was an integral part of socialist culture. Here the literature recognizes the mutual dependency of the myth of scientific and social progress. Secondly, science was essential to the development of "scientification of politics" (*Verwissenschaftlichung von Politik*), a phenomenon attributed to the early postwar period and the Golden Age of social democracy.[8] The term describes the belief that society could be governed according to objective apolitical laws and that scientific research could provide resources to distribute and make more rational political decisions. While this argument is controversial, many historians include science as one of the factors in the period of the end of ideology.[9] Finally, in some specific science-related questions – such as nuclear power or environmentalism – historians see a key factor in the fortunes of social democracy.

This section is going to analyze a series of monographs that explore the fortunes and decline of social democracy. I am going to use the ideal types sketched above to classify the role they attributed to science and technology. I have selected the more exhaustive books with a well-established fame, so the selection is not fully representative. Finally, I have focused on books published after the 1970s and before 2008. This period saw the beginning of the decline of social democracy, which produced the revisionism of the Third Way/Neue Mitte. Social democratic reformers saw the need to recast the program of social democracy by making a break with traditions and adapt to the new conditions of globalization and neo-liberalism. Thus, I am interested in the period where historical research served not just scientific purposes, but also the ideological purpose of justify or oppose the internal transformation of social democracy.

The first book is *Paper Stones,* one of the older narratives on the rise and decline of social democracy.[10] The book is concerned with the slow decline of traditional social democracy, so Adam Przeworski and John Sprague give some weight to the idea that technological change might have changed the privileged relationship between socialist parties and the working-class. In addition to deindustrialization, they focus on the effect of technology on the way politics was run. Traditional social democratic parties expressed the closed milieu of the working-class and organized their militants through a comprehensive network of organization that regulated most aspects of daily life. Over time, social democrats shifted to electoralism, relying on new media such as television to reach a wider range of social groups. Thus, Przeworski and Sprague consider technological change just one of the many factors in the transformation of social democratic parties and explicitly as just an external factor, not a substantial one.

Sheri Berman's *The Primacy of Politics* is another text that gives little attention to technological factors and scientific questions. Berman sees the early orthodox Marxism of the turn of the 20th century as dominated by scientific and economic determinism under the influence of Engels and Kautsky.[11] She sees the close relationship between science and socialism as simply a feature of an early and immature version of socialism. She does not systematically conceptualize the role of technological progress except as a tool for multiple, not specifically socialist goals.[12] This book offers little insight into the role of science and technology.

More open to recognize the role of science and technology in socialism is the work of Gøsta Esping-Andersen. Esping-Andersen deals with the theories of post-industrialism since the 1960s to explain the evolution of the welfare systems. He criticizes both Marxist and liberal economists for their excessive reliance on technological determinism due to a binary division between market and state. Ignoring different national outcomes, they built theories of post-industrialism that did not account enough for the role of political decisions.[13] In line with the political nature of technological decisions, Esping-Andersen also recognizes a specific reformist socialist tradition of promoting social reforms, education and welfare provisions as necessary for the full deployment of technological progress.[14]

Donald Sassoon's classic history of the European left, *One Hundred Years of Socialism*, devotes considerable space to the role of science and technology. Sassoon identifies 19th-century positivism and the celebration

of science as essential elements at the foundations of socialism.[15] This celebration of progress would inform the socialist movement throughout the 20th century. Progress and technological modernization were integral part of the appeal of socialism:

> In the post-war period the SPD had acquired legitimacy by accepting fundamental assumptions of liberal capitalism – namely, that the gradual deployment of technical progress would bring about a continuous increase in the welfare of society – that modern societies faced an infinite trend towards growth and technological progress. It further assumed that this would go hand in hand with the gradual development of socialism. This was not a peculiarity of German socialists. The entire socialist movement, including communists, accepted this teleological view, present, in one form or another, throughout Marx's own writings and shared by all liberals since the days of the Enlightenment.[16]

The existential problem for socialism was that technological progress was taking place under capitalism. This opened a contradiction, which for Sassoon is best embodied by the French Communist Party. As an anti-system party inimical to every social change, it had to reject technological progress while also promising a brilliant future under communism.[17] This problem became even more pressing in the 1960s, as Western societies entered a crisis of rationality and science. The promise of technological abundance and technically-assisted gender equality by social democratic governments failed to materialize, while the Vietnam war presented a struggle between the technologically advanced and inhuman civilization and the archaic, but revolutionary peasants.[18] The 1968 movement embodied the revolt against rationalism and industrial technology.[19]

