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THE GERMAN SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY 1890-1914 AS A POLITICAL MODEL

IN IMPERIAL GERMANY BEFORE THE FIRST WORLD WAR, POLITICAL parties played a limited and somewhat unusual rôle. It is normally held that what defines a political party — and makes it different from other interest or pressure groups — is its willingness or constitutional ability to take power; to achieve its desired ends through the given structure of political power in society. This applied to all constitutional societies prior to 1914 with the exception of Germany. Here political parties as such had no opportunity for wielding power. The Imperial Government was carried on independently of them. The formation and composition of Government was not related to the power and strength of political parties as expressed at elections, and did not in any way represent the political groupings in the legislature, the *Reichstag*. The parties were of course able to influence Government in a negative way, by obstructing legislation, and by interrogating the Government about its administrative actions. Consequently the Imperial Chancellor found it necessary in matters of legislation to work with the support of a majority in the *Reichstag*, and often conducted complicated manoeuvres to obtain one. The parties that made up such a majority at any one time, however, had no expectation of sharing power; the most they could hope to obtain, by co-operating with the Government, was legislation favouring their particular interests. In consequence the political parties in Germany before 1914 can better be described as politically organized interest groups, attempting to exert pressure on the Government in order to gain sectional advantages. The normal function of parties, to aggregate demands into a platform on which to be voted into power, could not be fulfilled, and so aggregation of interests remained limited. Constitutionally speaking, political parties did not exist at all; since, however, the political wishes of the electorate were expressed through organized parties, the Government had to form its majorities in the *Reichstag* by negotiation with party leaders instead of creating majorities out of undisciplined individuals, as the constitution suggested. The parties in turn "were dominated [in the imperial period] by the alternative of supporting or opposing an [anyhow] existing Government".[1] In fact the idea of a Reich party, pledged simply to support the Government, recurred in the

[1] "Rechtliche Ordnung des Parteiwesens", *Bericht der . . . Parteienrechtskommission* (Berlin, 1957), p. 5.

constitutional thinking of the time, and the Government's emotional manipulation of the 1907 *Reichstag* elections strongly suggested the emergence of such a "national" platform.[2]

Only two parties in Germany represented an exception to this general rule; the Catholic Centre Party and the Social Democratic Party (the SPD). Both began by representing socially defensive organizations rather than positive interest groups. Both considered themselves largely outside the course of political life in Imperial Germany. This applied far more to the SPD than to the Centre, for Socialist opposition was total and not merely limited; unlike the Centre it could envisage no possibility whatever of coming to terms with political society. With a philosophy that postulated not amendment but total collapse of the existing order, and made the party base its policies on that assumption, the SPD occupied from the moment of its foundation a pariah position. For twelve years, from 1878 to 1890, it was illegal; after Bismarck departed and the special anti-socialist legislation was repealed, the SPD never lost the conscious feeling of being an outcast, and adopted attitudes accordingly. Memories of the illegal period dominated the party's ideology much as the great depression dominates the ideology of the English Trade Unions today; in both cases a memory of being rejected by an existing order, whether political or economic.[3]

This made the SPD a very unusual phenomenon in political life. There have always been political groups committed to the total destruction and overthrow of existing government, but these have generally been conspiracies or sects, whose very existence has depended on tight organization and secrecy. With a platform of irreconcilable opposition the SPD, on the other hand, soon grew into a legal mass movement, whose official philosophy was based on the probably violent collapse of society, and whose policy attempted to hasten this event as much as possible. Right from the start it kept itself apart from society, first by emphasizing philosophical and moral differences, later completing the social containment of its members by organizational means. Thus the whole ideology of separation had strong moral overtones, which equated participation in society with corruption, and claimed to provide within itself a superior alternative to a corrupt capitalism. In fact the noisy official self-differentiation

[2] See for instance Robert von Mohl, *Lebenserinnerungen* (Stuttgart, 1902), ii, p. 171.

[3] The word "ideology" is used to express the current image of society. The analytical tools of Marxism as used at the time are called "philosophy". "Utopia" is used to express the vision of a better future, in the sense of Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia* (London, 1960 edn.), pp. 49 f., 173 f.

by Socialists was carried to such lengths that to discover substantial capacities in them for normal human behaviour — faults as well as virtues — was a major sociological triumph, achieved by no less a practitioner than Max Weber. And this rather obvious discovery still continues to illuminate unlikely areas of sociological inquiry today.[4] In fact, though great emphasis was always placed on this moral aspect as part and parcel of the doctrine of developing class-consciousness in Marxist philosophy, it was never considered sufficient, and the SPD increasingly developed organizational forms through which the activities and aspirations of its members could be expressed. But the two were not compatible; as organization grew moral fervour declined, and the one even became a sophisticated substitute for the other.

This non-participating opposition must be distinguished both from revolutionary conspiracies and political parties acting through and within the system. The SPD is not, of course, a unique example of such non-participating opposition. Circumstances of extreme dissatisfaction in various societies have produced similar phenomena from time to time. The RPF in France was founded in 1947 as a protest against the revival of a totally unacceptable *système politique* in the Fourth Republic. It refused to participate and, much like the SPD, used its presence in the political organs of society — legislature and civil administration — to provide a continuous and vociferous indictment of that society. Similarly, such parties arise in emerging colonial nations where a tradition of political organization exists: the Indian Congress, the Convention Peoples' Party in Ghana, the RDA in French West Africa. As these protest parties develop, they increasingly prohibit participation in colonial government, except as a clearly defined prelude to the departure of the colonial power. In all these cases, there is a strong element of inheritance expectation, whether by voluntary handing over of power or as a result of a cataclysm. In fact this expectation of inheritance is the moral force which makes non-participating opposition possible, yet prevents violence except as a last resort. Such parties, including the SPD, might well be called "inheritor parties".

Like all political parties, the SPD was mostly concerned with day to day problems of policy. The leadership particularly tended to be preoccupied with empirical problems, to which it tried to find

[4] See the references to Social Democracy in Max Weber, *Gesammelte Politische Schriften* (Tübingen, 1958); and the reference to this in, e.g., Reinhard Bendix, "Public authority in a developing political community. The case of India", *European Jl. of Sociology*, iv (1963), p. 51.

a solution in accordance with its philosophy. The maintenance of that philosophy and its development as a means of dealing with problems in their widest context was the task of the intellectuals. The SPD was, right from the start, well supplied with these. As a result of its pre-eminent position in the Second International, it attracted some of the best Marxist brains from other countries, particularly those where government policy kept Socialism confined to illegal conspiracies. Nonetheless, the continuing debate on policy within the party occasionally produced differences large enough to bring into question the SPD's entire *raison d'être*. Perhaps the most important of these self-examinations was the revisionist controversy, which began in 1898 and lasted — as a debate over fundamentals — until 1903. This is not the place to go through the details of the extremely wordy arguments which ranged over the entire field of theory, strategy and tactics — as well as personal denigrations. In the course of it the problem of the SPD's relationship to society came to be critically examined; to this extent the whole revisionist debate is an important landmark in our analysis of the SPD as an inheritor party.

Instead of concentrating on what they said or how, we will examine those who said it and why, in order to see what forces and ideas they represent. On the revisionist side there were first the theorists, people like Bernstein, who unconsciously paid tribute to the importance of Marxist philosophy by providing a theoretical basis for the sum of their own empirical observations, both of society and of party policy. It is important to recognize that this theoretical analysis was almost inadvertent, and always reluctant. Bernstein's articles began as an armchair exercise in the lofty quiet of the *Neue Zeit*. He was unaware of the savage storm of controversy that he was about to cause, and was astonished when it broke. Revisionism was not an intellectual attack on Marxist teleology, but a groping attempt to formulate coherently a mass of disturbing but strictly empirical data.[5]

Bernstein's main supporters were the practical men of the party, the Trade Union leaders, practising members of various professions who happened also to be Socialists, and above all the representatives of Social Democracy from South Germany. All these people had in some way broken through the isolation from society in which most Social Democrats found themselves. Thus it is interesting to note that among the lawyers in the SPD, those that were actually practising

[5] Paul Frölich's introduction to Rosa Luxemburg, *Gesammelte Werke* (Berlin, 1925), iii, p. 16. See also *Neue Zeit*, 1897-8, vol. i, p. 740.

were revisionist, while those who had been disbarred, or whose practice had suffered because they were Socialists, supported the leadership. The exception to this was a group consisting among others of Liebknecht, Rosenfeld and Haase, whose legal work was wholly confined to the defence of Socialist interests and members in the courts; these too supported the leadership, since their practices were almost a Socialist vested interest. Similarly journalists like Schippel and David, who had established a national reputation in their particular subjects, supported the revisionists, while those who wrote exclusively for the party press — especially in the provinces — were among the most vociferous supporters of orthodoxy.

