

SOCIAL DEMOCRACY READER

Michael Reschke, Christian Krell, Jochen Dahm et al.

History of Social Democracy



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Editors: Jochen Dahm, Helga Grebing, Christian Krell, Michael Reschke, Meik Woyke

Contact: christian.krell@fes.de/jochen.dahm@fes.de/nachkontakte@fes.de

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FOREWORD to the First English-language Edition

To know where one is going one needs to know where one has come from: politics needs clear orientation. Only if one knows the aims of one's actions will one achieve those aims and get others on board.

The Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung is committed to the goals of social democracy and the ideals of the labour movement. The 150th anniversary of the SPD on 23 May 2013 provides the occasion for the Academy for Social Democracy to look back on the history of social democracy in the Social Democracy Readers series.

This is the first English-language edition of this Reader. It is offered as a helping hand for political decision-makers and opinion formers in the more than 100 countries in which the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung promotes democracy and development, and contributes to peace and security.

Social democracy is a universal idea. It is an international idea. In its programmes it has always described international aspirations that go beyond national borders. It is borne by the conviction that the conflict between labour and capital shapes the political debate and reality not only in one country but in all countries. In a time of internationally interwoven economies, global challenges and world-encompassing communication networks this is more pertinent than ever.

The achievement of full social democracy remains an ongoing task in each individual country and worldwide. In every constellation and period the actors of social democracy must identify and – democratically – fight for their interpretation of the basic values of freedom, justice and solidarity.

It is also important to learn from one another. The mistakes that are made can be instructive. What was successful here can perhaps be adapted to be of use somewhere else. The paths taken by German social democracy in the past 150 years are described in this book.

Bans, persecution and exile, victories and defeats, more than once wrongly declared defunct: the SPD looks back on an eventful history. The Social Democrats had already organised as a party before the German Reich was founded in 1871 and they have helped to shape and lived through the German Empire,

the Weimar Republic, the National Socialist dictatorship, exile and a divided and united Germany.

The aim of the Social Democracy Readers is to present connections clearly and accurately and with concise formulations on a scholarly basis. In this series to date volumes have appeared in English on the issues of foundations, the economy and the welfare state.

This reader necessarily has particular emphases. Thus particular reference is made to three standard works that have also appeared in English: *History of the German Labour Movement* (Grebing 2007), *The Social Democratic Party of Germany 1848–2005* (Potthoff/Miller 2006) and *History of the German Trade Unions* (Schneider 2005). In many places, this volume has benefited greatly from these books.

We would like to thank first of all Michael Reschke. He is the main author of the bulk of the book. Helga Grebing and Meik Woyke have contributed their expertise to the volume as members of the editorial team. Their knowledgeable, wise and always constructive remarks were invaluable to its success.

Our thanks also go to Thomas Meyer and Viktoria Kalass for their advice on its conception. We also thank Viktoria Kalass for her work on the key chapters of the book and finally Tobias Gombert for his comments on the manuscript and his contribution »The SPD is feminine«. Without them and many other people the Reader would not have come about. Any shortcomings are our responsibility.

The symbol of the Academy of Social Democracy is a compass. Through the offerings of the Academy the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung would like to provide a framework that enables clear standpoints and orientations. We would be delighted if you were to take advantage of what we have to offer to help you find your political path. Social democracy lives to the extent that citizens take issue with it and commit themselves to it.



Dr. Christian Krell

Head

Academy for Social Democracy

Bonn, September 2013



Jochen Dahm

Project leader

Social Democracy Readers

1. INTRODUCTION

*History means
identity*

History means identity. Political self-understanding and models are not rigid, but flexible. They develop dynamically in response to changes in their environment. Development is not only straight ahead, however, but also involves detours, reversals and, especially, forks in the road at which decisions must be made. The representatives of social democracy have constantly found themselves in such decision-making situations.

Especially today there are important and difficult issues that require clarification. Above all, what is social democracy? Where does it come from, what does it mean today and where is it going in the twenty-first century? In order to be able to answer these questions about the identity, current meaning and development of social democracy we need to address its origins and decisive historical milestones.

*History shows that
old questions remain
current*

A glance at history shows that not all seemingly new political challenges of the present are being handled for the first time: the question of who really dominates whom; democratically legitimate policy on economic interests; or, looking at it the other way around, questions about the shaping of social democracy, in short about a self-determined life, arise again and again in the history of social democracy.

*The »scourge of
one's origins«*

The aim of overcoming the »scourge of one's origins« faces us today in different terms but politically it is still urgent in education policy discussions on the social selectivity of the German school system.

Gender equality

Gender equality was an early demand whose realisation has yet to be achieved, in light of a 25 per cent wage difference between men and women in employment of equal value.

War and peace

Last but not least, already at the beginning the labour movement was confronted by questions of war and peace and actively committed itself to international solidarity. In periods of deployment of the German army abroad these questions are all the more pressing. Global inequalities have always forced us to look beyond the national horizon and to expand our field of vision.

This small selection alone already shows two aspects of the history of social democracy: answers to the question of what is regarded as social and what is regarded as democratic are never final. They are subject to societal, political and economic change and thus have to be revised constantly.

Two aspects: social and democratic

Nevertheless, there has been social development. The process of constituting the labour movement in Germany in the mid-nineteenth century was driven by directly perceivable abuses: child labour, a lack of safety at work, poor accommodation, poverty, unclear economic future, no guaranteed social insurance in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability or old age. In brief: discernible social want.

The workers were marginalised not only socially but also politically by the Prussian three-class voting system and repression. The hopes bound up with the 1848 revolution were disappointed by its failure. With the ensuing period of repressive reaction the political environment deteriorated even further.

19th century: the emergence of the workers' movement

Overcoming material want and striving for political codetermination – the idea of a »better tomorrow« – thus stood at the beginning of the labour movement. Its political strength and conviction were nourished by daily experiences of solidarity between craftsmen, workers and their families, shared dependencies, but also by the sympathy and solidarity of international intellectuals from the middle class.

Overcoming want and striving for codetermination

The first party in the German labour movement was the Allgemeine Deutsche Arbeiterverein (ADAV) or General Association of German Workers. The founding of the ADAV on 23 May 1863 was the decisive step towards independent political representation for the working class. Beginning with the founding of the ADAV in 1863 one can talk of a continuous history of social democratic organisation in Germany. This founding accordingly represents the reference point for the 150th anniversary of the SPD in 2013.

23 May 1863: the Allgemeine Deutsche Arbeiterverein ADAV was founded

150 years of the Social Democratic Party in Germany also represents 150 years of German history. Rich in ruptures, ups and downs, in the course of Germany's development up to the robust democracy of the present day there have been many catastrophic aberrations. The democracy movement in Germany had to suffer persecution, dictatorship and violence. Its success was not predestined; the realisation of a democratic order long remained uncertain. Achieving complete social democracy remains an ongoing task.

150 years of the SPD: 150 years of German history

»The general and direct right to vote is thus, as has now ensued, not only your [directed towards the reader] political, but also your social basic principle, the basic condition of all social assistance. It is the only means of improving the material situation of the working class.« (Ferdinand Lassalle 1863, Offenes Antwortschreiben, cited after Dowe/Klotzbach 2004: 130)

Social democracy was always the driving force of social and political emancipation. Its history is closely interwoven with Germany's path to modernity and the achievement of societal and individual freedom against all opposition.

Characteristic of its programmatic approach was always the linking of the social question with the question of power, dominance and democracy. This internal connection can be seen in writings, speeches and programmes. Social democratic pioneers were convinced that only in a democracy could social want and dependence be overcome since only this form of state offers the opportunity to orient politics to the interests and needs of the majority of society and thus to the working class.

Thus the SPD and its predecessor organisations, such as the ADAV, represented only one part of the labour movement. The German labour movement also encompasses the trade unions, as well as the workers' cultural movement. Common to the organisations of the labour movement is their analysis and model of society. Together they pursued the goal of a social democracy.

Accordingly, all three parts of the labour movement may be found in this volume. Nevertheless, the focus lies on the programme, organisation and history of the political embodiment of social democracy as a party. We will make constant reference to the milieu and to other parts of the labour movement, such as the trade unions and cooperatives, in order to ensure a view of the larger whole, the labour movement in its entirety.

*Labour movement =
Party, trade unions
and cultural
movement*



Figure 1: The three strands of the social democratic labour movement

The goal of a socially just society in which the basic values of social democracy – freedom, justice and solidarity – are realised is a demanding and challenging task not only in the face of the changing dynamics of German history, but also because of capitalism’s proneness to crisis.

Structure of the book

Willy Brandt once said: »Nothing happens of its own accord. And little is permanent. Thus take courage and remember that every age requires its own answers and we have to be at our best if any good is to be done« (Willy Brandt 1992: 515f, Welcome address to the congress of the Socialist International, 14 September 1992).

With these words Brandt made it clear that a comprehensive analysis of the relevant societal conditions, problem situations and tendencies, but also the discussion of and ensuing agreement on goals, instruments and realisation are indispensable for formulating social democratic policy. On this basis the present Reader seeks to comprehend the history of social democracy up to the present day in terms of three key questions:

- With what societal developments and key decision-making situations has social democracy been confronted?
- How have social democrats interpreted, dealt with and developed these questions and developments in manifestos and strategies; what kinds of debate have they conducted?
- What successes, but also what defeats and crises have there been?

*Three key questions
of the book*

If we seek answers to these questions we come up time and again against key ideas and controversies that are important for a deeper understanding of social democracy: theory and practice, reform and revolution, war and peace, progress and inertia, internationalism and nationalism, but also an understanding of the state and society.

*Chapter 2:
Workers' movement
up to 1863*

The Reader is oriented in terms of historical periods. After this introduction the context in which the labour movement emerged is presented up to 1863 in **Chapter 2**. The aims of the French Revolution, the influence of early socialist ideas and in particular the development of bourgeois and capitalist society, as well as the failure of the 1848 revolution formed the points of departure of social democracy in Germany.

*Chapter 3:
Rise to become a
mass movement
(1863–1918)*

Chapter 3 charts the rise of social democracy to become a mass movement between 1863 and 1918, but also deals with the repression during the Wilhelmine authoritarian state (Socialists Act) and internal programmatic and strategic conflicts (revisionism controversy, war loans).

*Chapter 4:
Weimar Republic
(1919–1933)*

The hopes and disenchantments of the first German democracy are dealt with in **Chapter 4**. The rise of the Weimar Republic was shaped by social democrats as the leading party of the Republic. Nevertheless, social democratic forces were unable to prevent the fall of the young German democracy. The opening up of society, the first experiences of government and social progress, such as the introduction of unemployment insurance, were confronted by the split of the labour movement into the SPD and the KPD (Communist Party), inflation and economic crises, democracy's shallow social roots, the escalation of political violence and finally the rise of the NSDAP (the National Socialists).

*Chapter 5:
Prohibition,
persecution
and exile
(1933–1945)*

The rise of the National Socialist dictatorship ushered in destruction, persecution and repression from 1933 to 1945, as well as exile and the struggles of resistance. This is dealt with in **Chapter 5**. The chapter also presents the post-War upheavals to which Germany, Europe and the Party in exile and in the resistance were subject.

*Chapter 6:
Re-establishment
and modernisation
(1945–1965)*

After the end of the war in 1945 the SPD was the first party to be re-established, under Kurt Schumacher. **Chapter 6** describes the beginning of the second German democracy and presents the path taken from the new start to the mod-

ernisation of social democracy in the West in the late 1950s and 1960s. We also look at the Soviet zone of occupation and the forced amalgamation of the SPD and the KPD to form the SED, as well as their establishment in the later German Democratic Republic.

After the end of Erhard's period as Chancellor and the conservative-liberal coalition, in 1966 the SPD was able to participate in government for the first time in the post-War period. The Grand Coalition was followed by the »social-liberal era« linked to the chancellorships of Willy Brandt and Helmut Schmidt, characterised by democratisation, opening up of society, expansion of the welfare state and a new Ostpolitik. However, **Chapter 7** also describes the crises and failures of this period, such as the return of mass unemployment, terrorism and the return of the SPD to opposition in 1982.

The re-establishment of social democracy in the German Democratic Republic (DDR), German unification and the recent developments of the SPD are dealt with in **Chapter 8**. The return to government under Gerhard Schröder in 1998 after 16 years in opposition was followed by rapid disillusionment in the face of internal and social controversies surrounding the »third way« and »Agenda 2010«. Nevertheless, the Red-Green Coalition was able up to 2005 to kick-start modernisation on environmental and social policy issues. The ensuing second Grand Coalition up to 2009 collapsed with the gravest financial and economic crisis since the global economic crisis of the 1930s. The ongoing renewal of social democracy in Germany and Europe is also considered in this chapter.

It becomes clear in the course of this presentation how much social democrats and those closest to them struggled for more democracy and social progress and for the social democratic model of society.

Chapter 9 thus puts the theory of social democracy in its historical context and links it to the (programmatic) history of the SPD. To this end the relationship between the theory of social democracy and democratic socialism as a vision of a »free and equal society« is explained and other links are made to the volume on the *Foundations of Social Democracy* (Reader 1). In concluding remarks the essential characteristics of the development and programmatic history of social democracy are presented and we venture a look into the future.

*Chapter 7:
Grand and social-
liberal coalition
(1966–1989)*

*Chapter 8: Modern
social democracy
(1990–2013)*

*Chapter 9: History
of social democratic
programmes*

The present volume *History of Social Democracy* is part of a series of Social Democracy Readers and thus precedes Reader 1, *Foundations of Social Democracy*. It traces programmatic development up to the current theory of social democracy, but also illustrates historical debates and struggles for more freedom and justice in solidarity for all and offers a deep insight into the development of social democracy overall.

Where?	When?	What? (Keywords)
Chapter 1		Introduction: History means identity
Chapter 2	bis 1863	Emergence of the workers' movement
Chapter 3	1863–1918	Rise to become a mass movement
Chapter 4	1919–1933	Government responsibility and split in the Weimar Republic
Chapter 5	1933–1945	Prohibition, persecution and exile in the National Socialist period
Chapter 6	1945–1965	Refoundation and modernisation
Chapter 7	1966–1989	Grand and social-liberal coalitions
Chapter 8	1990–2013	Modern social democracy
Chapter 9		Social democracy: Where are we headed in this new era?