In addition to the role of science in the ideal universe of socialism, Sassoon also stresses that technological change changed the economic and social context. The success of socialism had been based on the Fordist mode of production, but the new model based on electronics created harmful developments. Older craft unionism was based on high skill and differentials of qualification, while the effects of new technologies was deskilling and levelling out differences in qualification.[20] Trade unions were forced to accept this or see their firms go bankrupt:

> What happened, instead, was that the 1970s was the decade in which key sectors of capitalism – those able to reorganize production by the

> intensive use of new technologies and information systems backed by adequate finance – advanced at the expense of the traditional sectors, i.e. those dominated by the traditional working class, and classical 'fordist' production and trade unionism.[21]

Technological change thus fostered the demise of traditional industries in which the workforce was male, unionized and well-paid in favor of new jobs with a different set of skills, often associated with women. This change allowed employers to impose lower salaries, piece rates, part-time and no job security.[22]

The end of rapid growth and environmental concerns eroded the myth of technological progress and unlimited growth, in favor of a concept of qualitative growth. While the idea considered environmental externalities and social impact, it was inevitably vaguer.[23] Moreover, by the end of the 1980s, social democratic parties like the British Labour Party had lost faith in the ability of the state to promote economic modernization and higher productivity.[24] Other parties, such as the German SPD, had been more successful in cushioning the problems of technological unemployment and disruption than in producing state-led growth.[25]

Geoff Eley's *Forging Democracy* also attempts a synthetic history of the European left. Eley also stresses how technological change in the productive system eroded the traditional working-class:

> Thus the shift from skilled industrial work to white-collar labor in services entailed other changes – preferences for women over men, part-time working, rising joblessness, extreme gaps between regions, new computer based high-technology industries, and the collapse of the industrial economy's old manufacturing core. Deindustrialization remapped the capitalist economy.[26]

For Eley, however, the question is why a new trade unionism did not develop under the new circumstances. The transformation to a service and knowledge economy could mean the creation of a new proletariat of workers to be organized into unions, allowing a return to corporatism and Keynenianism. However, Eley argues that the new working-class was too divided along regional, ethnic and age differences to build a proper solidarity and class consciousness. He counts among these factors technological innovations such as the decline of coal or the introduction of containers in docks, which eliminated the traditional professions of

miners and longshoremen, where solidarity had been strongest. Thus, for Eley technological change was a major factor in social transformations, although science and technology are still external factors.

John Callaghan has produced a good narrative of the decline of social democracy integrating the role of science and technology.[27] He gives attention to technological change as a factor while rejecting technological determinism. Callaghan argues that the promotion of technology was an integral part of the economic policies of the British Labour Party and the SPD in the 1960s and 1970s. This tradition can be traced in the 1964 Wilson government, but also the early period of the Mitterrand presidency and the Labour Party's manifesto in 1983:

> In short, the thrust of the manifesto was redolent of Labour rhetoric of old: it was a case of science, industry and technology aided by the state against the forces of finance, short-termism and capital export.[28]

Against this statist and technocratic tradition and out of the 1968 contestation, a different tradition embodied by the New Left emerged. In France, supporters of *Autogestion* "denounced traditional social democracy for its naive faith in progress via state-guided economic growth and technological change."[29] Callaghan identifies a similar trend in the SPD in the 1980s and the Swedish social democrats in the 1990s, as they recognized the destructive environmental consequences of technology and the need for democratic control. After its fourth defeat in 1992, the British Labour Party shifted towards supply-side socialism, retrenching state intervention to allow the market to make private industry competitive. At the same time, state intervention shifted to building human capital: "Education and training had now been elevated to 'the commanding heights' of a modern economy."[30] Callaghan is thus able to identify a key component of the transition from old social democracy to Third Way/ Neue Mitte.