The South Germans, who provided the revisionist shock troops at party congresses, and in between continued to co-operate with "society" at home, strenuously made the excuse of special conditions, a different political climate. Much of the debate at party congresses was concerned with establishing and defining the validity of these exceptions in South Germany. From our point of view it should be noted that it was only in the provinces of South Germany that the SPD could take part in communal affairs, and occupied its share of local government posts in accordance with electoral strength. Similarly, the different laws and their interpretation in North and South Germany had repeatedly proved useful to the SPD, whose members often found refuge in another province from impending deportations or prosecutions in Prussia. Undoubtedly the insulation between society and the SPD was thinner and more porous in the South.

The line-up in the revisionist controversy therefore was closely connected with the experience of collaborating with existing society. The continuing debate about policy was concerned with the same problem. By postulating that capitalism had softened sufficiently to make it possible for Social Democracy not only to come to terms with it, but actually influence it in the desired direction — which meant the acceptance of a status similar to other political parties — Bernstein and his supporters were altering not so much Marxist theoretical analysis as the party's established practice of political isolation. The alienation of being permanently and irrevocably dissociated would thus be broken; not only policy would change, but the moral and organizational structure of isolation was threatened.

Significantly this effort to throw a bridge across the gap from the Socialist camp was matched by a similar attempt on the part of society. Sombart, Schmoller and other academic social scientists recognized that it was not desirable to perpetuate the gap between the

Socialist camp and society, and attempted to persuade society, particularly the Government in its administration and legislation, to meet the working classes half way.[6] Sombart himself coasted close to Marxist shores for many years; he perceived that what really kept Social Democracy isolated from society was not policy — which could be altered — but an ideology and a philosophy of separation which could only be destroyed by contact. In return the SPD intellectuals, Mehring and Luxemburg, recognized how close he was to the truth and reserved a specially vitriolic hatred for the *Kathedersozialisten*, though in private they acknowledged the validity of some of Sombart's comments.[7] Paradoxically however, while the revisionist impetus from within the Socialist camp came from professional men, Trade Union leaders and Southern politicians, it was only from a few academic intellectuals like Sombart that a corresponding effort was made to persuade a disinterested and reluctant public on the other side.

Opposed to the revisionists in the SPD were two main groups, those who believed that the gap between society and Socialism was natural and desirable — the Marxists — and those who believed that society had irrevocably cast them out and that Socialist isolation was mainly the product of Government policies and attitudes.[8] At that time there was no visible difference between these two points of view. The SPD Executive and the substantial force who supported it came down belatedly but firmly against the revisionists and between 1901 and 1903 rebuilt the broken defences against society on all fronts. Chronologically the defeat of the revisionists at the 1903 party congress was followed shortly by the opening of a revolutionary period in Germany during which a series of Trade Union strikes coincided with mounting political agitation for suffrage reform in Prussia. Then in January 1905 came the outbreak of the Russian revolution with its considerable impact on the SPD. To all appearances, the defeat of the revisionists was therefore followed by a sharper confrontation between Social Democracy and society; in an

[6] See particularly Werner Sombart, *Dennoch! Aus Theorie und Geschichte der gewerkschaftlichen Arbeiterbewegung* (Jena, 1900).

[7] See Mehring's preface to Rosa Luxemburg, "Die deutsche Wissenschaft hinter den Arbeitern", *Neue Zeit*, 1900-1, vol. i, p. 740. But she wrote to a friend in November 1910: "Sombart is perfectly right in his criticisms of our technical application of historical materialism . . . as represented by Kautsky — this is nothing else but a caricature of Marx's ideas" (Unpublished letter: photocopy in archives of Zaklad Historii Partii, KC PZPR, Warsaw).

[8] For a concise exposition of this view for foreign consumption see Theodor Barth, "Kaiser Wilhelm II und die Sozialdemokratie", *Cosmopolis*, i (1896), p. 873.

atmosphere of general satisfaction there was no point in any further self-examination in the victors' camp. Nonetheless the mobilization of support for the "old and tried tactics" against the revisionists created what was in fact an alliance of two different groups. During the period of political deflation after 1906, and particularly after the defeat of Social Democracy in the 1907 *Reichstag* elections, the orthodox majority of the party gradually broke down into these two different and finally conflicting groups. It was the development of this particular conflict which eventually brought about a division in European Socialism of much greater historical significance than the revisionist controversy. In effect, it was the disintegration of the majority against the revisionists which finally produced the split between Communism and Social Democracy, and the rest of the paper will be concerned with it.

On the surface the split took place over increasingly sharp differences about policy. From 1910 to 1914 alternative policies emerged with regard to almost all problems with which the SPD was faced. Most recent history has analysed these divergencies in terms of policy, though with considerable sophistication; the most recent and thorough history of the SPD traces the emergence of distinct groups by systematically analysing alignments over different problems, and treating these chronologically. At the same time the possibilities offered by previous attempts at a more sociological analysis are deliberately played down.[9] But there are difficulties with this attempt to create systematic groupings and sub-groupings according to policy decisions.[10] For one thing, this method is arbitrary and at the same time overcomplicated. Composition and size of these political "groups" was in a constant state of flux; they had no real basis of cohesion. As soon as we regard the SPD correctly — as a political society in its own right — the policies of these groups *in vacuo* and even the groups themselves lose much of their meaning, and any history based on them becomes as arbitrary as a history of the French radicals under the Third Republic in terms of their policies and ministerial groupings. The shifting middle position in the pre-war SPD, which during the war crystallized into the Independent Social Democratic Party (USPD), had no real basis for permanent existence, and indeed ceased to be a political factor of any importance in 1920; it can be argued that the USPD was a precipita-

[9] Carl E. Schorske, *German Social Democracy 1905-1917* (Cambridge, Mass., 1955), p. 118.

[10] In order to make this analysis systematic, Schorske created the following alignments: Revisionists, Executive, Centre, Left Centre and a final catchment basin — the Radicals.

tion of wartime conditions. It seems therefore more meaningful to search for the central division and to treat the momentary voting line-ups as so many *ad hoc* agglomerations of individuals. Naturally there were policy disputes, and people did align themselves differently on each occasion, but underneath there is a consistent divergence based on fundamental differences between left and right, which the USPD only obscured for a time. It is usually argued that this final polarization was due exclusively to the pull of the Soviet Union acting through the Third International; that if there had been no Soviet Union there would have been no Socialist split into two camps. The present author believes, however, that this particular split was already endemic in German Social Democracy before 1914 and would probably have happened anyhow.

Why has this problem been so difficult to identify? To a large extent the reasons are to be found within the SPD itself. The system of frequent meetings, culminating in annual meetings of delegates at provincial party congresses and finally the national congress, allowed for and even encouraged the full and free expression of views. Under such circumstances it is usually supposed that there is no need to look for hidden motives. People can and do tell the truth as they see it, and opponents within the party soon put right any suspected — or even unconscious — intent to deceive. At least until 1912 vote catching was deplored; the German political system made that scale of aggregation pointless. As far as self-expression was concerned the SPD was extremely democratic. The party press debated problems at great length, and opened its pages to the representatives of all divergent opinions. From 1911 onwards this practice began to be progressively curtailed; the far left opposition to the Executive had difficulty in getting the party press to print its views without a certain amount of censorship. But for most of the period before the war almost any view could get a public airing. At the party congresses there were no attempts to restrict the expression of opinions other than those dictated by time. Even in 1913 Rosa Luxemburg and her supporters were able to put forward a strongly worded resolution on the mass strike, and to speak at length on its behalf.[11] Like any legislature, the SPD congress jealously guarded its rights and privileges; there was no guillotine and the chairman's rules of order were lax. Above all the opposition had many opportunities of putting its views to meetings in various localities all over the country. Local party secretaries were more concerned with having interesting and provocative speakers in order to provide

[11] *Protokoll des Parteitags der SPD, 1913*, pp. 194, 288-93, 485.

a worthwhile evening for their members than with any attempt to impose a party line, though here too provincial executives tried from 1912 to exercise an occasional veto.[12] With so much public and free debate, it appears pointless to search for unsolved mysteries.