Figure 2: Structure of the book

The SPD is feminine

By Tobias Gombert

»If we want a humane society we need to overcome the male dominated society« (Hamburg Programme 2007: 41). More than any other political party the SPD has always stood up for equal freedom for all, both women and men. But the SPD is strong not only because it has stood up for women, but above all because women have been involved in it and in all policy areas. The SPD has thus taken on a pioneering role in the women's movement. At the same time, the private and political life journeys of female SPD politicians show that an equal place in party and society is an object of constant struggle. In what follows we briefly present nine female SPD politicians from the nineteenth and early twentieth century and try to answer the question: what can we take from them as a mission for today?

Clara Zetkin (1857–1933) was, until 1917, a leading politician of the left-wing of the party, later the KPD. As a staunch feminist and internationalist she promoted the international labour movement. In 1892 she was the founder and chief editor of the social democratic publication for women *Die Gleichheit* [Equality] and the decisive initiator of International Women's Day and the Socialist International. Clara Zetkin stands for the SPD as part of the women's movement, but also international solidarity.

Lily Braun (1865–1916) was one of the first Social Democrats to demand the reconciliation of working and family life in the political arena and she also practiced it in her own life. For example, she demanded better working hours for mothers. Lily Braun tried to mediate between the proletarian and middle class women's movements, but she encountered hostility from both sides. Lily Braun represents keeping the aim of reconciling working and family life a social policy task for men and women.

Rosa Luxemburg (1871–1919) was, up to 1914, one of the SPD's leading theorists and a spokesman of the left-wing of the SPD. Between 1907 and 1914 she taught at the SPD party school. In terms of the party programme she was opposed to the representatives of revisionism. Early on she shrewdly warned of the dangers of German militarism and imperialism. Later, she co-founded the KPD. She was murdered in 1919. Rosa Luxemburg represents the need for theoretically-grounded politics and for international solidarity.

Rosa Helfers (1885–1965) worked first as a prison social welfare worker. She joined the SPD under a male pseudonym. As first director of the Berlin-Moabit remand centre she declared that she was in a »male domain«. Rosa Helfers co-

founded both the workers' welfare and the SPD women's group in Hameln. She was a member of the Prussian and later the Lower Saxon State Parliament. During the National Socialist dictatorship she worked for the resistance. Rosa Helfers's social policy commitment represents the unity of the labour movement through the SPD and the AWO.

Louise Schroeder (1887–1957), as one of the few women in the Weimar national constituent assembly, was a member of the Reichstag and later of the Bundestag. She was briefly the mayor of Berlin. She was involved in the refounding of the AWO and the SPD after the Second World War. Louise Schroeder represents the successful combination of municipal, state and federal politics.

Elisabeth Selbert (1896–1986) came from a modest background and initially worked in a telegraph office. Through self-study – alongside a family and a job – she prepared for the Abitur and completed her studies in law and political science with a doctorate. She is one of the four »mothers of the Basic Law« and, among other things, saw to it that equal rights were included in the fundamental rights section of the Basic Law. Elisabeth Selbert represents the struggle for advancement on an equal footing through education and the use of knowledge for the sake of society.

Anna Zammert (1898–1982) was, among other things, a tobacco worker and employed in open-cast mining. Later, she studied at the Labour Academy in Frankfurt am Main. From 1927 to 1933 she was the first female full-time secretary of a trade union and up to 1933 also a Reichstag deputy. After the Second World War she was responsible for rebuilding the AWO in Hannover. Anna Zammert in particular represents work on the alliance between the SPD and the trade unions.

Annemarie Renger (1919–2008) decisively helped to shape SPD policy after the Second World War. For example, from 1946 she headed, initially in Hannover, Schumacher's office and later in Bonn the office of the Party Executive. Between 1972 and 1990 she was president and vice-president of the Bundestag. Annemarie Renger represents hard-won success as a career politician.

Inge Wettig-Danielmeier (born in 1936) was a member of the SPD Party Executive between 1982 and 2007 and, among other things, was SPD Federal Treasurer from 1991 to 2007, federal chair of the Working Group of Social Democratic Women from 1981 to 1992 and for 15 years a member of the Bundestag. During her time as federal treasurer the SPD's financial investments and administration were expanded and consolidated. Inge Wettig-Danielmeier stands, alongside her struggle for gender equality, in particular for the political and sustainable organisation of party financing.

2. IN THE BEGINNING THERE WAS WANT: FREEDOM AND PROGRESS IN SOLIDARITY (UP TO 1863)¹

In this chapter:

- the social situation of the working class in the mid-nineteenth century is described;
- the ideas of the early socialists are discussed;
- it is shown how the revolution of 1848/49 influenced the establishment of the labour movement;
- the emergence of its first organisations is reconstructed.

With the General Association of German Workers (Allgemeinen Deutschen Arbeiterverein, ADAV) the first independent workers' party was founded in May 1863. Its founding was also the beginning of a continuous line of social democratic² parties in Germany. Before the founding of the ADAV the fledgling German labour movement went through a phase of self-examination and self-identification. This period was characterised by the political and social contradictions and problems, even hardships of this time. Not least it was determined by the question of how these contradictions and problems – including organisational ones – could be addressed.

The traditional banner of the SPD, the old ADAV flag, which is also depicted on the cover of this book, does not recall the French Revolution by chance. The values of the Revolution – freedom, equality and fraternity – that adorn the banner already adumbrate the triad of values of social democracy: freedom, justice and solidarity.

The French Revolution exercised a strong influence on the labour movement. The break with feudalism and absolutism, the ideas of general human rights, the ideal of equality for all, political self-determination, democracy and parliamentarism form central reference points in the programme and identity of the labour movement.

*Continuous line
since 1863*

*The influence of the
French Revolution*

*Reference points
of the workers'
movement*

1 In writing this volume particular use was made of the ideas of Potthoff/Miller (2002), Schneider (2000) and Grebing (2007).

2 »Social democratic« and »socialist« are not understood as opposed here. In particular in the nineteenth century the two were largely congruent.

The slogan »unity is strength« on the traditional banner is an early reference to the conviction that social change can be obtained only together. If society is to change and to become more just collective organisation on the basis of solidarity is indispensable.

*Demand for equality
= break with
feudalism*

In particular, the equality principle here meant the essential break with the previous feudal order based on estates. The social and political consequences of the equality principle were accordingly comprehensive: social security and better working conditions, codetermination in the world of work, access to education, no discrimination on the grounds of social origin and above all the demand for free, general and direct voting rights; parliamentary democracy instead of absolutist rule, elected political representation instead of monarchical dynasties.

*Liberalisation of
the economy*

Furthermore, the Enlightenment and the French Revolution ushered in a new era. The influence of liberalism was reflected not only in demands for democratic transformation. In terms of the economy it obtained real importance, although with varying degrees of success: freedom of trade, liberation of peasants and market competition superseded the economic order previously characterised by the guilds – (early) capitalism began its triumphal march.

In the political sphere, liberalism was unable to assert itself against conservative monarchical forces. In terms of economic policy, however, in the context of the monarchical-authoritarian state of the time it was able to implement far-reaching self-regulation of the market and of participants in the economy. Liberalism was an ideology of the upcoming commercial and property-owning classes. Profiting from social development they put no particular emphasis on the solution of contradictions in early capitalism and the struggle against social polarisation. Rather the supporters of liberalism trusted in individual civil rights

Chapter 2: 1799–1863

1799

Robert Owen's successful company experiment for better working conditions (early socialism)

21 February 1848

Publication of the Communist Manifesto (Marx/Engels)

1799

Contemporary events: industrialisation and population explosion

and liberties without far-reaching social rights. Economic freedom ranked above political freedom for them.

Societal Conditions of the Labour Movement

The advent of the labour movement cannot be imagined without a comprehensive change in economic and social circumstances. The liberal market economy and growing social crises were the decisive context for the emergence of the labour movement.

Early capitalism was based on two principles, which at the same time were key driving forces of the labour movement: industrialisation and wage labour. Both induced a proletarianisation of large segments of society.

*Market economy
and social want*

*Negative and
positive proletariani-
sation*

The term »**proletarian**« comes from the Latin word »proles«, which means »progeny«. In ancient Rome it referred to the people who were not slaves, but free citizens, although they had no property and were dependent on wage labour. Karl Marx coined the term with reference to the industrial labour that came into being as a result of the Industrial Revolution in the nineteenth century. Marx considered that they have a »double freedom«: liberation from feudal structures and freedom to use their labour power as they choose, but also »freedom« from the ownership of the means of production and thus dependency all over again. The counter-term with regard to the proletariat is the bourgeoisie, the property-owning class.

Proletarianisation generated a tendency for the workers' living conditions and life circumstances to converge and thus contributed not least to the formation of a common identity. Kocka (1990a: 521ff) distinguishes between a »negative proletarianisation« and a »positive proletarianisation«. By »negative proletarianisation« he means the crisis-prone and destructive processes of early capitalism. He thus describes, based on the abolition of serfdom and the introduction of

freedom of trade the release of the working population from the system of estates and the previous cooperative forms of labour in guilds.

**From February/
March 1848**
1848 Revolution
(Paukskirche)

**23 August to
3 September 1848**
Founding of the German Workers'
Brotherhood (Stephan Born)

1 March 1863
»Open letter«
(Ferdinand Lassalle)

1848

1863

*New dependencies
and institutions*

In Kocka's view, the implementation of wage labour constitutes a »positive proletarianisation«. However, »positive« in this sense does not have any normative value. Rather with this term Kocka is alluding to the structure-forming effect of proletarianisation, establishing new dependencies and institutions. Notwithstanding all the social want and injustice proletarianisation is here regarded not as a process of impoverishment but as a process of social destruction and restructuring. This exerted a decisive effect on class formation by dissolving traditional class identities and creating the feeling of belonging to new social classes.

*Centralisation of
labour promotes
identity formation*

The centralisation of labour had a decisive influence on the later formation of a common identity in the working class in early capitalism. Previously, work had been characterised by the integrated manufacturing of products. Workplaces were, as a rule, bound to the home. Now work meant wage labour in the form of specialised division of labour with a higher level of mechanisation. For – mainly male – individuals it was also more abstract and ultimately alienating. Workplaces and home and family were separated.

*Craftsmen: pioneers
of the labour
movement*

Labour thus became a sphere in its own right with a high level of standardisation: strict specification of working time, mechanisation and production parameters. It was no longer »embedded«. On top of this came the decisive experience of managerial governance, together with substantial social distance from the company management. The workers thus found themselves subject to a double dependency once again: on one hand, on the market and on the other hand, on the employers who owned the capital (cf. Kocka 1990a: 51ff). This characterises the structural opposition of labour and capital to this day.

The pioneers of the early labour movement were, in particular, journeymen and impoverished master craftsmen, for example, the wood turner and later »kaiser of the workers« August Bebel. The decisive experience of »negative proletarianisation« can be illustrated particularly well in terms of the journeymen.

The journeymen were not only driven by the experience of social want. They had specialised qualifications, were very proud of their occupation and independent-minded. A large proportion of master craftsmen worked alone, as did the journeymen. However, they feared losing this very occupational autonomy due to the economic liberal policies of the authoritarian state under the Kaiser, as

wage labourers under capitalism. They were afraid that they would be drawn into relationships based on direct dependency.

Politically, their distinct independence gave them an advantage, as did their previous experience of organisation and corporate and guild traditions and the networks built on them. This was to prove invaluable in the formation of the cooperative, trade union and party elements of the labour movement.

The Solution of the Social Question

The processes of upheaval we have outlined were by no means confined to Germany. Early capitalism based on Britain's pioneering role in industrialisation – also frequently referred to as »Manchester capitalism« – led to contradictions in all Western industrialised nations. It created social disparities, new societal dependencies and was accompanied by shifts in power. Accordingly, various ideas and theories on the solution of the social question influenced efforts to tame and, ultimately, to overcome capitalism, in the form of early socialism.

*Manchester
capitalism and early
socialism*

*England:
Robert Owen*

*France: Pierre-
Joseph Proudhon*

Robert Owen (1771–1858) was a British entrepreneur and early socialist. In 1799 he was able to show, at his cotton mill in New Lanark, Scotland, that good working conditions and high productivity were not contradictory, but go hand in hand. He shortened working time, provided affordable accommodation, introduced pension and sickness insurance and, as a result, considerably raised the company's productivity, not least because of the workers' stronger motivation. Owen was one of the founders of the cooperative movement.

At the centre of the contributions from Britain and France, that not least inspired Karl Marx's reflections, stood a critical analysis of private property. The Englishman Robert Owen, for example, tested the idea of joint property, in other words, the notion of collective ownership in his own factory. Owen's experiences exerted great influence on the development of the British cooperatives and trade unions, but also on later social legislation.

In France, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon saw the state as the decisive actor in the organisation of society. His formula »property is theft« – which links private property with »extortionate« privileges – is well-known. His countryman Charles Fourier saw the more equal distribution of wealth as the key to a more just social order. Henri de Saint-Simon, finally, argued that the development of the economy influences

social life. This hypothesis re-emerged in Marx who understood the economy as the »economic base« of a society.

*Germany: conserva-
tive reformers*

In Germany, early socialist approaches from foreign, especially French social critics were taken up by conservative reformers, such as Lorenz von Stein. But other social strata were also influenced. The poet Georg Büchner's slogan »Peace to the shacks! Wage war on the palaces!« became well known. Also worthy of note is the journeyman tailor Wilhelm Weitling who formulated radical early socialist demands for equality-based community of property, abolition of money and, finally, revolutionary social upheaval, largely motivated by Christian beliefs.

*Social question and
Christianity*

In any case, representatives of Christianity also took up the social question, although to varying degrees. Although Protestantism and Catholicism strove to stem the loss of Christian-conservative values in the facing of rampant secularisation, they differed with regard to their approach to the social question. Protestantism primarily traced poverty back to religious grounds and limited itself to poor relief and pastoral care.

Social Catholicism, on the other hand, represented especially by the then Bishop of Mainz, Wilhelm-Emanuel Freiherr von Ketteler, and evinced by *Die Arbeiterfrage und das Christentum* (1864) took a different path. It understood the social question as society's key challenge in the developing capitalist order. There were overlaps between Lassalle and von Ketteler not only with regard to the analysis of the exploitative nature of wage labour and in the demand for the promotion of cooperatives. They also shared the conviction that the working class must be able to have independent representation and that the state must implement social reforms.

*Papal criticism of
capitalism*

There was also criticism of capitalism in the papal encyclical *Rerum novarum* by Pope Leo XIII (1891). Christian trade unions and the social policy programme of the Centre Party reflected these proposals. The relationship between Catholics and social democracy remained distant or even hostile, however, because social democracy was regarded as »the heir of anti-religious liberalism« (Grebinger 2007: 53).