Callaghan also focuses on the role of technological change in transforming the context of social democracy. He supports the idea that new communication technologies were a major factor in globalization and weakening of national government, but he is skeptical that structural changes in the economy were the reason for the decline of social democracy. Academics and left-wing activists blame the flexible manufacturing system and the application of information technology to the monitoring of performance for the transition for a post-Fordist production

system.[31] However, Callaghan finds that the new flexible structures were less disruptive than claimed and outcomes such a labor market deregulation was not an automatic result of technology, but a product of political decisions. In this, Callaghan agrees with Esping-Andersen. A more serious question is whether technological change meant a decline of industrial workers, eroding the traditional constituency of social democracy. However, Callaghan warns that the working-class was never a solid bloc and its quantitative changes were not tied to the fortunes of social democratic parties. Callaghan's research is particularly useful in taking scientific questions as a substantial part of politics while warning against easy technological determinism.

The most successful attempt to integrate science and technology into a narrative of the rise and decline of social democracy is research by Francis Sejersted, although it is limited to Norwegian and Swedish cases.[32] Sejersted identifies these two social democratic parties as the most successful because of their adoption of a program of nation-building and social integration based on economic modernization and technological change. Like Jarausch notes, claiming the mantle of modernity was essential for social democratic projects. Sejersted sees the role of science not only in promoting economic growth and technological progress, but also advancing a model for a well-run society. This model based on rationalism and redistribution had a tendency to degenerate into optimism about technical mastery over life and an overreliance on expertise.[33] Sejersted thus associates a decline of social democratic fortunes in the 1970s to a greater skepticism towards technology in its many manifestations, including nuclear power.[34] Sejersted identifies the decline of the scientification of politics as a return to politics, where alternative worldviews and system of values could struggle over where to steer society:

> In the period after 1970, however, and running parallel with the weakening of faith in rational common sense and in technical progress, rationalist arguments were being replaced by moral arguments. Political rhetoric was changing its character. Beneath this turnover we are also able to glimpse a weakening of technological determinism and a new faith in the significance of political decisions.[35]

Finally, it must be noted that almost all narratives deal with technological change. Science is covered only to the degree that scientific

research produces new technology. Science as self-defined activity for the production of new knowledge or as a model of rationality and humanism is usually not covered. Only Sassoon and Sejersted recognize that the myth of progress of socialists depended on an expansive view of science.

3. Science and social democracy in the 21st century

This section analyzes the role of science and technology in the policies of European social democracy from the late 1990s to the late 2010s, a transition period into a world no longer defined by the Cold War. Since the expansion of the European Union towards North, South and East and the deepening of integration, the Party of European Socialists has played major role in synthetizing the disparate demands of individual socialist parties, so that we can take it as representative of European social democracy.

I will analyze the electoral manifestos the PES produced for each European election since 1999. The late 1990s saw the spread of a revision of social democratic ideology in Europe, with the electoral success of Tony Blair's New Labour in 1997 and Gerhard Scröder's SPD in 1998. The two leaders produced a joint ideological document synthetizing the principles of their ideological revision, which they called Third Way/ Neue Mitte. This ideological manifesto enshrined at international level the changes they were enacting in their national parties – a common process in the redefinition of social democratic ideology.[36] The influence of this ideological revision could already be seen in the manifesto of the PES for the European elections the following year.

The global financial crisis of 2008 opened a new chapter for European social democracy, as many of the policies and values associated with the Third Way were being challenged as excessively neo-liberal, requiring the PES to make a turn towards greater radicalism in economic matters. At the same time, any push for expansive fiscal policies and economic intervention met the opposition of supporters of fiscal austerity at European and national level, so this radicalism had to be reconciled with the need to eventually compromise with coalition partners. This would change radically with the Covid-19 pandemic.

Science and technology play a central role in *Europe: The Third Way - die neue Mitte*, the manifesto in which Tony Blair and Gerhard Schröder defined the new ideological identity of social democracy.[37] The topos of technological change is central in their argument for the revision of social

democratic ideology: as technological change radically transform the economic and social context in which socialists operate, their ideology must not be a straitjacket, but must adapt flexibly to the new circumstances.

However, technological change was not only the problem, it was also the solution. "The most important task of modernisation is to invest in human capital: to make the individual and businesses fit for the knowledge-based economy of the future."[38] Technological change and flexibility opened up opportunities to take up new jobs or start new businesses. Technology was also the solution to environmental problems, as new technologies consumed fewer resources.