So any history based largely on official documents and published articles must give the impression of free interplay of opinions followed by majority resolutions at the congress — all very open and democratic. The rare attempts to deceive the congress or to keep things from it usually failed, and caused a scandal in addition. Yet careful analysis of the congress proceedings and particularly of the private papers of the SPD leaders shows that in the last years there was more and more manoeuvring behind the scenes, and in addition the Executive even began to insist that its proceedings and communications must be privileged and secret like those of any other successfully functioning administration.[13] This bald demand met vociferous resistance; though the Executive's attitude was vindicated by a majority, it learnt its lesson and the expulsion of Radek in 1913 for instance was handled with kid-glove regard for the party congress's susceptibilities. The overpowering form of democracy deceptively hid the lack of content. The Executive always managed to manoeuvre in a variety of ways in order to avoid public defeat on important questions. Like the Imperial Government, it found the manipulation of the legislature simpler than flouting it. But manipulation inevitably means distortion.

But in spite of the flood of discussion on every conceivable subject, there were in fact some universally respected taboos. These add to the difficulty, since they mainly concerned questions that would have illuminated our present problems if they had been discussed. Thus in all the years from 1882 to 1914 there was only one article in *Neue Zeit*, the theoretical organ of Social Democracy, on the subject of post-revolutionary society, and this treated the problem merely in a historical context — as a discussion of past millenarian societies.[14] Even the revolution itself was little discussed; the technique of it not at all. The all-important topic of war was treated as an abstract evil, simply to be denounced. Interest was focused largely on contemporary questions of the day and their importance in the context of present Socialist attitudes, while broader questions affecting the SPD's future tended to be ignored. After the revisionist controversy,

[12] See for instance letter from Merkel, a local organizer in Baden, to Dittmann 23 June 1913 in Dittmann papers, SPD archives, Bonn.

[13] See *Protokoll . . . 1911* for a public debate on this problem of secrecy.

[14] Karl Kautsky, "Zukunftsstaaten der Vergangenheit", *Neue Zeit*, 1893-4, vol. i, pp. 653-63, 684-96.

most party members took the formally hostile relationship between Social Democracy and society and the final revolutionary catharsis largely for granted. Organizational problems, except in their immediate and technical aspect, were part of this limbo; there was no attempt to relate organization to policy. More than this; such matters were held to be rather unimportant and technical and therefore properly the concern of the leadership. While anyone was free to debate policy, the few critics of the SPD's structure and style of administration were told right from the start that they had no experience and did not know what they were talking about.[15] Naturally there were important organizational changes, such as the reorganization and enlargement of the Executive in 1900 and again in 1911, the changes in the functions of the Party Control Commission in 1912; the interesting fact is that they took place in an atmosphere of relative indifference and silence.[16] What mattered was who would fill the offices. As we shall see the basis of the radical opposition to the leadership was the demolition of the organizational taboo; underneath the surface criticisms of policy Rosa Luxemburg and the others raised fundamental questions about organization and its rôle in defining the relationship between Social Democracy and society.

Before 1914 the only thorough attempt to relate problems of organization directly to the larger aims of Social Democracy was made by Lenin in *What is to be done?* His critics, both Russian and German, challenged the policy of centralized control which he advocated; but what shocked them even more than his actual views was the whole concept of elevating organizational problems to a place of such primary importance. In the debates during and after the Second Russian Congress, Mensheviks and Bolsheviks respectively questioned and insisted on the need for exact formulations. Rosa Luxemburg, acting as a link between Russian and German Social Democracy, put the general apprehension clearly:

> The lessons we should learn from the organizational concept of Social Democracy are basic functions, the spirit of organization . . . as co-ordinating and combining and not the particular, exclusive, structural aspect . . . .[17]

No valid comparison between the organizational ideas of Bolsheviks and the SPD is possible as their circumstances were entirely different. But we can contrast the relative importance each gave to a correct

[15] For instance, *Protokoll . . . 1899*, pp. 186, 291.

[16] See for instance Eduard Bernstein, "Reorganisation der Parteileitung", *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, xv (1911), p. 1326; Georg Ledebour, "Die Reorganisierung des Parteivorstandes", *Neue Zeit*, 1910-1, vol. ii, p. 457.

[17] Rosa Luxemburg, "Organisatsionnie voprosi ruskoi Sotsialdemokratii", *Iskra*, no. 69 (1904).

theory of organization. Thus it was not so much that the situation of the SPD required a different organization from that of the Russian party — the one a legal mass movement, the other an illegal and emigré conspiracy — but that the German party saw no relationship between policy and organization, while Lenin held that this was the crux of the problem. Perhaps the difference will be more apparent if we turn the question round. The SPD was always in search of correct policies; its nature and size gave it the right or even the duty to take issue on nearly all the major questions of the day. It shared many of the preoccupations of society, however much it differed in its policies. Organization had to serve these policies, above all the policy of growth. Lenin on the other hand could only influence Russian society sporadically. His universe was one of small competing conspiratorial groups, and internal problems of organization could easily appear pre-eminent in that world. Organization was not synonymous with growth, but with control. Without a correct power structure there could be no control, and hence no party. Whether in German circumstances any pre-occupation with organizational structure as a creative rather than a secondary factor was possible at all is another question. We shall see that only the radical opposition in Germany sensed how crucial this problem was, though they dealt with it in terms of a destructive onslaught on the party's organizational self-satisfaction and not by proposing explicit alternatives.

The defeat of revisionism in Germany — at least as a matter of debate — temporarily settled the problem of relations between Social Democracy and society. The SPD went back to its isolation with a vengeance; vindicated at home, the orthodox majority now felt strong enough to use its pre-eminent position in the Second International to impose the same policy of isolation on other parties. At the Amsterdam Congress of the International in 1904 this problem was aired in a violent debate between the Germans and the French. Where the Germans advocated strength through abstinence and the growth of the party in isolation, the French had always insisted that strength could only be measured by political power.

> What at present most weighs on Europe and the World, on the guarantee of peace . . . the progress of socialism and of the working-class . . . is the political powerlessness of German Social Democracy.[18]

The political debate was shot through with social overtones. To many of the French the idea of satisfying social and personal aspirations within an isolated socialist movement was meaningless.

[18] *Proceedings of International Socialist Congress at Paris, 1900*, p. 37.

The whole conception of socialist "togetherness" was treated with contempt. Briand said after the Congress: "Genossen, Genossen, j'en ai assez de ces genosseries" (Comrades, Comrades, I am sick of all this camaraderie).[19] Most important of all, Jaurès poured particular scorn on the philosophy of isolation — and on its philosopher; on "the political formulae with which your good Comrade Kautsky will supply you to the end of his days".[20] Though the issue was exactly the same at Amsterdam as it had been at all the German party congresses since 1898, the French saw it far more clearly than the German revisionists and expressed their case more lucidly — isolation or participation; not theory, but personal questions affecting every socialist. In return and for good measure the Germans carried the resolution adopted at their party congress in Dresden the year before almost verbatim at the International Congress — and carried it in the teeth of the French.

The victory was turned to good account. From 1904 to 1914 a steady growth of SPD organization and services took place. On the political side the central executive was enlarged, regional organizations strengthened and new ones created, and more officials appointed at all levels.[21] Equally important was the less publicized extension in the social and cultural field. Party education received a fillip with the creation of the party school in 1906 and the extension and improvement of the *Wanderlehrer* system, the ambulant lecturers who moved from place to place with their instruction courses.[22] The party organized closed excursions, singing groups and even paid a squadron of "workers' poets" who wrote both tunes and lyrics.[23] Special emphasis was placed on organizing services for children and youth; in 1912 there were 125 local children's commissions and 574 youth commissions.[24] The women's movement made rapid headway under the aegis of the devoted Clara Zetkin. Finally, the *Zahlabend*, when members of local organizations gathered in the pub to pay contributions and talk things over, became not only the most important social institution of Social Democracy at the grass roots, but

[19] Georges Suarez, *Briand: Sa vie, son oeuvre avec son journal et de nombreux documents inédits*, vol. i (Paris, 1938), p. 463.