Masterminds of the Labour Movement: Marx and Engels

»The modern bourgeois society that has sprouted from the ruins of feudal society has not done away with class antagonisms. It has but established new classes, new conditions of oppression, new forms of struggle in place of the old ones. Our epoch, the epoch of the bourgeoisie, possesses, however, this distinct feature: it has simplified class antagonisms. Society as a whole is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other — Bourgeoisie and Proletariat.«

(Marx/Engels 1848, Communist Manifesto, cited after Dowe/Klotzbach 2004:57)

Karl Marx (1818–1883) and **Friedrich Engels** (1820–1895) were German philosophers and political journalists. Their Communist Manifesto, published in 1848, exerted enormous political influence. Marx's most important publication with regard to economic theory was *Capital*, whose three volumes were published between 1867 and 1894. The most important independent publications by Friedrich Engels were *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (1845) and *Anti-Dühring* (1877).

Incomparably more influential from the mid-nineteenth century onwards were the works of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. The (industrial) working class shares, as Marx wrote in the Communist Manifesto of 1848, a common fate: the compulsion to »sell his own labour power« which thus becomes a commodity (Marx/Engels, cited after Dowe/Klotzbach 2004: 62).

*Influential:
Marx and Engels*

These conclusions were based on Marx's analysis of »bourgeois society«, which was determined by capitalism. He identified its core as lying in the »class opposition« of bourgeoisie and proletariat, capital and labour, ownership or non-ownership of capital and in the power of disposal over the means of production. Marx was convinced that the proletariat and the bourgeoisie confronted one another irreconcilably.

»The history of all societies hitherto is the history of class conflict.«

(Marx/Engels 1848, Communist Manifesto, cited after Dowe/Klotzbach 2004: 57)

In the Communist Manifesto, Marx and Engels take stock of the socialist debate and formulate their own social analysis partly deviating from it and partly based on it. In their day, the Manifesto enjoyed broad influence less because of the text as a whole, however, than due to individual quotations.

*The influence of
the Communist
Manifesto was
mainly through
quotations*

The Manifesto takes up the early socialist demand for the abolition of private ownership of the means of production and puts economic development at the centre of social change. People's dependence on other people has its origin in the control of some individuals over the means of production. Capitalism breaks with traditional forms of organising labour and at the same time contributes to the formation of a revolutionary class through the proletarianisation, impoverishment and concentration of the working masses in the factories.

According to Marx, a revolutionary upheaval would ultimately overcome the »alienation of people from one another«, in other words, their degradation to a commodity, labour power, in the capitalist mode of production. Man would not only be released from the compulsion to sell his or her labour power, but also superseding private property would enable people to enjoy real freedom:

»In place of the old bourgeois society, with its classes and class antagonisms, we shall have an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all« (Marx/Engels 1848, Communist Manifesto, cited after Dowe/Klotzbach 2004: 57)

Marx: Capital

In the first volume of *Capital*, which appeared in 1867, Marx put his societal analysis on an economic footing. He showed, among other things, that not only the exploitation of the working class, but also the constant struggle for economic productivity can be analysed as a condition of survival for companies. Crises in whole branches of the economy can be explained in this way.

Engels: The Condition of the Working Class in England

In their analysis, Marx and Engels were concerned mainly with the industrial working class in England. At the time the Communist Manifesto appeared, 1848, this group made up only a small part of the population, however. In Germany industrialisation gathered pace later than in Britain. Nevertheless, the above-described crises, dependencies and concerns about their subsistence affected the bulk of the German population. Whether the »proletariat« or the »fourth estate« »the misery of a broad, hard working and, despite that, hungry and propertyless class« (Posthoff/Miller 2004: 21) was prevalent, even before industrialisation. Poverty was the result especially of the strong population growth at the beginning of the nineteenth century, which came at a time of a lack of gainful employment. Engels described *The Condition of the Working Class in England* as follows:

»[T]hese workers have no property whatsoever of their own, and live wholly upon wages, which usually go from hand to mouth. Society, composed wholly of atoms, does not trouble itself about them; leaves them to care for themselves and their families, yet supplies them no means of doing this in an efficient and permanent manner. Every working man, even the best, is therefore constantly exposed to loss of work and food, that is to death by starvation, and many perish in this way. The dwellings of the workers are everywhere badly planned, badly built, and kept in the worst condition, badly ventilated, damp, and unwholesome. The inhabitants are confined to the smallest possible space, and at least one family usually sleeps in each room. The interior arrangement of the dwellings is poverty-stricken in various degrees, down to the utter absence of even the most necessary furniture. The clothing of the workers, too, is generally scanty, and that of great multitudes is in rags. The food is, in general, bad; often almost unfit for consumption, and in many cases, at least at times, insufficient in quantity, so that, in extreme cases, death by starvation results.« (Engels 1845: 85f)

The population rose from 23 million to 43 million between 1800 and 1875, despite the emigration of around 3 million people. The cities saw particular population growth, on one hand due to rising birth rates and on the other hand as a result of migration flows from rural areas into the newly emerging industrial centres. Almost 50 per cent of the population belonged to the »proletariat« in the mid-nineteenth century. At least two-thirds belonged to the lower class or the lower middle class, while the bourgeoisie made up around 10 per cent of society (cf. Kocka 1990a: 105).

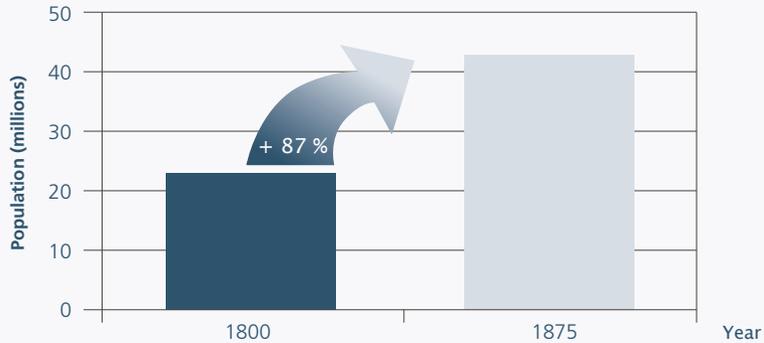


Figure 3: Population explosion at the time of the Industrial Revolution (Germany)

Interpretation: The population almost doubled between 1800 and 1875 from 23 to 43 million.

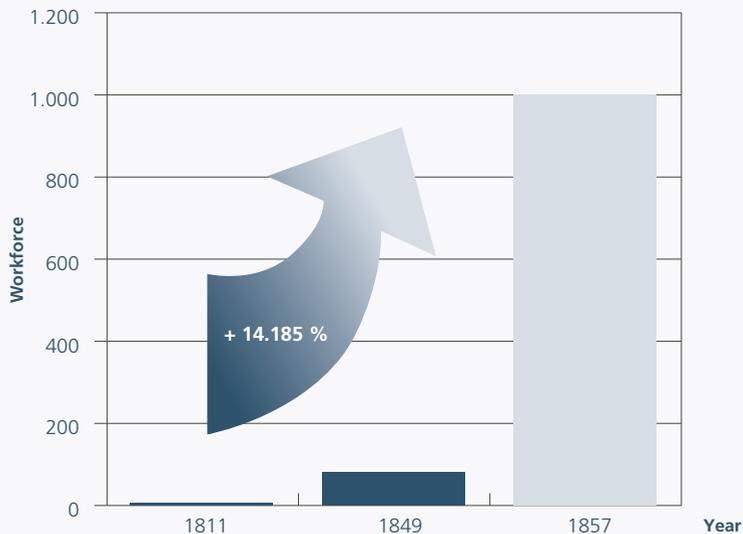


Figure 4: Development of the workforce, Krupp

Interpretation: The workforce of the Krupp company increased almost one hundred and fifty fold in the wake of the Industrial Revolution from 1811 to 1857, less than 50 years.

The process of industrialisation took some time to get under way, however. There was an oversupply of labour: Krupp, for example, employed 7 people in 1811 and 80 in 1849, climbing to 1,000 only in 1857. The mass poverty, 14-hour working days, women's and child labour, the desperate housing situation and the lack of social provision against life's contingencies suffered by the unpropertied was in sharp contrast to the rising prosperity of the property-owning business class, the capitalist bourgeoisie. Despite the dependency, low wages and social want factory work promised the propertyless work and food. In contrast, incomes from the cottage industry of weavers and spinners, for example, were well below the subsistence minimum.

*Industrialisation:
slow at first*

From the 1850s industrialisation took off. The rise in the population was now reflected in the number of employees in individual economic branches. In 1830 three times as many employees worked in agriculture as in industry – and only 10 per cent of the latter in factories, mines and manufacturing – while in 1873 the agricultural sector and industry and services were already at level pegging, each with 50 per cent. Particularly significant was the economic dynamic of the German Empire in developing the agrarian market: up to the middle of the century agricultural products were exported from Germany; subsequently, however, this changed and Germany became an agricultural importer. The catalyst of industrial development was the advent of the railways (cf. Kocka 1990a: 104).

*From the 1850s:
dynamic
industrialisation*

The Revolution of 1848 and the Beginnings of the Organised Labour Movement

The self-consciousness asserted by Marx and Engels in the Communist Manifesto and the communist movement that supposedly haunted Europe like a »spectre« were borne more by the conviction that the key to the objective course of history had been discovered than by a discernible mass organisation and broad concrete appeal in society. Especially in Germany the Manifesto reached only a few supporters in the »Communist League«.

The year 1848 was significant less because of the publication of the Communist Manifesto than because of two other decisive events paramount in the historiography of social democracy: the 1848 revolution and the founding of the German Workers' Brotherhood as a broad, independent member organisation.

*1848: an important
year in several
respects*

The repressive policy of the authoritarian state towards oppositional movements retarded the development of trade unions and of a politically organised labour

movement in Germany. The ban on trade union organisation was only lifted temporarily with the 1848 revolution. This had happened as early as 1824 in Britain, where a labour movement already existed, sustained by the trade unions. Furthermore, in Germany there was significance press censorship. Up to 1848 only journeymen were politically active and only then when they were not on German soil. The journeymen organised themselves in various contexts, among others in the communist-leaning »League of the Just«. The first sickness, mutual benefit and burial funds, as well as the first strike activities were the precursors of trade union development.

The revolution of 1848 was to change all this. In contrast to France, the revolution in Germany had less of a social motivation, being sustained much more by democratic and nationalist motives. The aim of the German democrats was a parliamentary state of national unity with general and equal voting rights. The formation of a national constitutional assembly in Frankfurt's Paulskirche was thus a decisive political success for large segments of the bourgeois democracy movement.

*The revolution
of 1848*

The working class that fought alongside the bourgeois democrats were driven by hopes of a better and self-determined life. For them the revolution offered the initial spark towards organisation. In the ensuing period the first trade union associations emerged, first and foremost printers and tobacco workers. There were also socially motivated liberal democratic forces among the bourgeoisie, however. Sustained by a liberal educational ideal they endeavoured to establish workers' education clubs. But although they provided help towards self-help more far-reaching social demands and all their political consequences were not on their agenda.

»We workers were a strange, unknown entity to a large part of the German bourgeois class ... ; could we expect to be considered a class in society that undergoes its own independent development? ... We aim our forces neither too high nor too low; it is true that we are now at a stage of development from which no power on earth could deflect us any longer ... we are taking our affairs into our own hands and no one should wrest them from us again« (Stephan Born 1848, introduction to the Statutes of the Berlin Central Workers' Committee, cited after Grebing 2007: 15).

The printer Stephan Born took another, independent path. Mainly at his instigation between 23 August and 3 September 1848 32 workers' associations from all over Germany met in Berlin to found the first independent transregional

Stephan Born (1824–1898) was a skilled printer, but later also worked as a teacher, editor and professor. The founding of the German Workers' Brotherhood, the first independent, transregional self-help organisation of the labour movement in 1848 was largely due to him. After the collapse of the March Revolution of 1848 Born emigrated to Switzerland.

self-help organisation of the labour movement in the form of the German Workers' Brotherhood, which represented trade union demands. Its successful establishment all over the country is clear from the 230 local associations and district organisations that the Workers' Brotherhood later encompassed.

Besides the step towards transregional independence and the size of the organisation another characteristic was essential to the Brotherhood: the idea of solidarity. Although the Workers' Brotherhood was largely made up of qualified workers and journeymen and only to a lesser extent of the uneducated, wage labourers or the »*Lumpenproletariat*« the slogan of »workers' brotherhood« – »all for one and one for all« – testifies to a common identity and a collective self-understanding as the »working class«. The members of the Workers' Brotherhood shared the conviction that freedom and progress could be achieved only in solidarity.

In the context of Stephan Born's Workers' Brotherhood the concept of »social democracy« emerged prominently for the first time. Thus the (male) members called themselves »social democrats« and thereby manifested in their self-description the sustained programmatic conviction of the inseparable link between the social and the democratic questions. As a consequence the term became increasingly established: the key publication of the ADAV bore the title »*Der Social-Demokrat*« and the term may also be found in the designations of later party foundations and mergers.

The demands of the Workers' Brotherhood were political and social: freedom of association in order to be able to establish their own representative organisations, the first welfare state security systems, such as health care institutions and sickness insurance funds. The critique of private property was to be found

in the demand for consumer and production cooperatives, while the dramatic transformation of labour was evidenced in the demands for certificates of employment, legal labour protection and codetermination with regard to working time and wage determination.

*The collapse of the
1848 revolution*

It was possible to get individual representatives to introduce corresponding demands into the deliberations of the national constitutional assembly in Frankfurt's Paulskirche. Here they came up against the reluctance of the liberal-bourgeois majority to countenance drastic change and social democratic reform proposals were thwarted. The goal of the liberal and bourgeois forces was to create a German nation-state with constitutionally guaranteed civil liberties. Specifically, their priority was rights of political codetermination, equality before the law and protection of property. Demands by the radical democratic and social revolutionary minority in the national assembly could not be pushed through.

At the same time, the monarchist forces became stronger. The disappointment of the working class concerning the outcome of the negotiations in the Paulskirche grew, leading to protests. The monarchist reaction seized the opportunity presented by the weakness and internal division of the democracy movement. The protests were put down by force of arms and the parliament was dissolved. The brief democratic spring linked to the revolution came to an abrupt end with a strict ban on association and the persecution of oppositional forces.