The manifesto called for a new type of interventionist policy, rejecting both *laissez faire* and old state intervention. Society was transitioning from the Fordist model based on industrial mass production to services and information economy based on knowledge. The task of new state intervention was building human and social capital, which created the conditions for more investments and jobs. Unemployment was also caused by the lack of skilled workers (for example in information technology) for the new jobs. "Therefore, governments have a responsibility to put in place a framework that enables individuals to enhance their qualifications and to fulfil their potential. This must now be a top social democratic priority."[39] Education was not to be limited to childhood, but be life-long. Unemployment could become an opportunity to attain qualifications and develop skills. The state also had the key responsibility of promoting scientific research and innovation, fostering the growth of tech giants from below. At the same time, the liberalization of capital markets would allow investments to flow where needed. Deregulation was also necessary to support the growth of new firms.

Thus, while Blair-Schröder envisioned the retrenchment of state tasks in some fields, it also expanded state responsibilities in other fields. As Jenny Andersson notes, the turn of social democracy in the 1990s was not simply neo-liberal, but it involved new and sometimes deeper forms of interventionism.[40] According to Andersson, this was possible because it suited well the traditions of European social democracy.

The influence of the Third Way/Neue Mitte is evident in the 1999 and 2004 PES manifestos, which give a strong emphasis to human capital. They advanced education and training as complementing strategies of social inclusion and economic growth. The 1999 manifesto presents investments in human capital as an alternative to neo-liberal policies towards globalization and a form of economic intervention more suited

for the new knowledge society: "Our biggest investment must be in our greatest asset, our people and their skills. Europe can compete successfully by investing in education, modern skills and technology, not by lower wages and poorer working conditions."[41] The 2004 manifesto ties the socialist policies to the Lisbon strategy of creating a knowledge-based society:

> Our work programme, *Momentum for recovery in Europe: Promoting public and private investments*, proposes a detailed strategy to create more new high-quality jobs by promoting greater investment in research and technology, supporting new growth sectors and reinforcing modern education, training and lifelong learning.[42]

Environmental policies were already prominent, although they come late in the documents. The 1999 manifesto is committed to sustainable development, biodiversity and the fight against greenhouse gasses. The 2004 connects protection of the environment with justice for the younger generations.

With the 2008 economic crisis, the rhetorical register of the manifestos becomes more aggressive, particularly blaming conservatives for having let market forces go unchecked. The 2009 manifesto proposes that the choice in the elections is between a progressive Europe making politics responsible to the people or a conservative Europe leaving everything to the market. This is in line with a rhetorical revival of Keynesianism and other forms of state intervention, but also the fact that European governments and institutions were more reluctant than the Obama administration. In addition to fairness and defense of workers' rights, environmentalism becomes another justification for state intervention: transforming the economy into green economy to prevent climate change and avoid energy dependency. Indeed, the manifesto accuses conservatives of ignoring the science of climate change to dismiss its political implications.

A significant shift is an open commitment to increase investments: "Substantially raising investment in research, development and innovation will be essential for new smart green growth and our long-term prosperity."[43] This must be realized by empowering the European Investment Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development to grant financing. However, the direction of investments still show continuity. The manifesto promotes education, life-long learning, retraining and apprenticeship as

necessary to help workers adapt to the new jobs created by technological progress and the green transition:

> People must be helped through this transformation of our economies. It is imperative that our citizens – of all ages – have the opportunity to develop their skills, find new and better jobs as well as being able to work and study abroad. We believe that action at local, regional, national and European levels should be geared towards supporting people through transition and opening up new and better opportunities.[44]
>
> We propose to support businesses to anticipate changes caused by climate change and technological shifts – thereby safeguarding existing and creating new jobs – while also helping workers retrain if they lose their jobs because of these changes.[45]

The 2014 manifesto responds to the austerity policies promoted at national and European level by conservative governments. It is even more open in demanding direct economic intervention to reflate the economy and increase production: "we will prioritize innovation, research, training and a smart reindustrialization policy, so that amazing breakthroughs discovered in European laboratories and universities can be translated into more jobs for workers in Europe."[46]

As usual, the destination of investments is in the form of scientific research and training, with an explicit commitment to adapt to the wave of technological progress to create greater growth and more jobs. The term "smart reindustrialization" is significantly ambiguous, as it seems to distance itself from traditional industrial policies. However, the manifesto also includes a commitment to direct European investments to promote green growth and sustainability, in order to avoid the externalities of uncontrolled markets. The 2019 manifesto is even bolder on the need to control the flow of investments to promote socially beneficial growth: "We need a long-term Investment Plan to prepare our industries and workers so they benefit from the green transition, the digital revolution and the growth of artificial intelligence."[47]