[20] *Compte rendu analytique, 6è Congrès Socialiste international, Amsterdam 1904*, p. 174.

[21] This is discussed by Schorske, *op. cit.*, pp. 118-36, with full reference to the sources.

[22] See Heinrich Schulz, "Zwei Jahre Arbeiterbildung", *Neue Zeit*, 1907-8, vol. ii, p. 883.

[23] Bruno Schönlank, the son of the editor of the *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, made a career as such an *Arbeiterpoet* and has described it to the author.

[24] *Protokoll . . . 1912*, p. 13.

the focus of political opinion and the accepted means by which Executive and opposition could reach the members. The subject deserves a study of its own, especially in comparison with similar activities in France, Austria and England.

Institutions began to serve curious and unexpected purposes. The local party press became a hothouse for talent, for collecting bright young men and keeping them within the Socialist orbit; a complex system of cross-posting of journalists developed in the last years before the war. And behind the growing party press stood a network of publishing houses with an increasingly large budget. J. H. W. Dietz and the *Vorwärts* bookshop had a turnover fully comparable to that of any commercial publishing venture.

Two particular features of this organizational proliferation deserve special emphasis. The party spread its net into hitherto untouched or resistant areas. Efforts were made to organize the predominantly rural provinces and a successful stint in "Siberia" became a passport to high party office.[25] In the course of extending activity it also extended control. Thus between 1906 and 1908 it moved in on the youth organizations which had been spontaneous creations under the guidance of devoted individuals, mostly radical except in the South where an otherwise prominent revisionist, Dr. Ludwig Frank, had been active in this field. As a result the numbers increased steadily after 1908, but the radical élan was organized out of existence, or at least driven underground until the war.[26]

Secondly, there was an immediate reflection in the organizational structure of the party to cope with new and increased activity. As the press grew, press commissions proliferated in numbers and power. The youth problem brought organizational salvation in the shape of the *Jugendzentrale* under the formidable Friedrich Ebert.[27] Occasionally the organization was even created before the activity it was intended to regulate, as with the educational commission (*Bildungsausschuss*) formed in 1906 to advise on, and set up, the party school. Until the war there was no climate of opposition to the existence of a bureaucracy; if anything both Left and Right supported organizational proliferation as a form of institutionalized support for

[25] Thus Otto Braun first made his reputation in Königsberg in East Prussia. He joined the Control Commission in 1906, and became a member of the Executive in 1911. Similarly Scheidemann's early party work consisted of agitation in a rural district of Hessen.

[26] See Karl Korn, *Die Arbeiterjugendbewegung* (Berlin, 1923), and the section in Schorske, *op. cit.*, pp. 97-108.

[27] See Friedrich Ebert, *Schriften, Aufzeichnungen, Reden* (Dresden, 1926), i, pp. 70-5.

their particular cause.[28] The English or American notion of limited government, that it might be better to do without certain activities if they involved authoritative regulation or control, was utterly alien.

By 1911 already the SPD had all the appearance of a state within a state, and when Bebel jocularly referred to the Executive as "your government" no one took exception or expressed surprise at the phrase.[29] This "government" presided over a formidable apparatus, and a large budget to pay for it. The finances of the SPD were the envy of the Second International; its primacy was openly admitted to be connected with its *largesse*.[30] The preamble to the Executive's report at each party congress resembled nothing so much as the budget of the Reich; consolidated revenue on one side, expenditure on the other. The Executive's report itself, moreover, was increasingly concerned with welfare and social activities, indicators of organizational growth and influence — such as circulation of party papers — and these items took precedence over the platform speeches on important problems of the day. The three or four days a year when the party congress met were a miniature reflection of a whole *Reichstag* session, but entirely different in form and content from the annual congresses of the other German parties. Unlike them, it was no mere forum of opinion, at which the leadership could test the feeling of the constituencies. The party congress had a vital constitutional rôle in the SPD state; however fierce the dissenting protests of conscience, it never failed to rally to the Executive when party cohesion was at stake. Whatever the problems and disagreements, few delegates left the congress without a feeling of communion with the great, of work jointly and well done. As Bebel's private correspondence shows, this atmosphere was not spontaneous but carefully prepared in advance through personal contact and persuasion.[31]

The danger of controversy between the political leadership and the Trade Unions was removed by the secret agreement of February 1906, in which the SPD leadership undertook to avoid and play down policies offensive to the Trade Unions. In return the Trade Union leaders renounced any attempt at establishing a separate political line for themselves, let alone divorcing the Trade Union movement from

[28] See *Protokoll . . . 1905*, p. 361 for the view of the Left; for the revisionist view of strong provincial organizations as a defence against encroachment from the centre, *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, ix (1905), pp. 767-70.

[29] *Protokoll . . . 1911*, p. 173.

[30] *Ibid.*, p. 216.

[31] For instance, letters from Bebel to Kautsky at the International Institute for Social History, Amsterdam, Kautsky papers, DIII.

organized Social Democracy. In Germany political Socialism had preceded organized Trade Unionism and always considered the latter its specialist industrial branch; a client relationship which the rich and growing Trade Unions found increasingly irksome. Now, by admitting the Unions to adult status, friction was reduced and henceforward the Trade Union leadership played an important part in supporting the SPD Executive against the Left. Both the party and the Trade Union leaders were careful to avoid crossing each other's organizational preserves by practising abstention rather than through any attempt to define their respective areas. This mutual self-denying ordinance brought a rich, disciplined membership back into the SPD "state" — but at the expense of all but the most platitudinous political exploitation. The harmony between Trade Unions and party was unique on the Continent at the time. More than any other single factor it helped to explain the extent to which Social Democracy was able to develop as a "state", but also why it remained immobile.[32]

All this enormously strengthened the power of the SPD leadership. From the proliferation of services and organizations, there inevitably grew a bureaucracy which thought of itself as "neutral" in questions of policy, supported the executive at all times and became in turn the structural apparatus of the leadership's control. As an institution the party bureaucracy articulated hidden but powerful interests of its own, which were effectively represented by the Executive. That democracy is not the enemy of oligarchy but perhaps its most fertile soil, was already obvious to de Tocqueville in his examination of the United States as a political phenomenon in the nineteenth century.[33] This prediction was brilliantly documented as an existing fact by Robert Michels.[34] Though his central thesis is the connection between democracy and oligarchy on social and political grounds, the work bristles with incidental insights which he could not always pursue. Thus the development of bureaucracy as both the functional expression of oligarchy and in turn as a further means of increasing its power are briefly discussed, while the notion of a state within

[32] For an analysis of the political effects of the Trade Union-Socialist party relationship in different European countries before the first world war, see Maurice Duverger, *Political Parties* (London, 1959), p. 5 ff.

[33] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (New York, 1956 edn.), pp. 295, 303.

[34] Robert Michels, *Zur Soziologie des Parteiwesens in der modernen Demokratie* (Leipzig, 1911) — Engl. trans., *Political Parties* (London, 1959); and an article, "Die Deutsche Sozialdemokratie" in *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik*, xxiii (1906), pp. 471-556.

a state is only mentioned once.[35] Michels also recognized but did not stress the problem of the relationship between "party and state", or in our terms between party and society.[36] It is curious that later historians all pay tribute to Michels's writing, but no one has developed his particular train of thought, or tried to relate it to the analysis of party policy in Germany or elsewhere.