*The labour move-
ment took up the
democratic legacy*

From the collapse of the Frankfurt national assembly, which almost completely comprised members of the bourgeoisie and only a handful of peasants and craftsmen, the liberal bourgeoisie and the labour movement drew different conclusions, each with far-reaching consequences. While on the side of the bourgeoisie adaptation and resignation held sway and the oppositional stance was in many instances renounced in light of the economic freedoms that had been obtained, in the labour movement the conviction grew that it would have to achieve progress and a just social order on its own. The working class took up the legacy of the 1848 revolution and developed democratic ideals and ideas further. The democratisation of society and the liberation of the working class became the historical mission of the labour movement.

»Organise yourselves as a general German workers' association with the purpose of legal and peaceful, but untiring, unrelenting agitation for the introduction of general and direct voting rights in all German states. From the moment when this association encompasses even as few as 100,000 German workers it will already constitute a force to be reckoned with. Propagate this call in every work-place, every village, every shack. Let the stronger comprehension and education of urban workers be passed on to rural workers ... The more the echo of their voices rings out a million-fold the more irresistible will be the pressure.« (Ferdinand Lassalle 1863, Offenes Antwortschreiben, cited after Dowe/Klotzbach 2004: 131)

On the eve of the formation of the ADAV, whose leading figure delivered these words, unsolved social problems and continuing political impotence went hand in hand with disappointment concerning the fruitless attempts at cooperation with the liberal movement. The growing conviction of the working class and less that of the intellectuals associated with it that it had to represent its own interests gained more and more support and validity. The working class increasingly organised itself. In 1863 the first German workers' party was founded, the General German Workers' Association (Allgemeine Deutsche Arbeiterverein, ADAV). This date marked the historic turning point towards the constitution of a third major political tendency alongside liberalism and conservatism: socialism.

What does this mean for social democracy?

- Early on, the young labour movement recognised, based on Marx and Engels and their own life experience, how decisively economic relations shaped society.
- The labour movement took up the democratic legacy of the 1848 revolution.
- Social want under early capitalism, on one hand, and the authoritarian state, on the other, opposed a just social order. From the beginning social democracy was distinguished by its linking of the social question and the question of democracy.

Further reading:

Jürgen Kocka
(1990a), *Geschichte der Arbeiter und der Arbeiterbewegung in Deutschland seit dem Ende des 18. Jahrhunderts*, Vol. 2: *Arbeitsverhältnisse und Grundlagen der Klassenbildung im 19. Jahrhundert*, Verlag J.H.W. Dietz Nachf., Bonn.

Jürgen Kocka
(1990b), *Weder Stand noch Klasse. Unterschichten um 1800*, Verlag J.H.W. Dietz Nachf., Bonn.

3. MASS MOVEMENT BETWEEN UNITY AND DIVISION (1863–1918)

In this chapter

- it is described how the SPD later emerged from the General German Workers' Association (Allgemeiner Deutscher Arbeiterverein, ADAV) of 1863 and the Social Democratic Workers' Party (Sozialdemokratische Arbeiterpartei (SDAP));
- the prohibition and persecution of social democracy during the period of the Anti-Socialist Laws are outlined;
- the rise to become a mass movement and the debate on programmes and strategies in the authoritarian German Empire are traced; and
- the circumstances in which the SPD split during the First World War are explained.

Lassalle was convinced that the bourgeoisie had betrayed the ideals of 1848. This was his principal motivation with regard to the founding of the ADAV in 1863. The historic task of realising democratic ideals of freedom were now the task of the »fourth estate«, as Lassalle often called the working class.

»Its task is thus in truth the task of all mankind; its freedom is the freedom of all mankind; its dominion is the dominion of all.« (Ferdinand Lassalle 1862, cited after Bernstein 1919: 187)

*Saxony: early centre
of the labour
movement*

It was not by chance that the ADAV was founded in Leipzig: Saxony was one of the early centres of the labour movement. Furthermore, the ban on association was lifted there in 1861. A minority in the Leipzig educational association were more active. They wanted independent political representation for the working class. A Central Committee to convene a general German workers' congress was proclaimed. Lassalle was asked to outline a programme.

Ferdinand Lassalle (1825–1864) was a lawyer and journalist and the first president of the General German Workers' Association (Allgemeiner Deutscher Arbeitervereins, ADAV), founded in 1863, of which the SPD is the successor. Lassalle's »Open Letter«, to which the founding of the ADAV can be traced back, is famous. He met a tragic death in a pistol duel, which contributed to his idolisation.

Ferdinand Lassalle was a famous lawyer and journalist. Thanks to his passionate speeches, organisational abilities and adopted role as lawyer for the working class he had an enormous influence and appeal. He outlined the programme and strategy of the ADAV in his »Open Letter« of 1 March 1863. On

23 May 1863 11 delegates met in Leipzig to found the ADAV and elected Lassalle its president. The membership in 1864 totalled around 4,600. Although the ADAV encompassed only a minority of workers' associations and its direct influence was regionally limited, the founding of the ADAV signalled a breakthrough. The subsequent idolisation of Ferdinand Lassalle and the circumstance that constant reference was made to his ideas indicate his significance for the development of the labour movement.

Lassalle had a liberal counterpart in the German Progress Party. The debate between Hermann Schulze-Delitzsch, a co-founder of the German cooperative movement, and Lassalle reflects a major controversy of the period, a key point of contention between socialism and liberalism. Its subject was the interpretation of the social question, especially the »iron law of wages«.

1863: the »Open Letter« and the founding of the ADAV

Lassalle's liberal counterpart

According to the **iron law of wages** workers' pay will always tend towards the lowest possible level. The yield- and profit-oriented exploitation in capitalism prevents higher wages.

For Lassalle, the »iron law of wages« gave rise to the need to establish production cooperatives for the workers. The idea was to overcome the separation between

wages, on one hand, and company profits, on the other. This rejected state intervention and relied more on self-help through assistance funds and consumer cooperatives.

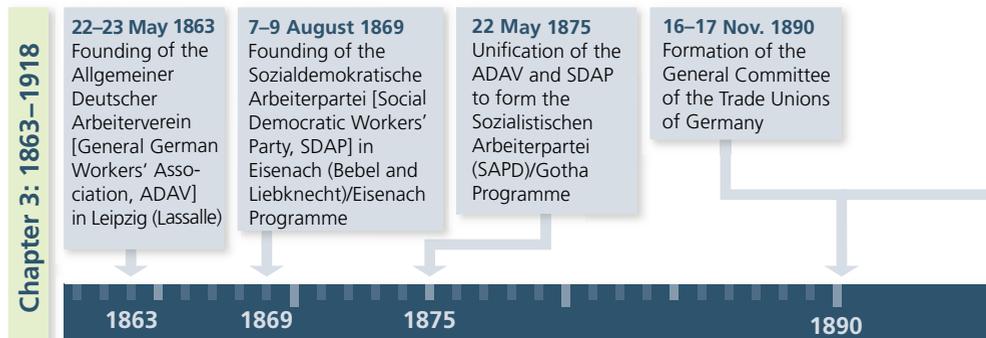
Lassalle, Marx and Engels

Lassalle, Marx and Engels disagreed on many issues. However, they allotted a decisive historical role to the labour movement. They analysed the shortcomings of capitalism in a similar way. They also shared the view that the demand for the abolition of »ownership of land and capital« is central to the emancipation of the labour movement.

The considerable differences between Lassalle, on one hand, and Marx and Engels, on the other, lay in their view of the state, a revolutionary or reform-oriented approach, a stronger national or international viewpoint and different notions of internal party codetermination. These differences affected the party formation processes of the 1860s.

Their ideas differed primarily with regard to the role of the state and its legislative institutions. Marx saw it rather as an instrument of repression of the ruling class. Lassalle regarded it as possible to change the state's political orientation. For him because of its legislative function it was a central arena for improving the living conditions of the working class. In comparison to Marx and Engels, moreover, Lassalle was much more oriented towards the national state. He was less internationalist and less revolutionary in terms of political programmes and rhetoric.

Marx and Engels also criticised Lassalle's political strategy. He attacked the liberal bourgeoisie too much and made too little effort, at least in the initial period of the political struggle, to forge alliances with the progressive part of the bourgeoisie. Only in that way could conditions favouring the political independence of the labour movement gradually develop.



During this period: the German Empire, the persecution of social democracy with the Anti-Socialist Laws (October 1878 to September 1890) and the First World War

The »Eisenachers« Found the Second Party of the Labour Movement

On 7 August 1869 a second branch of the labour movement – the so-called »Eisenacher« – was organised with the founding of the Social Democratic

1869: founding of the SDAP

August Bebel (1840–1913) and **Wilhelm Liebknecht** (1826–1900) founded the SDAP in 1869. Bebel was one of the two chairmen of the SPD from 1892 until his death and from 1871 a member of the Reichstag. His popularity was expressed in the nickname »kaiser of the workers«. Bebel's most influential work as an author was *Die Frau und der Sozialismus* [Women and Socialism], which appeared in 1879. The older Liebknecht was active in 1848/49 revolution and later became an influential member of the SPD's Reichstag faction. Wilhelm Liebknecht was the father of Karl Liebknecht.

Workers' Party (Sozialdemokratische Arbeiterpartei, SDAP). The founders, dual leadership and shaping figures were Wilhelm Liebknecht and August Bebel, who later, as »kaiser of the workers«, rose to become an icon and for many years the chairman of the SPD.

Initially, the SDAP primarily comprised former members of the ADAV. Many were also former sup-

Programmatic overlaps with the ADAV

porters of Saxony's People's Party, who followed Bebel and Liebknecht. Regionally, the SDAP attracted mainly central and southern German workers. In programmatic and theoretical terms, much was reminiscent of the ADAV: like the ADAV, the SDAP demanded general, direct and equal voting rights, legally regulated maximum working hours, progressive taxation instead of consumption taxes and general compulsory education. Furthermore, the SDAP advocated state promotion of cooperatives. It recognised state institutions as arenas of political debate. Accordingly, the SDAP stood in elections.

12–18 Oct. 1890
The SAP renames itself the Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (SPD)

14–20 Oct. 1891
Resolution on the Erfurt Programme

27 Nov. 1906
Mannheim Agreement between the trade unions and the SPD

6–8 April 1917
Split of the SPD into the MSPD and the USPD

1891

1906

1917

*[Social Democratic Party of Germany]

Like Lassalle, the »Eisenachers« point of departure was the connection between political and social freedom:

»The social question is in any case inseparable from the political, its solution is determined by it and possible only in a democratic state.« (Eisenach Programme, cited after Dowe/Klotzbach 2004: 160)

They underlined their international ethos by joining the International Workers' Association, which was later designated the First International. The membership of the SDAP numbered around 10,000 in 1870 and around 9,000 in 1875 (by comparison, in 1872 the ADAV had around 21,000 members and around 15,000 in 1875).

	ADAV	SDAP
Founding	1863	1869
Important persons	Lassalle	Bebel and Liebknecht
Internal organisation	Authoritarian committee	»Bottom-up«
Frame of reference	Stronger national orientation	Stronger international orientation
German question	Lesser German solution under Prussian leadership	Greater German solution with Austrian participation
Assessment of Bismarck's policy	Potential ally	Epitome of authoritarian and backward Germany

Figure 5: Differences between ADAV and SDAP

Differences between the ADAV and the SDAP

A first substantive difference between the two parties of the labour movement was internal democratic organisation. The ADAV had an authoritarian structure with an autonomous central leadership under both Lassalle and his successor Johann Baptist von Schweitzer. In contrast, the SDAP – like parties today – was based on internal democratic decision-making »from the bottom up«.

Difference: internal organisation

The SDAP and the ADAV also differed with regard to the formation of a German nation. While the former favoured a federalist and greater German – that is, integrating Austria – model, the latter preferred the lesser German, Prussian-dominated variant. Also different were their assessments of the Prussian prime minister and later Imperial Chancellor Otto von Bismarck: potential partner in the struggle against the bourgeoisie, on one hand (ADAV), and epitome of backward and authoritarian Germany, on the other (SDAP).

Rapprochement and Merger

These different views initially determined the relationship between the SDAP and the ADAV. In 1875, however, they united in Gotha to form the Sozialistische Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands [Socialist Workers' Party of Germany, SAPD].³ Rapprochement was made more exigent, besides by the now completed founding of the German Reich in 1871, by the deteriorating situation of the working class. After the founding of the Reich, the attention of the authoritarian state shifted back to domestic affairs and targeted social democracy. Added to state repression was heightened economic and social hardship. In 1873 the so-called »founders' crash« (*Gründerkrach*) occurred at the end of the period of rapid industrial expansion in Germany. The view gained ground among supporters of the two parties that they could continue to exist only together.

The SAPD was thus founded in a hostile environment and this experience shaped the party. The Gotha Programme concluded at the party unification conference largely consists of a combination of Lassalle's and Liebknecht's views. It is characterised less by stringent analysis and theoretical derivation of political demands. It also borrowed little from Marx, as Marx himself informed Liebknecht in a sharp critique.

The **Gotha Programme** underlined the increasing formation and consolidation of the workers' class consciousness. This is made particularly clear by Lassalle's adherence to the »iron law of wages« as a keystone of societal analysis and the fact that all other political forces were castigated as reactionary. This also amounted to a renunciation of any alliance with progressive forces from the bourgeoisie.

3 In some sources the SAPD of 1875 is also abbreviated SAP. The Socialist Workers' Party [Sozialistische Arbeiterpartei] founded in 1933 is also abbreviated as both SAPD and SAP. To distinguish between the two in this volume the Socialist Workers' Party will be referred to by the abbreviation SAP.

The Anti-Socialist Laws

Support from bourgeois social reformers or representatives of Catholic social doctrine was not expected. In the struggle for political equality and social rights the labour movement regarded itself as without allies – and the dominant forces in the German Empire were unwilling to change their attitude: the Anti-Socialist Laws demonstrated and put into practice the repressive intentions of the state.

How did the Anti-Socialist Laws come about? In 1871 the Paris Commune was founded, a spontaneously formed city council that sought to reorganise the French

capital in accordance with socialist ideas. It was violently put down by force of arms. German social democracy expressed solidarity with the Paris socialists. It proclaimed it a model in the international liberation struggle of the working class. After the suppression of the Paris Commune many German social democrats felt vindicated: a mass movement is a prerequisite of a change of government. Their scepticism towards spontaneous revolutionary coups had grown.

And indeed the parliamentary strategy of the social democrats was borne out. At the Reichstag elections their vote improved continuously: in 1871 the social democratic parties jointly received 3.2 per cent of the votes, in 1874 the total was 6.8 per cent and in 1877 the SAPD, the result of the merger of the ADAV and the SDAP, received 9.1 per cent of the votes.