The manifesto commits to sustainability, so that economic interests would not trump the environment. Fight against inequality was also a principle economic intervention had to integrate. The manifesto identifies education, training and scientific research as major targets of public investment: "Europe's industrial strategy must channel investment into

research and innovation, support training and life-long learning, and ensure that jobs are created and protected in the EU."[48]

This survey of the PES's manifestos shows an element of continuity in its policies in matter of science. While the financial crisis of 2008 prompted a bolder rhetoric, economic intervention had never ceased to be part of the armory of social democracy. The Third Way/Neue Mitte still envisioned radical intervention to build human capital. At the same time, despite a greater radicalism, the post-2008 manifestos are still reluctant to find new levers of economic intervention other than education, training and research. This could be blamed to a continuing influence of neo-liberalism, but it could also be explained by the unavailability of other economic policies such as physical planning or nationalization, which had proved of limited success. On the one hand, this could indicate a clear break between Cold War social democracy and post-1989 social democracy. On the other hand, the elements of continuity are strong even in the matter of human capital.

4. Continuity and change: Waldemar von Knoeringen and Olof Palme

The previous section surveyed the arguments and topoi of the social democratic discourse about science and technology since 1999. The present section is going to compare the social democratic discourse during the Cold War and during the 21st century. Given the vastness of the reconstructing social democratic culture across Europe, I will focus on a limited number of references from the Socialist International and the three most prominent social democratic figures who paid particular attention to the relationship between socialism and science: Waldemar von Knoeringen (from the German SPD), Olof Palme (from the Swedish social democrats) and Tony Blair (from the British Labour Party). Their rhetoric is particularly significant to trace continuity and disruptions in social democratic policies and culture. First, I will focus on von Knoeringen and Palme, as they are representative of social democracy in the Cold War era, the period that Third Way supporters were trying to distance themselves from.

As the previous section showed, human capital was a common topos in the social democratic discourse of science in the 21st century. Human capital justified a new form of state intervention and thus a proper socialist

economic policy. With the loss of legitimacy for traditional industrial policy, physical planning and direct state intervention, investments in scientific research, education and training become the main tools of economic intervention. However, this was not a radical innovation.

At the 1956 congress, the SPD committed to exploit all the resources of the so-called "Second Industrial Revolution" to satisfy social goals. Waldemar von Knoeringen had the SPD commit to spend more on education and training to increase production.[49] In 1964, Olof Palme argued that it was necessary to think beyond a binary division between capital and labor and to focus on the third factor of production, meaning technological progress and qualitative improvement of the workforce. Making indirect references to the Human Capital Theory of Theodore Schultz and the work of Odd Aukrust, Palme argued that more than half of economic growth could be attributed to better education and training. The state had thus to direct its attention to developing this most important productive factor: "But if a krona invested in education often gives a greater return than a krona invested in roads, power plants, factories or machines, this is a situation that must inevitably affect our view of education and thus of society's education policy."[50] In 1967, Waldemar von Knoeringen returned on the need to increase knowledge and education to increase production:

> We are witnessing the explosion of human knowledge and the steady increase in productivity. There are more researchers alive today than in all of human history. New inventions, scientific research results that question the status quo are everyday news. This is all connected: the tremendous expansion of technology, technical knowledge and its implementation in productive power, i.e. the increase in the output of human labor power per hour and capital unit.[51]

Another topos typical of the Third Way/Neue Mitte is the idea that rapid technological development transformed everything, making old ideas and institutions obsolete. In 1982 the Socialist International also noted that scientific advance rapidly changed all the parameters of political action and state activity. Previous socialist plans had not taken into account television and microchip, and they had also ignored the environmental impact of technology. "The socialist parties of the world must take science and scientific policy seriously, else our record as defenders of community interest against special interests will be something of the past."[52]

This topos was already present in a Palme's speech from 1967 and he even quoted Marx to prove this point. Technological change created immense new possibilities, but it also created technological unemployment for thousands of skilled workers. "New technique creates new opportunities, gives us the chance to make more with the same efforts. But new technology also makes old technology obsolete."[53] Here Palme could quote precedents from previous industrial revolutions. This new industrial revolution brought forward by automation and cybernetics would be no less revolutionary, but now society had a greater awareness of the need to protect individuals. This was not just a matter of fairness, but also not wasting human potential. Waldemar von Knoeringen was also aware of the developments in computers and cybernetics and how they would radically transform the context for social democratic actions.[54]