Last but by no means least, ideology itself performed a new and distinctive function in the new, more strongly structured, inward-looking party. Far from withering away, it provided a suitable umbrella under which to hide the continuing but by definition "ineffective" or "useless" political activity. The more the party isolated itself, the less (publicly admissible) point there was in canvassing, campaigning, electing or serving in *Land* and *Reich* legislatures; and the more important the ideological refuge. After 1905, party congresses ceased to be the supreme legislative assembly and became a symbol of ritual celebration of political ideology, "mere honorifics . . . a festivity", from which participants would disperse refreshed and capable of disseminating ideological refreshment. And their product, the assertion of the good old outward-looking ideology of revolution, became merely a means of ensuring continued loyalty and devotion to the proprietors, the SPD. Even today, in countries as pragmatic as Sweden, ideology is still seen as an *instrument* to mould participants and members into greater loyalty — and sociologists examine it in purely functional terms. The SPD could serve as a basic model for their theories.[37]

Although these influences did not manifest themselves openly, they did produce an identifiable state of mind in the party. The revisionist controversy, and the victory of the forces which wanted to concentrate on internal preoccupations and not on the relationship with society, provided the suitable political culture in which these forces could flourish. But this was not an accidental result of the victory of the Executive in the revisionist controversy. Rather it was the other way about. For beneath the verbal explanations of orthodoxy — the "Marxists" on the one hand and those who took isolation as the inevitable consequence of society's attitude on the other — there was

[35] Michels, *Political Parties*, p. 368.
[36] *Ibid.*, p. 367.
[37] See Herbert Tingsten, "Stability and Vitality in Swedish Democracy", *Political Quarterly*, ii (1955), p. 145. The general sociological concept is developed in R. K. Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure* (Glencoe, Illinois, 1957), chap. 1. The only reference to the SPD in this connection is in Ulf Himmelstrand, "A Theoretical and Empirical Approach to Depoliticization and Political Involvement", *Acta Sociologica*, vi (1962), p. 95.

the very real self-interest of a bureaucracy whose power and indeed existence depended largely on the SPD's continued isolation, to whatever reason this was due. It is very noticeable how after 1901 these forces entered the controversy and threw their weight decisively behind the orthodox. When Kautsky said that revisionism, if triumphant, would destroy the very basis of Social Democracy, he was incidentally articulating the real self-interest of Bebel and his colleagues in maintaining the *status quo*. To a considerable extent the question of *why* Social Democracy should be isolated became a formality, and was lost in the self-interest of powerful factors to keep it so.

What therefore distinguishes the SPD from other "inheritors" is this powerful factor of immobility, of satisfaction with the *status quo* of isolation. Moreover the growing SPD state did not take any accidental form in accordance with particular needs, but followed the pattern of society in which, isolated or no, it was enveloped. The creation of a separate society within the SPD was a re-creation, a mirror image, of German Imperial society. Ideology is necessarily the reflection of knowledge available at the time, and therefore differs sharply from utopia.[38] Since, as we have seen, detailed discussion of future society — utopia — did not exist, and was frowned upon as romantic, there could be no other image for SPD society to copy than that by which it was surrounded, however antagonistic the two may have been. This held true of attitudes as much as organizational forms. One of the most striking examples of the way in which organized Social Democracy reflected society was in its unconscious national attitudes. Overtly the SPD opposed nationalism, but in private Bebel developed a sound hatred of both English and Russians.[39] What is particularly interesting is that in private Bebel lashed out at foreign socialists with the same homespun invective which he used on opponents in the SPD — as Socialists they were all *en famille* — while his references to the British government were couched in the diplomatic formalities of one head of state discussing the affairs of another.[40] Often the differences between public and private attitudes were obliterated. Thus the

[38] Mannheim, *op. cit.*, p. 173, See above, n. 3.

[39] See Bebel's letters to Kautsky, note 31 above. For an analysis of official German reactions to the quarrels in the Russian Social Democratic party, see D. Geyer, "Die russische Parteispaltung im Urteil der deutschen Sozialdemokratie", *International Rev. of Social Hist.*, iii (1958), pp. 195, 418.

[40] See letter from the British Consul-General in Zurich reporting a dinner conversation with August Bebel, Sir Henry Augst to William J. Braithwaite, 22 Oct. 1910, in *Lloyd George's Ambulance Wagon; The Memoirs of W. J. Braithwaite* (London, 1957), pp. 65-6.

SPD regarded the domestic Polish question in much the same way as the rest of society — with incomprehension; the Poles were as fractious as citizens as they were awkward as Socialists. The only remedy was organizational absorption, which was merely a Socialist version of Germanization.[41]

Groups organizing for pressure on or against other groups tend to copy the structure of their opposite number.[42] As we shall see, there did develop after 1912 a form of contact between the two societies at the top, which hastened this process of precise duplication. "One can see in the organization of the Social Democratic Executive and its organs an involuntary mirror image of the Imperial Germany of William II and of its system of political leadership".[43]

Moreover the SPD had the additional benefit of philosophy for its position. This did not apply to its organizational mirror image of society — which went entirely unnoticed — but it did cover very adequately the necessity for isolation. Karl Kautsky in his *Road to Power* provided positive content to this isolation, and raised it from the regrettable by-product of policy to a positive revolutionary factor.[44] The attempt to invest certain observed phenomena with the normative sanction of Marxist theory with a little creative kneading was typical of Kautsky. As Parvus, who despised him, put it: "All the guts knocked out of [Marxism]. Out of Marx's good raw dough Kautsky made *Matzes*".[45] Briefly Kautsky's view was that the mere growth of isolated Social Democracy would subjectively and objectively cause such havoc in the opposing camp that society would disintegrate and Social Democracy be able to step into its place. This was the theory of inheritance at its most extreme. As an index of internal strength, Kautsky postulated doctrinal purity.[46] As an index of growth, however, he suggested an increase of votes and mandates at the coming (1912) *Reichstag* elections, on which the party was pinning special hopes after its lack of success in 1907. Though not always in full agreement with the Executive, Kautsky had become by this time the particular exponent of its ideology. He was the champion of social isolation, and he was also an intellectual, far removed from

[41] For the SPD's attitude to the Polish question see Hans Ulrich Wehler, *Sozialdemokratie und Nationalstaat* (Würzburg, 1962). Michels also picked up this point, *Political Parties*, p. 395.

[42] See the study of the British Medical Association: Harry Eckstein, *Pressure Group Politics, The Case of the British Medical Association* (London, 1960), p. 21.

[43] Gerhard Ritter, *Die Arbeiterbewegung im Wilhelminischen Reich* (Berlin, 1959), p. 52.

[44] Karl Kautsky, *Der Weg zur Macht* (Berlin, 1909).

[45] *Die Glocke*, vol. i (1915), p. 20.

[46] *Op. cit.*, p. 124.

the immediate problems of organization and even further from any contact with society. It is therefore not surprising that he reflected faithfully and coherently the implicit ideology of the party leadership, even though he often felt exasperated by the Executive and saw himself as a doughty champion of progress.[47]

Yet Kautsky's analysis carried within it the dialectic of its own destruction. The emphasis on success in elections as a positive factor in the overthrow of society justified as well as explained the party's obsession with the coming elections. When in 1912 Social Democracy not only made up for its defeat in 1907, but registered a great advance, Kautsky's theories appeared well justified, while their author was triumphant.[48] But the interest in *Reichstag* mandates contributed to an inflation of the importance within the party of the Socialist group in the *Reichstag*. Much of this was psychological. It had always been the practice for the most important leaders of the SPD to seek election to the *Reichstag* in constituencies where the SPD had strong chances of success. With the increasing importance of election success in party thinking, the status of members of the *Reichstag* also increased. The Socialist delegation was no longer merely made up of party notables, but provided a special cohesion and status for its members. The difference is important, and has been misunderstood.[49] Surprisingly there is little evidence that this tendency, which must have existed from the beginning of the century, ever gave any offence. By 1912 however the opposition, already aroused by many unsatisfactory aspects of party life, began to campaign against the way that "the letters MdR (member of the *Reichstag*) go to the head of all these good people".[50]

Now that the SPD with its 110 seats had become the largest single party in the *Reichstag*, it was increasingly involved, if not directly in the affairs of government, at least in the legislature's standing business. It could no longer simply abstain, and for a short time Scheidemann actually held the office of *Reichstag* Vice-President. The reasons why this attempt was not followed through were orthodox Socialist ones — crises of conscience with regard to wearing frock coats, bowing to the Emperor and leading the "Hoorays" when ceremonial tradition demanded. The interesting thing, however, is that the

[47] Erich Matthias, "Kautsky und der Kautskyanismus", in *Marximusstudien*, 2nd Ser. (Tübingen, 1957), pp. 172 ff.

[48] *Vorwärts*, 25 February, 6 March 1912.

[49] Even by Michels, "Die deutsche Sozialdemokratie", p. 477.