Bismarck and the conservative forces of the Monarchy thus saw themselves faced by social democrats, who were emerging against all the odds, and by the demands of the economically successful and rising bourgeoisie. They tried to meet both power political challenges by means of the Anti-Socialist Laws.

Two unsuccessful attempts on the life of Kaiser Wilhelm I, with which the social democrats were not linked, served as the final inducement to pass the Anti-Socialist Laws. Bismarck claimed that the state had to be defended against social

The **Anti-Socialist Laws** of 1878 («Gesetz gegen die gemeingefährlichen Bestrebungen der Sozialdemokratie» [Law against the public danger of Social Democratic endeavours]) prohibited political organisations such as parties and trade unions, as well as associations that supported socialism. Freedom of association and of the press were limited. By the time the law was repealed in 1890 several hundred newspapers, journals and trade unions had been banned and social democrats had been persecuted, arrested and sentenced. This included the party newspaper that first appeared in 1876, *Vorwärts*.⁴

4 See p. 43.

democracy. In doing so he was able to build on bourgeois resentment against social democracy from the period of the Paris Commune.

On one hand, he thus stoked up fear and resentment against social democracy, branding it as jeopardising the state and subversive. On the other hand, he tried to bind in particular the national liberals to the authoritarian German Empire by calling for safeguards and defence of the existing order.

The Anti-Socialist Laws were adopted on 19 October 1878 with the votes of conservatives and national liberals against the votes of the social democrats, the Catholic centre and the left-liberal Progress Party. The Anti-Socialist Laws were

extended on several occasions and remained in place for 12 years, from October 1878 to September 1890.

Conservatives and liberals: in favour of the Anti-Socialist Laws

»Carrot and stick«

SPD: successes despite the ban

Longing for a better tomorrow

The founding congress of the Second International in 1889 called on all workers to go out onto the streets on **1. Mai** 1890 for their rights. In Germany, the Anti-Socialist Laws were still in force. The ban on assembly was circumvented by »mass walks«, while a **red carnation** in the buttonhole served as an identifying sign – flags could not be carried. (cf. Heimann 2003: 15).

But that was not all: Bismarck pursued a dual strategy, familiarly known as the »carrot and stick« policy. Besides repression a new level of social legislation emerged

in the 1880s in an attempt to integrate the working class: in 1883 the law on sickness insurance was passed, in 1884 accident insurance and in 1889 the invalidity and old age insurance law.

Rise of the Social Democrats

However, the rise of the social democrats could not be stopped by the strategy of political persecution and the attempt to drive them to the margins of society. They could still stand in elections at Reich and state level on the basis of constitutional law – and their election results continued to improve despite the massive restrictions until 1890. With around 1.4 million votes the SPD was the strongest party in the Reichstag elections in February 1890. It showed that the efforts against democracy and political self-determination, as well as the widespread mistrust of the authoritarian forces of the German Empire were strong enough to retain their binding force even during periods of prohibition. Indeed, identification and desire for an alternative social order grew. This found expression in particular in the increasing popularity of Marxist ideas, not least because the

inevitability of the collapse of capitalism and the achievement of a juster social order promised a better future. Despite the authoritarian gloom this idea gave people comfort, optimism and the will to win.

»Is it not workers who build locomotives and ships? Steam and electric power obey them and fire and water are tamed! One day they will drive their own carriages and travel the seas with their own ships! ... There is no splendour on earth that their eyes shall not see, no country on which they shall not set their foot...The world is theirs! The power is theirs! All human bliss is theirs! But ask yourselves who will bring us these things? Only the social democratic state of the future! It is the fulfilment of our most audacious dreams!« (Ernst Kreowski [1904], Zukunfts-Verheißung in a May newspaper, cited after Achten 1980: 134)

Social Democrats continued to pursue reform politically. The factions formed during the period of prohibition emerged as clear power centres. The election victories achieved against all the odds were understood as a further indication that the question of political power would be solved by means of general and democratic voting rights. Only in this way could the movement acquire a mass character and convergence with socialism become possible.

The Erfurt Programme

In 1891, the Party, which in 1890 had changed its name to the Social Democratic Party of Germany, adopted a new basic programme that combined utopian ideas and social analysis. The **Erfurt Programme** derives from an outline by two Party theoreticians, Karl Kautsky and Eduard Bernstein.

The structure of the Erfurt Programme is exemplary for all party programmes. In a first, as it were »theoretical part« social conditions are analysed and the Party's own political assumptions and values are presented. In the second »practical part« political instruments are derived from this.

In this instance the theoretical part took its bearings from Marxist ideas. It analysed capitalism's proneness to crises and called for, besides distribution of property and power of disposal over the means of production, the socialisation of the means of production. Thus the liberation of the working class could be achieved.

1891: Erfurt
Programme

Two-part structure

Theory: inspired
by Marx

The practical part of the programme demanded political freedoms and social reforms: for example, the introduction of general, direct and equal voting rights, citizen lawmaking, the abolition of sex discriminatory laws, compulsory schooling with free tuition, progressive tax rates, labour protection regulations and the introduction of the eight-hour day, but also the adoption of workers' insurance by the Reich with co-administration by the working class.

*Practical part:
concrete demands*

Establishment of Social Democracy

Bismarck's dual strategy under political pressure from the labour movement and, at the same time, progressive social legislation was not successful. The outcome of the 1890 Reichstag election was thus significant: for the first time the SPD was the strongest party, with 19.7 per cent or 1,427,000 votes. The breakthrough as a mass movement had been achieved, confidence in the SPD had increased, the social democratic milieu had been deepened and had proved robust enough to survive even 12 years of the Anti-Socialist Laws.

*1890: SPD wins the
most votes*

The Party had still not achieved the zenith, however. It proved this, on one hand, in the following Reichstag elections,⁵ but it can also be discerned in the growing membership. From 1912 the SPD was not only the strongest party in terms of votes and members, but also the strongest faction in the Reichstag.

Thus the SPD was adversely affected by the three-class voting system, which linked the value of votes to taxable income or property, not only in Prussia.

In Reichstag elections the SPD was discriminated against by the tailoring of the electorate. This had not changed since the founding of the Reich, although the distribution of the population had shifted dramatically in favour of the industrial centres. The consequence was that the agricultural – and thus predominantly conservative – areas retained inordinate influence under the first-past-the-post system of the German Empire. Farm workers remained unreachable for the SPD, as did large segments of non-protestant workers in the south and in parts of the west. Here the Catholic Centre Party was successful, which was discernibly open to the social question and garnered the support of Catholic workers.

*Discrimination
through the election
system*

5 1893: 23.3 per cent = 1,786,000 voters; 1898: 27.2 per cent = 2,107,000 voters; 1903: 31.7 per cent = 3,000,000 voters; 1907: 28.9 per cent = 3,258,000 voters; 1912: 34.8 per cent = 4,250,000 voters. See also p. 153.

The trade unions are the second important pillar of the labour movement. Their development also illustrates the progress of the movement. The working class organised itself initially on the basis of occupational groups. Once more – as already in mid-century – the associations of printers and cigarette workers formed the vanguard. The first trade unions and federations were banned by the Anti-Socialist Laws, however. After the ending of the ban the General Committee of German Trade Unions was founded, which already had 277,000 members in 1891 and by 1914 had around 2,500,000 members. Alongside these »free trade unions« were other, so-called »*Richtungsgewerkschaften*« which had particular ideological or party links: the Liberal-leaning craft unions (1913: 105,000 members) and the Christian trade unions (1913: 340,000 members). Both were significantly smaller than the social democratic trade unions, however.

The increase in the number of voters and party and trade union members reflected social changes in the German Empire. Industrialisation was accelerating, while the agricultural sector was being superseded as the dominant economic sector. Compared to the founding year of 1871, in 1914 around 67 million people – an increase of 27 million – lived in the German Empire (Reich). They were driven out of the agriculturally dominated areas into the industrial centres and their characteristic employment conditions in manufacturing. Especially in Saxony, Berlin and the Ruhr the population grew sharply. The proportion of the industrial labour force increased enormously. Industrialisation was driven particularly by technological progress.

Around the turn of the century one of the basic assumptions of the Erfurt Programme and its Marx-oriented analysis of capitalism and its future development had already come up against its limits: instead of increasing mass unemployment and falling wages, despite the differences between economic branches, unemployment was low and wages were rising. In fact, it was the low unemployment that gave the trade unions a power of veto and enabled them to score victories in negotiations. Among other things, daily working time was reduced, a major battlefield for the labour movement, falling from 12 hours in the 1870s, to 11 in the 1890s and in some places to 10 hours at the beginning of the century.

Nevertheless, the social question remained unresolved. Society was still pervaded by a polarisation between rich and poor. In particular, the housing stock, child labour and exploitation of women presented major problems. The working

class's options with regard to political self-determination outside its own milieu were also lacking; they remained excluded by the dominant forces. In the labour movement, conversely, this led to a deepening of the milieu, the founding of numerous institutions around the party and a strong sense of community. This sense of community found expression not least in the cooperative principle and in the workers' cultural movement. The milieu offered identity and support.

»When we're striding side by side and the songs of old are singing« – these lines illustrate how common songs strengthened the cohesion of social democracy and the trade unions. The singing of **workers' songs** created a social and political identity, conveyed visions of the future and was an important element of social democratic culture. Among the best known songs were the »Workers' Marseillaise«, written in 1864 in response to the death of Ferdinand Lassalle in a duel, and the »Bundeslied« [Comrades' Song] written by Georg Herwegh the previous year on the occasion of the founding of the General German Workers' Association. Only shortly before the First World War did the »Internationale« become the hymn of the labour movement worldwide. The songs passed on in the social democratic milieu represented a much more comprehensible and thus more widely effective form of social criticism. It demonstrated unity to the outside world and helped to give expression to strong feelings, such as indignation, anger and sorrow. There was singing on many occasions, such as the closing of assemblies, demonstrations, celebrations and funerals. During the Weimar Republic the organised Workers' Choral Movement had around 450,000 members, while agitprop groups tried out new musical forms. After power passed to the National Socialists the singing of workers' songs was punished. In the DDR singing was deployed in a new context as a means of mobilisation and struggle, while in West Germany not enough effort was made to maintain this tradition.

After the end of the Anti-Socialist Laws the social question was reframed. Decisions had to be made concerning what political domains the once again legal SPD – and with it the trade unions – would emphasise and what spirit they would cultivate. Did they want to maintain their oppositional attitude to the authoritarian German Empire and try to overthrow it? Or would practical reform work in the existing state and on the basis of capitalism be the means of choice? Could both be organised on a social basis? The latter relied principally on work in the Reichstag faction, alliances with the progressive bourgeoisie and the alliance with the free trade unions in shaping the world of work.

*Readjustment after
the end of the Anti-
Socialist Laws*

Leading Bavarian Social Democrat Georg von Vollmar was one of the first eloquent supporters of a reformism that focused on progressive alliances and corresponding parliamentary initiatives.

Georg von Vollmar (1850–1922) was a social democratic politician who played a decisive role in the development of the Bavarian branch of the SPD. He was its chairman from 1892 to 1918. The Georg-von-Vollmar-Akademie in Kochel am See is named after him.

Diametrically opposed to him was the Party chairman and »Kaiser of the Workers« August Bebel. Bebel was worried that too much emphasis on pragmatism risked losing sight of the main goal, overcoming capitalist exploitation and achieving socialism. He spoke of the imminent end and approaching collapse of bourgeois society – of a great »*Kladderadatsch*« or »unholy mess«. In the Erfurt Programme the Party had tried to transpose its social analysis and long-term (revolutionary) vision onto everyday political tasks. Whether this attempt would succeed remained to be seen.

*Contradictory:
movement
and party*

And in fact this sometimes apparently contradictory tension took account of real political and real social developments. The labour movement was more than a mere movement. The Party, like the free trade unions, had a mass organisation with paid functionaries. It possessed a ramified and hierarchical organisational structure that undertook a multitude of tasks: from communicating its own policies in the press, through education and administration of the membership, to advising members and supporters in social and legal difficulties. In the parliaments, although the SPD's room to manoeuvre was limited because the bourgeois parties stuck together, it was able to take advantage of the fact that they were the focus of attention. Here the Party had the opportunity to exert political influence and concrete legislative victories were possible on social and democratic issues. Such concrete achievements were also called for repeatedly by Marx and Engels.

The SPD could at best discuss demands for more democracy with the Left Liberals and social policy plans with the Centre Party, which was strong among Catholic workers. The SPD could not forge majorities on its own and the introduction of the eight-hour day, the abolition of the three-class election law in Prussia and the introduction of voting for women could not be achieved. Nevertheless, there were individual votes at the Reich level in which the Social Democrats consented to legislative plans, for example, for the first time with regard to the reduction of import duties on wheat in 1894 in order to reduce food prices.

The rise of social democracy is linked to the **social democratic media**. It tried to establish its own critical public in the Wilhelmine authoritarian state. For social democratic leaders the media was often the economic basis for political work; active social democrats were often dismissed in many branches of the economy. Up to 1875 the readership and membership were almost identical. In 1878 there were 42 social democratic publications, at the end of the Anti-Socialist Laws there were already 60 new publications and in 1928 alone there were 204 social democratic daily, but also many weekly publications and book publishers. This reflected the social democratic demand for education and enlightenment. Theoretical publications such as *Die Neue Zeit* (1883–1923) were the venues of the SPD's internal party debates. In this tradition today are publications such as *Neue Gesellschaft/Frankfurter Hefte*, *Zeitschrift für sozialistische Politik und Wirtschaft*, *Berliner Republik* and *Perspektiven des demokratischen Sozialismus*. After the National Socialist dictatorship the social democratic publication landscape was restored, but then declined dramatically and largely disappeared. The SPD still has a stake in the Deutschen Druck- und Verlagsgesellschaft mbH (ddvg).

Revisionism Struggle

The Party did not confine its discussions to more reform-oriented efforts in daily political work, however. From the beginning the Social Democrats had presented themselves as a party with a programme. It exhibited a productive culture of debate on daily and long-term political issues, which were discussed in depth in the SPD's theoretical journal *Die Neue Zeit* (The new era). Particularly around

the turn of the century theoretical interpretations of the development of capitalism played a central role in this. The debate was initiated by Eduard Bernstein.