Blair and Schröder insisted that computer and the information society had radically changed the context for socialism, but the idea of an information society was born in the 1970s. By 1983 Palme had already integrated information society into his discourse about socialism and technological progress. The argument Palme employed was that technological progress was continuously accelerating and was now difficult to understand and impossible to stop. The policy of the labor movement was to ride the wave of technological change to guide it:

> We can therefore never control technical development by simply resisting. Our opportunity is to be at the forefront of development. Then we can influence it.
>
> In the labor movement, there has been essentially always a positive attitude to technical change. In development, we have seen promises of better lives and living conditions.[55]

Von Knoeringen also preached not resisting technical change and adapting:

> It is not a question of whether the big changes will come, it is just a question of how politicians position themselves and how they react. I think that social democracy in particular must draw sober conclusions from this. That means: structural reforms in the apparatus of the most important social institutions.[56]

The main difference between Palme's arguments and those of the Third Way a decade later was the sense of history. Palme could appeal to a long tradition of socialist arguments and policies about technological change that justified the policies for the information society. On the other hand, Waldemar von Knoeringen invoked the changes and discoveries in science as a reason to renovate social democratic ideology and shift it away from traditional Marxism.[57]

Another topos is the relationship between technological developments and politics. Socialists tended to see technology as a positive development, but not one that would become automatically beneficial. Technology was ultimately a neutral tool and how to use it depended on the people in charge. It was the mission of socialists that technology be used to benefit society. Palme and von Knoeringen insisted on the need not to be passive receptors but master of the change:

> This reflects the attitude of openness to existing technology. But it is not an unconditional, passive attitude. On the contrary, technical development must sometimes be controlled both hard and firmly.
>
> We must ask ourselves where new technical knowledge can lead, what results investments in different areas can bring about. The development is not destined. It can be controlled and influenced.[58]

> We will only be able to preserve the human if man does not fall under the laws of technology, if he does not become an object but a subject of the apparatus. The socialist question is thus: is it possible for man to develop his social faculties as much as he has already developed his technical ones?[59]

The continuities between the older and newer discourse on technology will emerge even more clearly by focusing on British socialism.

5. Continuity and change in Tony Blair

Tony Blair has not only been a key figure for European social democracy in the last decades, he is also assumed to represent a specific trend. Blairism is identified with a conscious break with traditional social democratic culture, the retrenchment of state intervention in favor of the markets and the introduction of neo-liberal elements. He himself encouraged this perception, by presenting as an iconoclast battling traditionalists.

It must be noted that scientific literature followed his lead. For Michael Kranert, Blair's speeches articulated the topos of crisis in order to justify his renovation of social democracy.[60] He takes the following speech as exemplary of his rhetorical strategy:

> As a father, as a leader, as a member of the human family, I ask this question of Britain's future. We live in an era of extraordinary, revolutionary change at work, at home, through technology, through the million marvels of modern science. The possibilities are exciting. But its challenge is clear. How do we create in Britain a new age of achievement in which all of the people – not just a few but all of the people – can share?[61]

According to Kranert, crisis was central to the discourse of the Third Way/Neue Mitte, as external factors introduce radical changes in society, economy, technology and ideology that require a recasting of socialist ideology in order to adapt for the new times. By postulating unavoidable constraints, the socialist leadership forced on the party membership an ideological turn more in tune with the new neo-liberal era.

While there is some truth in this discourse analysis, a more historically minded analysis will show the element of continuity within socialist culture. We already showed how Waldemar von Knoeringen warned that technological change demanded to move away from orthodox Marxism. Blair's topoi can easily be found in previous Labour leader. In 1957, Frank Cousins also said he was emotional about the future of his six-year-old daughter.[62] In 1958, Alice Bacon said that education policy had to be the equalizer of future opportunities: "I want to emphasise in conclusion that our policy is a policy for all our children, not just for a few brilliant children."[63] In 1958, Jim Griffiths also described a new era of technological change that demanded new political action:

> We are on the threshold of a new technical revolution. In all our plans this is a challenge to us. We can now get hold of, harness, discipline, guide these tremendous new forces so that the new industrial revolution which is beginning becomes the foundation of a new, a better Britain and not, as was the old industrial revolution, the beginning of the dismal Britain of the nineteenth century.[64]