[50] Rosa Luxemburg in a letter to a friend, dated 18 Jan. 1912, in the archives of Zaklad Historii Partii, KC PZPR, Warsaw.

acceptance of the post should even have been considered — and still within the policy of general abstention.

This increase in the importance of the SPD's *Reichstag* delegation within the party coincided chronologically with an increase in the importance of the *Reichstag* itself. There was, in the two years before the war, a crisis of nerves in Germany, which the Chancellor of the time in his memoirs described as *Reichsverdrossenheit* (national disillusionment) — promptly matched, as will be seen, by a corresponding *frisson* of discomfort within the party.[51] Within this atmosphere of unease, a number of specific incidents took place, like the affair of Zabern, when the *Reichstag* severely criticized the Government, but offered to lend its assistance in dealing with the apparently uncontrollable proliferations of imperial power, like the military.[52] It was not the first time that the *Reichstag* had attempted to go to the rescue of the Government, but after 1912 it did so increasingly from a position of strength.[53]

Thus coincidentally as the *Reichstag* gained in importance, the SPD delegation increased its authority as a group within the party — yet another unconscious interaction between these two divorced societies. At the top, and particularly through the importance of its membership of the legislature, the isolation of the SPD was becoming imaginary rather than real. Though the slogans of total opposition continued, actual contact and collaboration became more frequent. Examples of this are legion; perhaps the most important and noisy incident was the attempt to exploit the SPD's position of power after the run-off elections of 1912 by forcing the creation of a left block in the *Reichstag*. The leadership and Kautsky went to great lengths to explain this as a temporary tactical phenomenon which could only be of benefit to the SPD; that while the party would influence its allies, these latter could have no effect on the solidly orthodox ideology of the party. What contemporary commentators and later historians failed to realize was that the very nature of a double-ballot system of elections made alliances between parties inevitable for the second poll — and this included the SPD — regardless of whether victory was intended as a mere demonstration of strength or was to be used in order to achieve policy purposes. But officially sanctioned electoral

[51] Von Bethmann-Hollweg, *Betrachtungen zum Weltkrieg* (Berlin, 1919), i, p. 95.

[52] See Hans-Gunter Zmarliks, *Bethmann-Hollweg als Reichskanzler 1909-14* (Düsseldorf, 1957), pp. 114-30.

[53] For a brief modern discussion of the relations between Government and *Reichstag*, see Eberhard Pikart, "Die Rolle der Parteien im deutschen konstitutionellen System vor 1914", *Zeitschrift für Politik*, ix (1962), pp. 12-32.

alliances were in any case a far cry from the revisionist debate. By harking back continually to the triumph of isolation after 1903, it had now become possible to carry out many of the revisionist recommendations in practice and still preserve the appearance of orthodoxy. Officially, divorce from society was still total. The more perceptive revisionists laughed.[54]

The peculiar significance of the emergence of the *Reichstag* delegation as a power factor in the SPD went almost completely unnoticed.[55] By 1913 the radical opposition was in full cry along the entire line of the Executive's policy. They condemned the collaboration with bourgeois parties, both during the elections and afterwards in the *Reichstag* — but as a matter of policy; as with so many other structural problems, no one was aware of how much power had shifted to the parliamentary delegation. It was only after the outbreak of war, when the SPD *Reichstag* delegation openly took control of the party and installed itself as custodian of policy for the duration, that the constitutional aspect was aired. It was suddenly realized that there was no provision in party statutes or philosophy for the *Reichstag* delegation to have any special function or rôle at all — just as there was no provision in the Imperial constitution for the existence of parties. Even then, however, it was the *policy* of the leadership and its new power base in the *Reichstag* that gave the most offence. The emerging split in the *Reichstag* delegation over the next three years between independents and majority — leaving aside Liebknecht — was partly due to the unconstitutional behaviour of the leadership, though heavily tinged with disagreement on policy. Haase, a lawyer, particularly took the constitutional view when he resigned from the co-chairmanship of the party.[56]

In the last resort, therefore, the SPD ceased on 4 August 1914 to be an inheritor party, and became a pressure group, similar to all the others — "a stinking corpse" in radical eyes.[57] Most of its dealings with the Government during the war were concerned with obtaining concessions for the sectional interests it represented, the workers. To this purpose the political orientation of the SPD became increasingly subordinated, and indeed members of the parliamentary

[54] *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, xvi (1912), p. 1167.

[55] In fact this development runs counter to the generally accepted notion that as left wing parties grow and strengthen their organization, the power of the parliamentary group diminishes within it. See Duverger, *Political Parties*, p. 185.

[56] Ernst Haase, *Hugo Haase, Sein Leben und Wirken* (Berlin, no date), pp. 120-30.

[57] Lenin, *Sochinenya* (4th edn.), vol. xxxiii, p. 184.

delegation declared again and again that if they continued to pursue the old political objectives, they would not be able to represent the interests of their members to the Government.[58]

It may well be concluded that in the long run the position of an inheritor party becomes impossible if the inheritance will not mature. A state of isolation cannot be indefinitely maintained. Either it will lead to violence or success. These alternatives are shared by inheritor parties in colonial countries. The third possibility is disintegration, such as befell the RPF which, five years after its foundation, had ceased to be a factor of importance in French political life (1952) and by 1955 had disappeared altogether. The last possibility, presented by the SPD in conditions in which success or violence were impossible, was gradual acceptance of the rôle of a pressure group like others such; competing for rewards instead of inheriting them. The distance it had created between society and itself, the increasing tendencies towards oligarchy and bureaucracy, helped to keep this alignment at bay and made the process of change invisible to the participants. Nevertheless the tendency was there already before 1914; often a cataclysm like war only hurries up inherent tendencies rather than altering basic alignments. And once more Kautsky came to the party's theoretical rescue. By asserting that there were essential differences between conditions during war and peace, he again reflected the thinking and attitude of the leadership which believed that only the outbreak of war forced it to make substantial changes and depart from established tradition, but that it could return to the *status quo ante* after the war, with an additional bonus in post-war credits.

Finally we will examine the developing opposition to the party leadership. So far, the emphasis has been on the distance-proximity variable in the relationship between society and Social Democracy. The revisionists advocated proximity, the orthodox distance. Since the radical opposition also advocated proximity — though of the opposite kind to the revisionist — a second variable will be introduced, namely organization-movement.

The dangers of self-absorption were already worrying Rosa Luxemburg in 1904; the victory over the revisionists looked strangely pyrrhic. On 17 December 1904 she wrote to her friend Henriette Roland-Holst:

[58] *Protokoll der Reichskonferenz der Sozialdemokratie Deutschlands . . . September 1916* (Berlin, no date), pp. 7-10.

> I also admire the certainty with which some of our radical friends hold that all that is needed is to bring back the straying lamb to its own fold, "loyalty to principle" (*Prinzipienfestigkeit*), without realizing that in this purely negative way we will not get one step further, and for a revolutionary movement not to move forward means — to move back. The only means . . . is to move forward oneself . . . .[59]

When she came back from Russia in 1906 it was soon obvious that the revolutionary period had been allowed to run down without any attempt to exploit it; that the party's absorption with organization and size were factors tending to immobility, hence weakness, and not signs of strength. In a pamphlet in which she analysed the tactical value of the mass strike based on her Russian experience, Rosa Luxemburg went a long way towards developing a doctrine which put up the concept of action and movement, not as a desirable policy for leaders to follow, but as a new theory of organization.[60] In the process she turned upside down the accepted doctrine of the entire Second International, that any Socialist party could only score successes against the forces marshalled by society if it had strong organization, full coffers and prudent leadership. On the contrary. She attempted to show that in the Russian revolution action had in fact created organization; that an unorganized and weak Social Democracy without any Trade Union organization at all had emerged from active struggle with strong and powerful organizations for party as well as unions. Lest this example should be too peculiarly Russian — which would condemn it in German eyes, and in fact did so — Rosa Luxemburg was at pains to show that the Trade Union organization in Germany had grown far more as a reaction to the anti-Socialist laws than in the subsequent period of freedom and tolerance.[61]

The next stage in the evolution of this doctrine came during the suffrage crisis in 1910 when for the first time the party leadership was specifically identified as a blockage in the course of revolution. The Executive was not only failing to do its job, but misunderstood its function which was to recognize revolutionary periods, to select and explain the correct weapons in any given situation — not to order action or forbid it — and above all to set targets at just the right level of possibilities, or perhaps a fraction above.[62] There was a strong hint of a Socialist doctrine of *ultra vires* in the treatment of the Executive's damper on the suffrage agitation. For the first time the organizational problem was posed in a new form in 1910; what are

[59] Quoted in Henriette Roland-Holst, *Rosa Luxemburg* (Zurich, 1937), p. 216.
[60] *Massenstreik, Partei und Gewerkschaften* (Hamburg, 1906), reprinted in *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. iv, pp. 410-79.
[61] *Ibid.*, p. 453.
[62] "Die Theorie und die Praxis" *ibid.*, pp. 589-90.

organizations for? There was something seriously wrong if they were not *for* anything, if they were only there to grow.