In the Communist Manifesto, Marx and Engels assumed that the middle class would decline, the work-

ing class would become more and more impoverished and there would be increasingly sharp economic and social crises. Bernstein also referred to Marx, but interpreted his analyses differently and pointed, with a glance at England's more advanced development, to the unexpected stability and adaptability of capitalism. Furthermore, he referred positively to the social progress – however

Further reading:

Friedhelm Boll
(2002), *Die deutsche Sozialdemokratie und ihre Medien. Wirtschaftliche Dynamik und rechtliche Formen*, Verlag J.H.W. Dietz
Nachfrage Herrberg, Bonn.

Productive debate

Bernstein: New interpretation of Marx

limited – in the German Empire and linked it to the strength and political work of the labour movement. He called for an approach to reform politics in which society and the political and economic system would be changed gradually in an evolutionary and democratic way and that the capitalist mode of production must be treated as more crisis-resistant and stable than previously assumed. This found expression in his famous formula:

»The final goal of socialism is nothing to me; progress toward that goal is everything.« (Bernstein 1920: 235)

Bernstein regarded the SPD as a »democratic-socialist reform party«. Hardly surprisingly, Bernstein experienced enormous opposition because he contradicted key aspects of the positioning and identity of social democracy: the orientation towards class struggle, the impending overthrow of the capitalist mode of production and the conviction of a historically necessary and natural development of bourgeois-capitalist society towards socialism.

The majority of delegates to party congresses at the turn of the century were led by Party chair August Bebel and Paul Singer, as well as Karl Kautsky. They and with them the majority of delegates spoke against Bernstein's ideas, which were soon referred to as revisionism.

The orientation of the Erfurt Programme was retained. Kautsky's famous formulation that the Social Democratic Party is »a revolutionary, but not a revolution-making party« expresses this: revolution, as understood by the majority of the Party, was not about a resort to violence and upheaval, but about the achievement of political power, radically changing economic structures and thus surmounting capitalist society by means of far-reaching social reforms.

Karl Kautsky (1854–1938) was the founder and editor of the SPD's theoretical journal *Die Neue Zeit*. Kautsky played a crucial role in establishing Marxist social analysis in the SPD. Alongside Eduard Bernstein he was the author of the final version of the Erfurt Programme of 1891.

Paul Singer (1844–1911) was a manufacturer and social democratic politician. He emerged from the bourgeois democratic movement, but joined the SDAP in 1869 and was co-chairman of the SPD from 1890 to 1911. Singer financed many important SPD publications.

Mass Strikes and the Strategy of the Trade Unions

After the Reichstag elections in 1912 the Social Democrats made up the strongest faction. Their real influence did not reflect this, however. The Party and the trade unions had reached their limits in relation to the elites in the German Empire. At the beginning of the twentieth century real wages were stagnating, as was the expansion of the welfare state, while company profits were rising.

Mass strikes were discussed as a possible way out of this situation. The idea was no longer being pursued within the framework of the debates of the Second International and even Engels and Bebel had been sceptical in the past: mass strikes were difficult to pull off and there was a danger of renewed repression.

Now the idea of a mass work stoppage in pursuit of general political aims, not confined to the labour struggle and wage negotiations, received renewed attention. It was not least because of worries about a reactionary coup and thus the continuance of democratic rights that at least existed to some extent. The reason for this concern was, on one hand, the »coup bill«. This bill was similar to the Anti-Socialist Laws. It, too, was directed against »endeavours hostile to the Kaiser«. However, the new bill was more comprehensive and also aimed at the general press and academia. It was rejected in 1895. Besides the »coup bill« the course of the Russian revolution of 1905 had increased fears with regard to a reactionary coup.

At the party congress in Mannheim in 1906 it was debated whether and how a mass strike could be held in order to defend democracy and accelerate the development to socialism. The reformist »right« wing of the party wanted to use it to overcome the three-class voting system in Prussia. The left around Rosa Luxemburg, Franz Mehring and Karl Liebknecht advocated using it in a crisis – for example, the outbreak of war – as a catalyst. In this way the prevailing order would be overthrown and socialism achieved.

Finally, the 1906 Mannheim Congress decided that in case of a threat to the Reichstag voting system or the right of association a mass strike would be a legitimate instrument. The resolution was characterised by a number of very defensive features despite the basic agreement. Neither of the two wings of the Party could win a majority for a proactive deployment of a political mass strike for its ends. The restrained formulation also took the trade unions into account. They had

*1912: SPD the
strongest faction*

Debate: mass strikes

*1906: Mannheim
party congress*

*Compromise for-
mula for a mass
strike*

rejected a mass strike at their congress in Cologne and put more faith in raising the level of their own organisation and improving organisation on the ground.

Within the framework of the party congress in Mannheim the Mannheim Agreement was concluded. It was supposed to resolve the deeper lying tensions between the Party and the trade unions linked to the revisionism dispute: the question of their organisational links.

The **Mannheimer Agreement** of 1906 represents a turning point for the development of the whole German trade union movement. The trade unions were dependent on the SPD. Political proximity, common origins and common roots in the labour movement remained, but now political decision-making and action concerning the party and the trade unions were discussed on an equal footing.

Party-political independence was thus so important to the trade unions because their main goal was to stabilise and build up their own organisation. They wanted to achieve success bit by bit and in particular by means of negotiations between capital and labour and thus directly oriented towards the existing societal context and the conditions of capitalist production.

First World War

The insight that the conflict between capital and labour, the sale of labour power and social and political inequalities were not exclusive to individual countries but structural principles of capitalism shaped labour movements internationally. Solidarity beyond national borders, the internationalism of the labour movement, which pervaded the earliest programmatic writings of the movement, such as the Communist Manifesto, was reflected not least in the famous formula:

»Proletarians of the world, unite!« (Marx/Engels 1848, Communist Manifesto, cited after Dowe/Klotzbach 2004:85)

This very internationalism was confronted with a tough test by the constantly increasing danger of war from the beginning of the twentieth century. In 1907 international delegations met for the first time on German soil in Stuttgart – the international women's conference and the socialist youth organisations also met for the first time – and decided to support the prevention of a European war and, if this was not possible, to strive for peace settlements as soon as possible. In 1912 the resolution was confirmed in principle, although supplemented by a demand for an international strike against war.

In August 1914, however, the Second International also foundered: after the French socialists the Germany Social Democrats also voted for the loans needed to finance the war and German social democracy fell in line with Kaiser Wilhelm II's »party truce policy«, in which he henceforth acknowledged »only Germans, no longer parties«.

Various reasons underlay the decision of the Reichstag faction: fear of Tsarist Russia, the image of a »defensive war«, the blurring of the line separating social democratic patriotism from the dominant nationalism, certainly also the desire for social recognition and to be in tune with the nation and to get rid of the label of »journeymen without a fatherland« that was pinned on the SPD because of its internationalism.

The trade unions, who got on board with the war policy before the Party, along with some segments of the Party and the parliamentary faction, did so in the hope that the German Empire would offer concessions in expanding social benefits and the democratic system, for example, by abolishing Prussia's three-class voting system. Indeed, the trade unions won recognition through the Auxiliary Service Act of 1916, which granted workforce interest representation by trade unions among other things on wage issues and working conditions in the arms industry and provided for negotiations with the management.

As diverse as the motives may have been for assenting to war loans the consequences of rejection of an oppositional peace policy by the majority of the Party and the parliamentary faction leadership were dramatic. In the context of the party truce policy the Social Democrats burned their bridges, precluding any room for manoeuvre within the party and the unity of the German labour movement came to an end.

The split in the Party into majority Social Democrats and independent Social Democrats in April 1917 did not follow the lines laid down before the War; in other words, it was not determined by the question »revisionist or anti-revisionist?« Indeed, the theoretical figureheads of the two positions – Karl Kautsky and Eduard Bernstein – joined the USPD,⁶ together with Rosa Luxemburg, long-time co-chair of the SPD Hugo Haase, Kurt Eisner, Clara Zetkin and Franz Mehring and others.

6 See. p. 52f.

Further reading:

Thomas Welskopp
(2000), *Das Banner der Brüderlichkeit. Die deutsche Sozialdemokratie vom Vormärz bis zum Sozialistengesetz*, Verlag J.H.W. Dietz Nachf., Bonn.

Gerhard Ritter/ Klaus Tenfelde
(1992), *Arbeiter im Deutschen German Empire 1871–1914*, Verlag J.H.W. Dietz Nachf., Bonn.

Helga Grebing
(1993), *Arbeiterbewegung. Sozialer Protest und kollektive Interessenvertretung bis 1914*, Munich.

In its rejection of the party truce policy and in its anti-militaristic and pacifist stance the USPD embodied traditional social democracy and strove for a negotiated peace. In other policy areas – despite the diversity of views – there was greater agreement with the MSPD.⁷ The USPD pursued a dual strategy, based on both parliamentary activity and the instigation of a mass strike. This made possible the integration of many forces from the left, initially even the Spartacus group led by Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht and the later Spartacus League, a predecessor of the Communist Party.

On the eve of the Republic the labour movement showed itself to be increasingly »destabilised« (Grebing), torn between the MSPD and the USPD but also in tension with the trade unions, who tended to fall in with the existing state of affairs. At the same time, the German Empire had fatally proved its inability to implement political and social reforms with the world war.

What does this mean for Social Democracy?

- With the founding of the ADAV on 23 May 1863 social democracy in 2013 can look back on 150 continuous years as an organisation. The independent organisation of the labour movement was a response to the collapse of the revolution of 1848/49.
- The prohibition and persecution of the Social Democrats during the period of the Anti-Socialist Laws was unable to prevent its rise to become a mass movement and the emergence of the Party, the trade unions and the workers' cultural movement.
- From the experience of the authoritarian German Empire the programme of the Social Democrats was initially characterised by scepticism with regard to the state. Although it formulated demands directed towards the state, it was based primarily on cooperative self-help and awaited revolutionary upheaval.
- The SPD developed as a programme party whose strength was to seek the right answers through common debate. The labour movement was weakened when the SPD split in 1917 over the issue of war loans.

7 See p. 52f.

4. DRIVING FORCE OF THE REPUBLIC AND CLASS PARTY (1919–1933)

In this chapter

- the leading role of the SPD in the Weimar Republic is described;
- the choice of Friedrich Ebert as Germany's first democratic head of state is presented;
- the problems faced by the young democracy are discussed;
- it is explained how the SPD tried to protect the Weimar Republic against its opponents from both the left and the right.

On 9 November 1918 at around 2 pm Philipp Scheidemann proclaimed the Republic from a balcony of the Reichstag. He deliberately forestalled Karl Liebknecht, who two hours later proclaimed the »Free Socialist Republic of Germany«.

With the sailors' mutiny in Kiel a few days earlier the revolution had begun. At a stroke this conferred a new role on the labour movement. Hitherto it had been largely against the existing economic order and the authoritarian German Empire. In the post-War world, however, it had become a decisive force.

It was a challenge to organise the nascent German democracy. The labour movement took up this challenge. However, its activities were ill-fated, for four reasons: first, the task was to take in hand the direct consequences of the War. This was linked to the question of how far the old elite was needed and how it was to be dealt with. Furthermore, the labour movement itself was split. It had divided into separate parties and was also in dispute concerning whether there should be a council or a parliamentary democracy. There were also conflicts between Social Democrats and communists in the trade unions of the General German Trade Union Federation (Allgemeiner Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund or ADGB). The integrative force of the free trade unions was exhausted in the course of the year, however, and in 1929 the communist *Richtungsgewerkschaft* (union with particular ideological or party political links) *Revolutionäre Gewerkschaftsopposition* split from the federation.

*1918: Scheidemann
proclaims
the Republic*

*Challenges facing
the young
democracy*

Among other things
a lack of food

Dealing with the Aftermath of the War

Dealing with the aftermath of the War involved in the first place providing people with food and coal. Because of the weather and strikes there were blackouts and hunger. Secondly, industrial production had to be converted from war to peacetime production. Furthermore, sustainable and durable peace conditions had to be negotiated. Not least an enormous logistical challenge faced the young democracy: 4 million soldiers had to be brought back home and provided with somewhere to live and reintegrated in the world of work.

Need for a functioning
administration

Dealing with the Old Elites

To implement this a functioning administration was needed and thus the support of the old elites. In contrast to the SPD and the trade unions the latter had experience in ministerial bureaucracy and state management. This was also important because the Social Democrats, on one hand, and the conservative bourgeoisie, nobility, the churches and the military, on the other, were at daggers drawn. In this context the so-called »stab in the back« propagated by the Supreme Command was not forgotten.

The **myth of the »stab in the back«** was a lie propagated by the Supreme Command after the First World War. The basic idea was that the German army remained »undefeated on the battlefield« and the German defeat was due solely to the November Revolution of 1918 and the Social Democrats. The lie was spread by, among others, Reichspräsident Hindenburg, exploited by the National Socialists and was a heavy burden for the Social Democrats and the young Republic. Indeed, the Supreme Command had already internally accepted defeat in October 1918 and pushed for a change in the Constitution since the United States had declared the democratisation of Germany as a precondition of an armistice. The myth of the stab in the back was thus so successful, among other things, because combat operations during the entire First World War and also at the time of the foreseeable defeat had not taken place in Germany itself.

Chapter 4: 1919–1933

9 November 1918
Philipp Scheidemann
proclaims the
Republic

15 January 1919
Rosa Luxemburg and
Karl Liebknecht
murdered by the
Freikorps

11 Feb. 1919
Friedrich Ebert
becomes
Reichspräsident

13–17 März 1920
Trade unions, SPD
and KPD repel the
Kapp Putsch with a
general strike

1918

1919

1920

1921

1922

Contemporary events: rise and fall of the Weimar Republic

Friedrich Ebert (1871–1925) was President of the German Reich in the Weimar Republic and thus Germany's first democratic head of state in 1919. He was a skilled saddler and grew up in modest circumstances. Ebert grew up in Heidelberg and was active both politically and in the trade unions at an early age. In 1889 he joined the German Socialist Workers' Party (Sozialistische Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands or SAPD), renamed the SPD in 1890. From 1913 until his death in 1925 Ebert was – initially with Hugo Haase – chairman of the SPD. The focus of his political work was striving for progressive improvements in the situation of the working class. During his period of office as Reichspräsident he stood up for political and social equality between the working class and the bourgeoisie. In his will, Friedrich Ebert suggested the establishment of a foundation aimed at educating disadvantaged young people from the working class. The money to start the **Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung** was donated by mourners.

Friedrich Ebert was worried about the social order. He was convinced that only a minimal level of continuity could provide the stability needed to cope with the above-mentioned challenges and to bring about sustainable and far-reaching political reforms.