The similarities are even stronger if we analyze an essay written by Blair in 2021:

> We are living through the most far-reaching upheaval since the 19th-century Industrial Revolution: a technology revolution of the internet, AI, quantum computing, extraordinary advances in genomics, bioscience, clean energy, nutrition, gaming, financial payments, satellite imagery – everything, every sphere of work, leisure and life is subject to its transformative power. The question is how it is used: to control humanity or liberate it, to provide opportunities for those presently without opportunity, or to put even more power, wealth and opportunity in the hands of those already well off.[65]

The fact that Blair picks up the same theme more than two decades apart show the centrality of the technological question for his world-view. However, rather than being distinctive of him, it is part of a long tradition of Labour culture. Blair could pick arguments from an established repertoire. As Palme already noted, invoking technological change as a disruptive factor for old hierarchies and institutions went back to Marx himself.

The same argument could be used for different ends by Marx, Palme or Blair. Luckily for them, this repertoire was stretchable to any purpose. Throughout the 1950s, Labour members had used the topic of the incoming technological revolution to justify either policies favoring central planning and nationalization or strategic openings to the middle class.[66] Blair's words are barely different from those of the idols of the Labour Left, Aneurin Bevan and Tony Benn:

> Science has opened up for us most flattering and pleasant prospects, but science has also opened up for us the most appalling future, unless we show now some vision and some understanding.[67]

> Technology, like all power, is neutral and the question is how do we use it.[68]

It is evident that the discourse on technological change was not just extensive, but also flexible. Social democrats continuously return to technology when looking for a solution for the problems of slow growth and unemployment, though their assumptions and ultimate goals change. Technology and science remain lodestars in the social democratic culture, despite many changes. However, if this is the case, why the fortunes of social democracy have changed?

6. Conclusions

Reflecting in 1987 on an essay he had written almost twenty years before, German literary scholar Helmut Kreuzer noticed how the attitude towards science had changed. The Oil Crisis and the Club of Rome signaled the end of unlimited growth. Huge technological transformations changed work and leisure. Political conflict was no longer over socialism and capitalism, but between the economy and ecology. Belief in progress declined, also thanks to pollution and medical disaster such as the Thalidomide and Three Miles Island. Opinion polls registered that the percentage of people who believed they would have an always better future went from 60 per cent in 1972 to 31 per cent in 1980. "That not everything that is technically possible should be realized – this formula found almost universal consensus as an imperative for future action."[69]

Further polls seem to confirm a greater skepticism towards the future and technological change. A Eurobarometer research enlightens on the attitude towards science in 2014, the year of the European elections in which social democratic parties struggled to find policies with which to convince voters.[70] While respondents were optimistic about the positive impact of scientific research on healthcare in the incoming decades, they were more skeptical about the positive contribution of technology in job creation. While optimism about technological innovation persisted in the Nordic countries, a marked pessimism was dominant in Italy, Germany and the countries of Eastern Europe. Most significantly, technological optimism was predominant among social groups with higher education. So while trust in science will remain a constituent element of social democratic policies and culture, it will probably win them less new votes than it did in the past.

It must also be noted that the emphasis of science is still present in the 21st century social democratic discourse, but notably less bold. Particularly, it is now openly challenged from the left. While older communists were even more enthusiastic about technological modernity than social democrats, the new left is more critical. Blair's pro-science essay in the 2021 met harsh criticism.[71] In addition, what good science dictates is much less clear than during the Cold War. The environmental and anti-nuclear movement have helped to deconstruct expertise by making scientific decisions more political and controversial.

Whether things will change, it is up to debate. The Covid-19 crisis opened the gates for greater economic intervention at European and

national level, finally satisfying many policy requests from social democrats. In addition, there is a greater emphasis on the role of science to solve social problems. A document the PES produced for the post-Covid world was much bolder in scientific matters and left-wing economic policies than anything put out before.[72] Opinion polls show that the pandemic generated a greater trust in science, at least in rich countries.[73] On the other hand, those rejecting scientific expertise in matters such as prevention and vaccination are a minority, but a motivated one. What history can teach us about the present moment is that the relationship between science, politics and democracy is not predetermined, but it will depend on the political decisions made by rulers and citizens.

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