Now Rosa Luxemburg was emphatically not an anarchist and went out of her way to distinguish between "revolutionary gymnastic", which "was conjured out of the air at will", and her own policy.[63] As an antithesis to the "leaders", she postulated "masses", not so much in any democratic sense of popular control of the Executive, but as a factor of mobility.[64] No one could claim that the party leaders acted contrary to the resolutions of the congresses; theories of bureaucracy were non-existent, and anyhow did not fit into the heuristic tools of Marxist analysis. The search for a means of overcoming the self-absorbed tendencies of the leadership had therefore to use a familiar and orthodox (not anarchist) terminology, though this did not always serve to clarify the problem. It is for this reason that the concept "masses" has caused Social Democrats after the Communist-Socialist split to claim the support of Rosa Luxemburg for some notion of majority democracy against Bolshevik arbitrariness. Similarly it has led later Communist historians to burden her with the concept of spontaneity which arises out of precisely the same misconception — that the spontaneous majority decisions of the masses were the supreme guide for Social Democracy. In fact, as careful analysis of Rosa Luxemburg's writing shows, the word "masses" was used as synonymous with "action", while "leaders" symbolized immobility and self-absorption.

This was the basis of Rosa Luxemburg's and Karl Liebknecht's doctrine of action. It was a dynamic, dialectic doctrine; organization and action revived each other and made each other grow. Only *use* of organizations could fertilize them. The boundaries of this doctrine were expanded in the years before the war, and of course developed still further between 1914 and 1918, culminating in the attempt to apply it in practice during the German revolution. Not only was action emphasized against the Executive's immobility, but its prophylactic effects on Social Democracy were stressed. In Rosa Luxemburg's view an active policy helped to articulate the class consciousness of the proletariat, and also provided a better workshop for tactical as well as theoretical education than any amount of writing, lecturing or organization. Thus action took over social as well as political duties, and reached into all the nooks and crannies in which SPD organization had taken hold. It may well be that there

[63] "Massenstreik", *ibid.*, p. 411.

[64] See for instance "Wieder Masse und Führer", *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, 29 Aug. 1911.

were underlying similarities with anarchism, in so far as any doctrine of action necessarily resembles any other. A wind of action and movement was blowing strongly around the edges of European culture at the time, both in art and literature as well as in the more political context of Sorel and the Italian Futurists. The analogy with the Anarchists alone is thus not meaningful. The German Left never departed from the self-imposed framework of Marxism; its ideas of action developed under very different circumstances from those of the Anarchists, as a particular corrective and not as a rejection of organization and leadership altogether. Most important of all, Rosa Luxemburg specifically drew on a Russian experience which differed sharply from the intellectual individualism of Bakunin, Niewenhuis and contemporary anarchism. She always emphasized self-discipline as an adjunct to action — the opposite of the doctrine of self-liberation which the Anarchists shared with other European action philosophies. In any case, ideas tend to become extreme under the pressure of opposition, just as they will remain diluted as long as there is still hope of persuading; we need not judge the ideas of the German radical Left from the romantic extremities of Pannekoek or the self-immolation of Karl Liebknecht.[65] Repeatedly Rosa Luxemburg maintained that her idea was not intended as a once-for-all upheaval with specific results for society, but as a tendency, a mode of thought, a unifying factor to overcome the adhesions and rigid categories produced by the growth preoccupations of the party leadership. Action was both a loosening and a unification. Moreover Rosa Luxemburg always emphasized that effective mass action presupposed the existence of a revolutionary period, and could never merely be the result of anyone's decision.

How then to postulate a revolutionary period? Here the doctrine of Imperialism provided the necessary means. According to Kautsky's theory, revolutionary periods had become non-existent — they could not develop unless society and Social Democracy were in close interaction and contact. Imperialism was merely a word to signify advanced social decomposition in Germany. Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Radek used Imperialism in precisely the opposite sense. Having tried and failed to propagate the mass strike as an instrument for galvanizing the party's thinking, Rosa Luxemburg began to look outward to society to provide the necessary solution. Like Canning she brought in one world to redress the balance of the other; in this case the old world of society to redress the ills of Social Democracy.

[65] See Anton Pannekoek, *Neue Zeit*, 1911-2, vol. ii, pp. 548, 810 ff. For Liebknecht see *Politische Aufzeichnungen aus seinem Nachlass* (Berlin, 1921).

In her writings from 1912 onwards, and in those of Radek, Mehring and Marchlewski, a doctrine of Imperialism was developed and adapted to this purpose, while people like Pannekoek, Liebknecht and Julian Borchardt developed an extreme personal ideology out of it.[66] The frontier between them was diffuse; emerging most clearly at odd moments such as the post-war confrontation between Radek and his former Bremen colleague Johann Knief.[67]

Thus from the beginning of 1912 there occurred on the extreme left a sudden sharp revival of interest in the doings of society. After nearly ten years of disinterest in such problems, Rosa Luxemburg took strongly to social reporting. But each article about some particular scandal was now sharply pointed towards the one desired end — the mounting pressure of Imperialism and the need to answer it with action.[68] The difference between capitalist and Imperialist society in practical terms became the degree of pressure on Social Democracy. Rosa Luxemburg tried to show that the gap created by the party's deliberate isolation was in fact non-existent, that society was pressing relentlessly on Socialism along the whole front. Without losing sight of the totality of the problem, which was vital to the Marxist conception of two conflicting total worlds, she picked all possible instances with which the immediacy of pressure could be proved. Whether it was a Trade Union strike, the maltreatment of recruits in the Imperial army, the excesses of the military towards the civilian population at Zabern, or a case of poisoning in an Old People's Home, the conclusion was always the same. She particularly disagreed with Liebknecht for his failure to keep a total perspective, for preoccupation with any one aspect of Imperialism must lead to distortion of that part instead of a permanent confrontation with the whole.

> The problems of militarism and imperialism are today's fundamental articulation of political life; they alone and not questions of governmental policy or other side issues provide the key to contemporary political life . . . the situation is the same as always, it has only become tenser . . . . Imperialism is not retreating but advancing on us, bringing with it ever increasing class conflicts . . . and enlivening the confrontation between society and Social Democracy . . . . The cause of Socialism must move forward.[69]

[66] See the statement of the International Socialists of Germany in *Arbeiterpolitik* 10 March 1917, reprinted in *Dokumente und Materialien zur Geschichte der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung* (Berlin - East, 1958), i, p. 574.

[67] See Radek's diary in Otto Ernst Schüddekopf, "Karl Radek in Berlin", *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte*, ii (1962), pp. 135-6.

[68] See for instance "Im Asyl", *Die Gleichheit*, 1 Jan. 1912; repr. in *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. iv, p. 150.

[69] *Die Gleichheit*, 5 Feb. 1912.

Consistently she spoke of "the great times in which we live", not as a piece of empty rhetoric, but to celebrate the closeness of the battle — "arm to arm, eye to eye, breast to breast" — as against the comfortable isolation implicit in the Executives' attitude. Though she chose the manifestations of particular policy problems like the 1912 elections on which to hang her doctrine, the insistence on one and the same cause and therefore on one sole solution is clear, almost monotonous, evidence of an essentially simple doctrine beneath the sophistication of her treatment.