The arrangement with the old elites was far-reaching. There was no attempt to found a new volunteer army. The Reich leadership around Friedrich Ebert and Gustav Noske, People's Commissar for the Army and Navy, instead concluded a pact with the old generals of the German Empire. They acted under the impression that internal order could be established and defence procured

against the – greatly exaggerated – forces of Bolshevism only with the Supreme Command. Thus Noske cooperated up to its dissolution with the radical right-wing Reichskorps, which was hostile to the Republic. Rosa Luxemburg and Lark Liebknecht were murdered by Freikorps supporters in January 1919. The Weimar Republic had to be defended much more against right-wing counter-revolutionary forces, however, as, for example, the Kapp Putsch – thwarted by, among other things, a mass strike – demonstrated in 1920.

Arrangement with the old elites

Luxemburg and Liebknecht murdered by the Freikorps

18–24 Sept. 1921
Adoption of the
Görlitz Programme

24 Sept. 1922
Part of the
USPD returns
to the SPD

13–18 Sept. 1925
Adoption of the
Heidelberg Programme

14 September 1930
The SPD decides to
tolerate the Brüning
government

1925

1930

*Trade unions:
renounce
nationalisations*

The trade unions entered into a momentous relationship: they joined forces with associations representing companies to form the so-called central work community (Zentralarbeitsgemeinschaft or ZAG). In this way they wanted to safeguard the equality with the employers' side that had been achieved in the First World War. This equal footing, enterprise interest representation structures and the long-desired eight-hour day were not to be had without the renunciation on the part of the Social Democratic trade unions of a transformation of existing property relations and capitalist economy. They thus distanced themselves from their previously central demand for comprehensive nationalisations, which had again been the subject of discussion during the revolutionary period.⁸

The **Kapp-Putsch** – also known as the Kapp-Lüttwitz-Putsch – of 13 March 1920 was directed against the democratic government of Gustav Bauer (SPD). Most putschists were active or former members of the Reichswehr. They were led by Wolfgang Kapp and Walther von Lüttwitz and supported by Erich von Ludendorff, who had already participated in the failed Hitler-Ludendorff Putsch. The government had to flee from Berlin; primarily thanks to the General Strike, however, the putsch collapsed after five days.

A Split in the Labour Movement

Finally, the problems of the young democracy were exacerbated by the split in the labour movement. The SPD had fissured after the majority's assent to war loans into the Majority Social Democrats (MSPD) and the Independent Social Democrats (USPD). Also part of the USPD was the revolutionary Spartacus League, which was orientated towards council democracy. This was the group around Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht from which the Communist Party of Germany (KPD) emerged on 1 January 1919. Although the Spartacus League was very much in the public eye it comprised only around 30 persons.

The split in the labour movement was linked to a multitude of debilitating disputes that hindered the reorganisation of the democratic system.

⁸ See Reader 6, *Staat, Bürgergesellschaft und Soziale Demokratie* [State, civil society and social democracy], Chapter 6.2.

*MSPD, USPD,
Spartacus League
and KPD*

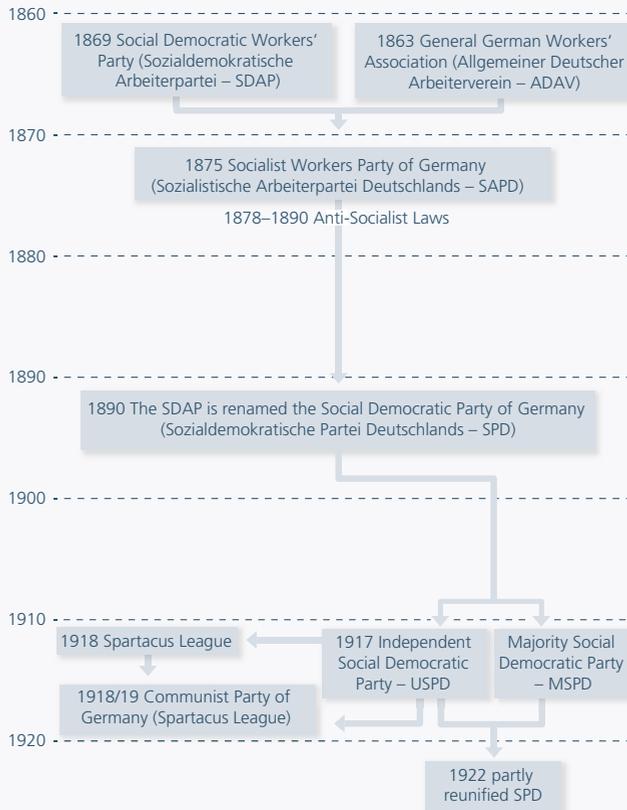


Figure 6: Organisational development, 1863–1922

Rosa Luxemburg (1871–1919) was cofounder of the Social Democratic Party of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania. In 1898 she came to Berlin and became a member of the SPD. She was a leading theoretician of the left in the SPD, among other things with a theory of imperialism.

Karl Liebknecht (1871–1919) was the second of five sons of Wilhelm Liebknecht and a member of the SPD from 1900. On 9 November 1918, two hours after Philipp Scheidemann, Liebknecht proclaimed a »Free Socialist Republic«. In 1919 Luxemburg and Liebknecht cofounded the KPD and in the same year were murdered by Freikorps troops.

Parliamentary Republic or Council Republic?

On 9 November 1919 SPD chair Friedrich Ebert succeeded Max von Baden as Chancellor of the Reich. Ebert strove to bring about the immediate election of a national constitutional convention to constitutionally safeguard the achievements of the revolution – and thus to decisively prevail over the monarchy – and to establish a legal foundation for the new state.

*Ebert: safeguard the
new state demo-
cratically*

Threats

Vorwärts described the situation in retrospect in 1925 as follows: »The greatest hardships from outside, the profoundest shock at home, social distress, threatening collapse, these were the signs under which Ebert came to office.« It also said: »Ebert's task was to prevent the crises from becoming catastrophes« (cited after Mühlhausen 2008: 107).

*In 1919 for the first
time: female
suffrage*

The election of the national constitutional convention in 1919, at which female suffrage could be implemented for the first time, was preceded by the Council of People's Deputies. To begin with it was organised on a parity basis with three representatives each of the SPD and the USPD and recognised by the workers' and soldiers' councils as a transitional government. The USPD left the Council at the end of 1918 in protest against the rejection of the MSPD to transform the army into a people's army.

Council Democracy?

Ebert and with him the majority of Social Democrats and in the trade unions supported a parliamentary republic and rejected a »council democracy«. In particular, Communist Party followers, who clearly represented a minority, nevertheless sought to emulate the Russian October Revolution of 1917.

A closer look at the positions in the working class during the period of revolution reveals, however, that they were less interested in council governance than in reforms in critical confrontation with the bureaucracy and the military. In any case, the advocates of the council republic gradually lost the power to mobilise since they were reined in by the trade unions and in respect of the internal majority, which largely favoured the MSPD. The large majority of the working class and with it the SPD, as well as parts of the USPD stood for a parliamentary democracy. They explicitly rejected the import of the Russian »soviet« (council) model to Germany.

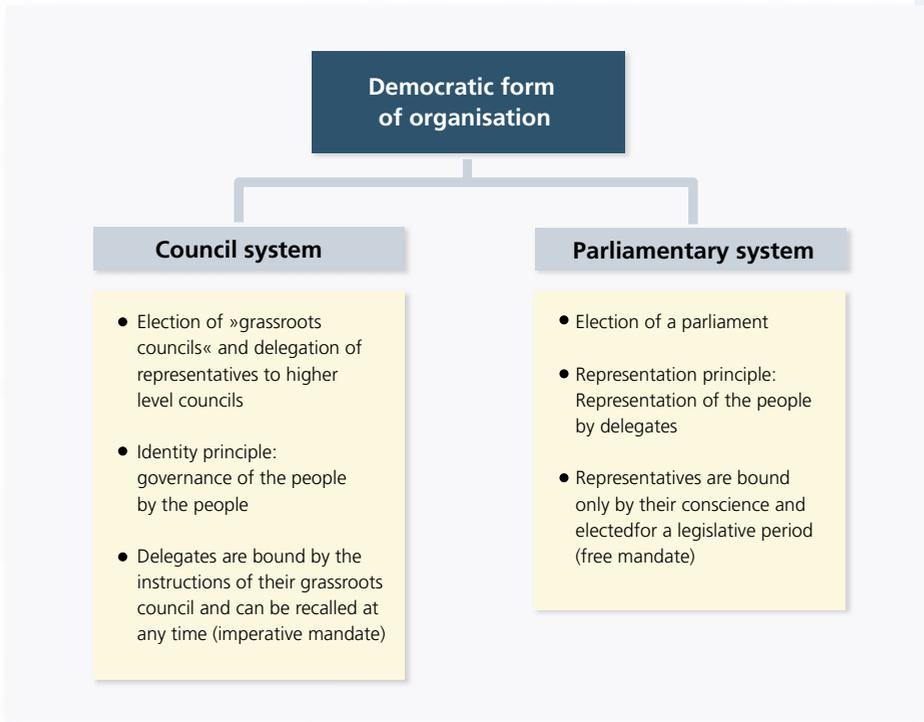


Figure 7: Comparison of the council and the parliamentary systems

The »Stalled« Revolution

The abovementioned circumstances, conflicts and decisions were a heavy burden for the labour movement. As a result, no radical reform options were tried out with regard to social and democratic issues during the revolutionary period. Instead, a pragmatic structural conservatism got the upper hand. Helga Grebing talks in her evaluation of a – conscious or unconscious – »continuity of the statist policy of political truce« (Grebing 2007: 70). Many hopes of the revolutionary soldiers and workers and various intellectuals were disappointed. In this period the foundations for the later bitter rivalry between the communists and the Social Democrats were also laid. For their part the real possibility now offered itself – not least on the basis of the Weimar Constitution⁹ – of bringing about a social democracy under the rule of law.

No radical reformist options

⁹ See Reader 6, *Staat, Bürgergesellschaft und Soziale Demokratie* [State, civil society and social democracy], Chapter 3.3.

Article	Contains regulations on (among other things)
102	Judges' independence and obligation to apply the law
109	Equality before the law, fundamentally equal civil rights and duties for men and women
111	Free movement
114	Individual freedoms
115	Inviolability of the home
116	No punishment without law
117	Inviolability of privacy of correspondence
118	Freedom of opinion
119	Protection of marriage with equal rights for both genders
123	Freedom of assembly
124	Freedom of association
125	Secrecy of the ballot and electoral freedom
126	Right of petition
134	Tax liability in accordance with one's ability to pay
135	Religious freedom
142	Academic freedom
161	Social security
163	Right to work, social assistance
165	Trade union and works council regulations

Figure 8: Selected Articles of the Weimar Constitution

Social Democracy between Government and Opposition

The Social Democrats became the driving force of the Weimar Republic and its Constitution. After the USPD had split and its left wing, with around 370,000 members went over to the KPD in 1920, in 1922 around 200,000 members returned to majority social democracy. The SPD consolidated itself once again as by far the largest and strongest party.

In addition, until 1925 it provided the first President of the Reich of the Weimar Republic in the person of Friedrich Ebert. Until the Reichstag elections of July 1932 the Social Democrats were always the strongest force. They were able to build coalition governments in the Reich and in the *Länder* and thus achieved their first government experience. By 1920 the SPD ruled in the so-called Weimar coalition with the Catholic Centre Party and the left-liberal DDP in the cabinets of Social Democrats Gustav Bauer and Hermann Müller.

SPD: driving force of the Weimar Republic

Ebert President of the Reich until 1925

In a grand coalition with the National Liberals of the DVP and the Centre the SPD governed twice: for a mere two months in 1923 under Gustav Stresemann and under SPD chairman Hermann Müller from 1928 to 1930. The SPD was the party that identified most strongly with the Republic. However, it was in opposition most of the time – a role which it tried to perform constructively.

In the SPD, perception and description of its own role was a field of major conflict. This increased after the reunification with the returning parts of the USPD: wanting to be a party of government or of opposition remained a permanent topic of debate. Coalitions, accordingly, were evaluated differently: as meaningful goal in order to be able to legislate, as a necessary evil or as pointless. According to the latter opinion the potential to change society lay not in parliament but outside it.

Identity conflicts were accompanied by the issue of where the power centre should be: in the party, in the parliamentary faction or in the executive, in other words, the members of the government.

These questions of orientation occupied the party during the whole Weimar period. Klaus Schönhoven aptly describes the situation of the SPD in Weimar as a »remarkable hybrid«, half government and half opposition party (Schönhoven 1989: 118).

In the *Länder* and the municipalities the SPD governed continuously. Prussia, the largest of the *Länder*, was particularly important. Under the Social Democratic leadership of Otto Braun as prime minister it became the »democratic bastion« in Weimar. By handling the government and opposition questions pragmatically the Social Democrats in the *Länder* and the municipalities were able to bring about concrete improvements in the social circumstances of the working class. In the process, despite the conflicts with the KPD there were regional coalitions, for example, in Saxony and Hesse. Oriented towards the idea of a municipal socialism they extended and modernised in particular the housing stock and created a social living environment with social and cultural institutions (including schools, swimming baths, theatres and sports facilities).

Development of the Working Class Milieu

Despite the rise of the mass media and increasing differentiation with regard to milieu and society due to the ever expanding middle classes and employment relations the working class milieu proved relatively stable. New implementing organisations were even formed, such as workers' welfare. At the same time, society became more and more differentiated and voters and also members of the new middle class – in other words, clerks and officials in new service occupations – gained in importance. The social democratic trade unions of these occupational groups organised in the General Free Federation of Employees (Allgemeiner freier Angestelltenbund – Afa-Bund) which was linked to the ADGB through a cooperation agreement, although it remained autonomous until the end of the Weimar Republic.