In one sense the radical opposition was following in the footsteps of the revisionists: neither could tolerate the separation from society. Both made a sustained attempt to overcome time-honoured alienation. Any relationship destroys alienation, whether positive or negative; any attempt to come to terms with existing surroundings or to struggle actively against them. Consequently we must see in the radical opposition inside the SPD as much a desire for tightening the relationship between Socialism and society as in the policy of the revisionists. There were occasional, oddly sympathetic echoes in Left and Right criticisms of the Executive between 1910 and 1914, which were not lost on Kautsky.[70]

But what distinguished the revisionists from the radicals was polarity of another kind, with regard to a different variable — action-organization. The revisionists never queried the organizational growth preoccupations of the party; they were major participants. And naturally they welcomed the emerging emphasis on parliamentary work and the *Reichstag* delegation. As to the radicals' pressure for action, they paid back a gibe of 1899 and called it "impossibilism".[71] For the revisionists, one of the things that was clearly impossible was to bring organization and action together in a causal or complementary relationship.

The German Left evolved a special theory of action. We have tried to show that the development and sharpening of this idea was due to, and took place in, the vacuum which the deliberate and unconscious policies of the SPD leadership had created and sustained. This was a direct consequence of victory in the revisionist controversy. Instead of helping to keep the party revolutionary as was believed at the time, the defeat — in votes if not in practice — of the revisionists in fact

[70] See his article "Zwischen Baden und Luxemburg", *Neue Zeit*, 1909-10, vol. ii, p. 667.

[71] Max Schippel, "Die neuesten Vorstösse unserer Impossibilisten", *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, xvi (1912), p. 280.

did the opposite. By isolating the SPD and creating a condition of general and increasing alienation from society, the possibilities of revolutionary stimulation were blocked, since these could only be provided by *contact* with society. Moreover isolation provided the political culture in which self-deception became general and complete, since the means of checking the existing revolutionary myths against real achievements were destroyed. In these conditions a new philosophy was evolved (Kautsky's) which emptied revolutionary Marxism of its dynamic content and in the last resort divorced the collapse of society from the policies and activities of Social Democracy except in a purely formal sense. It was natural therefore that anyone who opposed this concept would start with the urge to crack the party out of its isolation and self-absorption.

Elsewhere but at the same time a totally different theory of action was being developed by Lenin. This allocated positive meaning to the rôle of organization. But this doctrine was also developed under conditions of isolation from society. The Bolshevik leadership was in emigration except for a short period during the first Russian revolution, and Lenin's ideas too were the product of his immediate surroundings, the Russian Social Democratic party, just as the thinking of the German Left was dominated by conditions inside the SPD. The means of revolution were developed not through conflict with the society against which the revolution was aimed, but in the framework of a socialist party whose organization and policies were held to be inadequate. Lenin did not bring Imperialism in to help him, Bolshevik isolation was deliberate, self imposed; he would galvanize Russian Social Democracy from a sound kernel outwards, not from Imperialism inwards. Where the German Left emphasized action against organization, Lenin preached organization as a means to action. But action was common to both — and it was this emphasis on action which finally brought the German Left and the Russian Bolsheviks into the same camp in spite of so many serious disagreements. In her review of the Bolshevik revolution, written in September 1918, Rosa Luxemburg singled out this commitment to action for particular praise. Here she saw a strong sympathetic echo to her own ideas, and analysed it precisely in her own terms:

> With . . . the seizure of power and *the carrying forward* of the revolution the Bolsheviks have solved the famous question of a "popular majority" which has so long oppressed the German Social Democrats . . . not through a majority to a revolutionary tactic, but through a revolutionary tactic to a majority . . . .[72]

[72] *Die Russische Revolution*, edn. Flechtheim, (Frankfurt, 1963), p. 54: my italics.

With action as the cause and not the consequence of mass support, she saw the Bolsheviks applying her ideas in practice — and incidentally provides us with clear evidence as to what she meant when she spoke of majority and masses. In spite of other severe criticisms of Bolshevik policy, it was this solution of the problem by the Bolsheviks which definitely ensured them the support of the German Left.

It is not difficult to analyse the influence of these twin factors of organization and action in the subsequent history of the USSR. Lenin's preoccupation with the primacy of organization produced a certain indifference to the larger concept of society, just as it had done in the councils of the SPD. Thus the rapid changes of policy from war Communism to NEP (New Economic Policy), indeed the willingness to let a partially capitalist society flourish, were due in the last resort to the conviction that providing a correct organization and proper theoretical discipline were maintained in the party kernel, society could for the moment take care of itself; its shortcomings could not affect the party. According to Lenin, the functional direction of the relationship between party and society was always outward; if the kernel was sound, then the state of the periphery was less important. In this respect his analysis resembled the ideology of the SPD but differed completely from the German Left who before and after the war had found it necessary to use as a means of galvanizing the party. The whole doctrine of taking power only at the end of a long process of revolutionary development, which Rosa Luxemburg postulated as the programme for the young German Communist party, was based on assumptions exactly contrary to Lenin's, namely that only great changes in society in a Socialist direction could make the rule of a truly Socialist party feasible.[73]

It was Stalin who to some extent reversed this process and paradoxically adopted policies closer to the ideas of the old German Left. In the great purges, he broke down the Leninist distinction between party and society and put both on a more equal if lower footing. The means of coercion developed against society during collectivization were now turned on the party, so that — though in an entirely different context — society was brought in once more to balance an unsatisfactory structure and a self-satisfied ideology that were held to have developed within it. At the same time the idea of action as a prophylactic had gained in importance during collectivization and the first Five-year Plan, at the expense of Lenin's sacrosanct

[73] See *Bericht über den Gründungstag der KPD (Spartakusbund)* (Berlin, no date), p. 56.

kernel of organization. The Stalin period is symptomatic of a constant flux in the organizational structure. Institutions and functions appeared and disappeared rapidly, personnel was shifted about at great speed — precisely to prevent immobility, to ensure that the needs of society were met, and could make themselves felt within the party. Indeed the entire Soviet model of economic development as it evolved can be interpreted as an attempt to keep the highly bureaucratic planning system in a constant state of flux with campaigns and *sturmovshchina*. The notion of creative tensions as factors of economic development have given rise to a whole theory that rapid industrialization of under-developed countries is only possible in conditions of flux and political mobilizations, not in conditions of bureaucratic stability and orderly planning.[74] There is clearly a long and respectable tradition of continuity for the principle of action in the sense in which this word was first developed by the German Left in opposition to the SPD leadership.

We have tested our two-variable model of the pre-war SPD at some length, and have briefly suggested certain fields to which it might usefully be extended — colonial inheritor parties, certain parties of protest in western society, and to the Communist party of the Soviet Union. The possibilities of application have only been sketched, but it is hoped that they may provide a useful tool for a whole series of problems, for instance the present Russo-Chinese conflict. Moreover we have tried to show the problem as a continuum, both horizontally in relation to the other parties of Imperial Germany and the pre-war Bolsheviks, as well as in time, linked with post-revolutionary Russia.

The relationship of conflict and organization is recognized by modern sociology.[75] So is the relationship between a "class" or group and "society" or all other groups. In a political context our problem could be restated with sociological definitions as the difference on the one hand between interest aggregation plus articulation (an interest group or groups broadening out into effective political action; revisionists); secondly an attempt to aggregate interests through superimposition of conflicts but without political articulation (the SPD in isolation); finally no interest aggregation at all but strenuous superimposition of conflicts (Imperialism) and

[74] See for instance, A. O. Hirschmann, *The Strategy of Economic Development* (Newhaven, 1958); Jacques Perroux, *La Coexistence pacifique* (Paris, 1958). See also Gunnar Myrdal, *Economic Theory in Under-developed Regions* (London, 1957).

[75] For instance Ralf Dahrendorf, *Class and Class Conflict in an Industrial Society* (London, 1959), p. 213.

strong political articulation (the German Left). The possibilities adumbrated by modern sociology have not yet been adequately exploited in the study of political organizations, dynamics, relationships. Especially the dynamics; most pictures of change are "moving pictures" which means that they are no more than "a composition of immobilities . . . a position, and then a new position etc. *ad infinitum*".[76] The problem troubled Talcott Parsons among others, just as long ago it troubled Rosa Luxemburg.[77] In this field too our approach to developments in the pre-war SPD may in part be a useful contribution.

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[76] Henri Bergson, "Die Wahrnehmung der Veränderung" in *Denken und Schöpferisches Werden* (Meisenheim, 1958), p. 165.
[77] *Essays in Sociological Theory* (Glencoe, Illinois, 1954), p. 217.