Around the Social Democrats and the trade unions in the twentieth century various **organisations** emerged, some of which still exist or are known today. **Workers' Welfare** (AWO) was founded on 13 December 1919 by Marie Juchacz as the »central committee for workers' welfare in the SPD«. At the centre of its work were efforts to ameliorate the hardships that arose after the First World War, for example, with lunch clubs, but also self-help workshops. From a self-help initiative the AWO developed into a comprehensive support organisation. The Nazis were unable to bring it into line and banned it. After the Second World War the AWO was re-established independent of party political and religious affiliations. Even today it is committed to the values of solidarity, tolerance, freedom, equality and justice. The **Workers' Samaritan Organisation** (*Arbeiter-Samariter-Bund*), founded as early as 1888, emerged from a self-help initiative for workers, was banned during the National Socialist period and re-established after the War. **Volksfürsorge** (People's Welfare) began operations on 1 July 1913. Its first two general managers were the Social Democrats Adolph von Elm and Friedrich Lesche. Their idea was a cooperative national insurance scheme, even though Volksfürsorge was finally organised as a limited company. It was incorporated in the German Workers' Front by the National Socialists. After the Second World War a »Alte Volksfürsorge« was refounded, but later became Volksfürsorge again. A more recent organisation is the **Auto Club Europa** (ACE), founded in 1965 on the initiative of various DGB trade unions. In its mission statement the ACE links a commitment to the car to the idea of total mobility, including all means of transport. In 1995 it also opened up its membership to people without a trade union background and with around 550,000 members is today one of Germany's leading automobile clubs.

The Social Democrats were only rarely able to build bridges in society, however, never mind intimations of later becoming a broad-based national party and it made little effort in that direction. The confessional division between Protestantism and Catholicism remained, however, and the flourishing workers' cul-

ture strengthened its own milieu, at least in terms of perception. The women's movement was in its heyday. Women tried to get into parliament, organised in local groups and got involved in particular in workers' welfare in social and educational affairs. Issues of the women's movement, such as equality in the workplace or liberalisation of abortion, marriage and family law were discussed not least in their own publications, such as *Frauenwelt* or *Die Genossin*.¹⁰

Heyday of the women's movement

Programmatic Development

The basic programme at that time reflected the abovementioned identity problems. The Görlitz Programme of 1921 expressed the difference in relation to the KPD and Bolshevism even more sharply. The Heidelberg Programme of 1925, after the return of left-wingers from the USPD and given the situation of the working class, was once more more strongly oriented towards Marx's theories, although it did not emulate pre-War orthodoxy. It was more ambitious in terms of internationalist positions. During this time the realisation grew that it was not enough to organise »manual workers«; »brain workers« – in other words, primarily those in the new white-collar jobs – also had to be won over.

Rudolf Hilferding succeeded Karl Kautsky as the Party's leading theoretician.

The **Görlitzer Programme** was adopted in September 1921. It was decisively shaped by Eduard Bernstein. The Programme was reform-oriented and linked to the attempt also to appeal to voters outside the traditional electorate. Among other things, in the Görlitz Programme the MSPD committed itself to the Weimar Republic and its legal order. In this way it distanced itself from the USPD and the KPD. The Görlitz Programme was replaced in 1925 by the Heidelberg Programme.

Programmatic: win over "brain workers" for the Party, too"

The SPD adopted the **Heidelberger Programme** at the party congress in September 1925 and it remained in place until 1959. The Heidelberg Programme was more closely linked to the Erfurt Programme of 1891 than the Görlitz Programme of 1921. This can be explained partly by the reunification of the MSPD and the USPD in the meantime. The Heidelberg Programme focused on international policy. Thus it called, among other things, for a »United States of Europe« as early as 1925. It also emphasised the importance of the democratic state and the role of political parties. Heidelberg was chosen as the location of the party congress in memory of Friedrich Ebert, who was born there and had been buried shortly beforehand.

¹⁰ See pp. 13 and 87.

Hilferding complemented Marxist social analysis in particular in respect of the development of financial capital and banks. In financial capital and the monopolistic tendencies in the economy he saw the transition from a free to an organised capitalism. The increasing centralisation of

Rudolf Hilferding (1877–1941) came from Vienna and in 1923 and 1928/29 was Finance Minister of the Weimar Republic. He had been a member of the USPD and returned to the SPD in 1922. Hilferding was a medical doctor, but was primarily known as a Marxist theoretician and leading thinker of the SPD.

capital and economic power leads, according to this, to a comprehensive cartel. Capital's inherent principle of free competition would thus gradually be replaced by planning. For Hilferding, organised capitalism was the key to the liberation of capitalism and a condition for its transition to socialism on a democratic-parliamentary basis and in an evolutionary – in other words, reform-based – manner.

The concept of organised capitalism formed, with the concept of economic democracy, a programmatic and strategic link between the SPD and the ADGB. The idea of economic democracy encompasses the extension of the democracy principle to economic processes and emphasises the primacy of politics as against the economy. The concept was developed largely by Fritz Naphtali.¹¹

The ADGB and its individual trade unions saw themselves confronted by membership losses and political pressure from the employers' organisations during the Weimar period. The capital side increasingly resorted to conflict in order to assert its interests: it focussed, for example, on lockouts or that in political discussions the trade unions were not recognised as equal partners or on supporting the presidential cabinets and Brüning's destructive austerity policy at the end of the Weimar Republic.

Politically, the strategy also meant distancing oneself from the right and the left. This not infrequently led to tensions with the Party. Together, however, the SPD and the ADGB fought for the expansion of the welfare state. They wanted to complement democratic freedom with social freedom. The greatest success came in 1927 with the introduction of unemployment insurance. Tragically, the last Reich government with a parliamentary majority, the grand coalition led by the Social Democratic Chancellor Herman Müller, collapsed at the end of 1930 in a dispute over contributions to this unemployment insurance.

¹¹ Fritz Naphtali's idea is described in detail in the Reader and Audio Book 6, *Staat, Bürgergesellschaft und Soziale Demokratie* [State, civil society and social democracy], Chapter 6.

To the Left of Social Democracy

Setbacks in the course of expanding democratic and social rights, continuing social inequality, the burden of the revolutionary period and the complexity of governing in the Republic had repercussions for the SPD. It stagnated as a force of integration in the workers' milieu and in the labour movement.

Left of the SPD, on one hand, the KPD had emerged as a party. On the other hand, various groupings and organisations were gathered there that had no faith in the SPD strategy of moving closer and closer to socialism. The left in and outside social democracy still perceived political debates in the Weimar Republic in many instances as class struggles. They thus demanded decisive steps to overcome capitalism and called on the SPD to step up its efforts to appeal to strata that had been lost to the KPD. These leftwing socialist groups had little hope of the Weimar Republic. They were democratically oriented, however, which distinguished them from the KPD and tied them to the SPD.

Paul Levi (1883–1930) was a lawyer and Reichstag representative. In 1919 he was a founding member of the KPD and from March 1919 to 1921 its chairman. After criticising the putschist tactics of the KPD he was expelled from the party in 1921 and returned to the SPD.

Adhering to the Russian model the KPD had organised itself in a strict hierarchy as a cadre party and distinguished itself sharply from the SPD and the Weimar Republic. In this way it lost its former chairman Paul Levi to the SPD.

After the defections from the USPD at the Reichstag elections the KPD achieved 9 per cent of the vote in 1924 and 17 per cent in 1932. With regard to its membership structure and electorate the KPD corresponded closely to a proletarian class party. It appealed above all to poorly qualified workers. At the end of the Republic and in 1929 due to the world economic and financial crisis they were able to mobilise young unemployed people.

The trade union-organised skilled workers, in contrast, were behind the SPD. Besides the competition for voters and members the KPD was a challenge for the SPD because the KPD refused to enter into coalition. In accordance with the thesis of social fascism the SPD and not the NSDAP was the main enemy.

This split in the labour movement and the fragmentation of the milieu adversely affected its ability to mobilise and integrate society and narrowed its chances of opposing the rise of the NSDAP. During this period, however, some of the groups were formed that later in opposition were to play an important role in the resistance to the National Socialist dictatorship: »Neu Beginnen« (New beginning), »Internationaler Sozialistischer Kampfbund« (ISK [International Socialist Militant League]), »Rote Kämpfer« (Red fighters) und »Sozialistische Arbeiterpartei« (Socialist Workers Party).¹²

The communist thesis of **social fascism** saw fascism as a combat organisation of the bourgeoisie and social democracy as moderate but still part of this fascism. This thesis was developed among others by Stalin, who spoke of »twin brothers« and from 1929 also characterised the programme and strategy of the KPD. This led to the KPD regarding Social Democrats and free trade unionists, but not the NSDAP as their main enemy. A common front on the part of the labour movement against National Socialism was thus impossible.

Defence of the Republic

Hemmed in by the KPD and the NSDAP democracy came increasingly under threat. The SPD was confronted with the question of how the Republic could be defended. They tried a number of approaches: first, in the Reich and in the *Länder*, especially Prussia, they used legislative options and introduced Decrees and Laws for the Protection of the Republic. The SPD also used its party press and meetings to try to check the mobilisation of the National Socialists through public relations activities. In order to protect its own organisation and meetings a paramilitary structure was finally created with the ADGB in the form of the Iron Front. The Iron Front, however, was able to demonstrate only symbolic strength rather than real clout. As early as 1924 the SPD, the DDP and the Centre had founded the ultimately social democratic-dominated Reichsbanner Schwarz-Rot-Gold.¹³

At the elections in September 1930 the NSDAP achieved an increase in its share of the vote of almost 16 percentage points, leaping from 2.6 per cent to 18.3 per cent. In July 1932 its share doubled, to 37.4 per cent. Before that, the grand coalition,¹⁴ the last government of the Reich with a parliamentary majority, had collapsed.

¹² See p. 71f.

¹³ See p. 69.

¹⁴ The »grand coalition« then included the SPD, the German Centre Party (Centre), the German People's Party (DVP) and the German Democratic Party (DDP).

Up to the end of the Republic a period of presidential regimes now followed, made possible under Art. 48 of the Constitution. The SPD tolerated these presidential regimes because the KPD's refusal to cooperate gave it no political alternative. Economic recession and social distress demanded active government and new elections held out the prospect of further NSDAP success.

Heinrich Brüning, parliamentary leader of the Centre Party, was tolerated as the first Reich Chancellor without a parliamentary majority. However, Brüning never kept his promise to maintain social balance.

The tide of the NSDAP began to ebb. It lost 4.3 percentage points at the Reichstag elections of November 1932. However, the Social Democrats also suffered. Toleration of Brüning and his policy oriented solely towards deflation and not growth and employment led to splits on the left of the Party. The Socialist

Workers' Party of Germany was founded after expulsions from the SPD, which increasingly lost the ability to integrate and mobilise. On 1 June 1932 Brüning was succeeded by Franz von Papen, who made one of the Social Democrats' greatest fears come true: in the so-called »Prussian blow« their last great bastion fell.

With the **»Prussian blow«** on 20 July 1932 the caretaker government pension funds the Free State of Prussia, headed by Otto Braun (SPD), was replaced by a Reich commissioner, in breach of the Constitution. The »Prussian blow« was carried out with the help of the Reichswehr and the promulgation of a military emergency. The governmental power of one of the largest *Länder* was transferred to Reich chancellor Franz von Papen.

The Reichstag election of July 1932, which the SPD stylised as an election about the fate of democracy brought no relief. Instead, the power of the NSDAP grew.

Within the parliamentary framework the defence of the Republic – or of what was left of it – did not succeed. Had the time come for extra-parliamentary resistance, possibly including violence, even civil war? The SPD refused to deal with this issue, to the intense frustration of individual left-wing socialist circles. The SPD was not ready to give up its humanist and enlightenment ideals and decided to remain within the legal framework. The ADGB, in turn, went a step further. It not only rejected the option of a general strike, whose chances of success were viewed somewhat sceptically. The trade unions concentrated, as they had at the beginning of the Republic, on protecting their own organisation. They

settled with the new government and fell out with the AFA Federation as a result. From the side of the SPD, too, the ADGB was sharply criticised. Grebing succinctly summarises the criticism of Otto Wels: »out of fear of organisational death they committed political suicide« (2007: 106).¹⁵

Otto Wels (1873–1939) was a Social Democratic politician. He joined the SPD in 1891, was an MP for many years and SPD chairman from 1919 until his death. Wels's speech against the Enabling Act is famous.¹⁵ The SPD chamber in the Bundestag is named after Wels.

End of the Weimar Republic: the SPD alone stood for democracy

The Collapse of the Weimar Republic

At the end of the Weimar Republic once again the Social Democratic Party was the only one supporting democracy. It was no longer possible to establish a block with the left liberals and the Catholic Centre in defence of the Republic and democracy. Street fighting with and between communists and National Socialists and disrupted meetings characterised everyday politics. Social Democrats and communists still found themselves incapable of forming a united front or action group against the National Socialists. Nevertheless, in November 1932 the two parties received around 37 per cent of the votes. The KPD, however, continued to cling to its social fascism theory.

During the final phase of the Republic the SPD constantly lost votes – from its heyday in 1928, with 29.8 per cent, through 24.5 per cent (1930) to 21.6 per cent and 20.4 per cent (both in 1932). But even with emergency decrees that affected both the SPD and the KPD and imprisonment the SPD still achieved a relatively stable 18.3 per cent at the last Reichstag election in March 1933, which could no longer be regarded as free.

The older Social Democrats felt they had returned to the time of the Anti-Socialist Laws with the ominous rise of the National Socialists, the intimidation and threats and also the assaults and arrests. It was assumed that one of the first aims of the National Socialists would be to destroy the labour movement. Many hoped, after learning from experience, to start again later on. This hope was not fulfilled, however. Many Social Democrats and trade unionists were murdered by National Socialists. The National Socialist reign of terror, the Second World War and the Holocaust represent the darkest chapter in German history.

¹⁵ See pp. 66–69.

What does this mean for social democracy?

- The role of the Social Democrats in the Weimar Republic was contradictory: on one hand, they were mainly in opposition in parliament; on the other hand, they were the driving force of the young democracy.
- With government responsibilities the reform orientation of the Social Democrats was strengthened. In the now democratic state they recognised possible guarantees of the realisation of civil rights and liberties.
- The concept of a class party confined to its own milieu reached its limits in the Weimar Republic. Social democracy needs a social democracy that reaches all social strata.
- The collapse of the Weimar Republic shows clearly how vulnerable democracies are if they are not broadly anchored in society. Not least this points to the importance of political education for promoting a democratic consciousness.

Further reading:

Walter Mühlhausen (2006), *Friedrich Ebert 1871–1925. Reichspräsident der Weimarer Republik*, Verlag J.H.W. Dietz Nachf., Bonn.

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5. PERSECUTION, PROHIBITION AND EXILE (1933–1945)

In this chapter

- the circumstances of the speech by Otto Wels against the Enabling Act and the end of the Weimar Republic are presented;
- the prohibition and persecution of the SPD and the trade unions, as well as the resistance of the labour movement against the National Socialist dictatorship are described;
- the programmatic debates of the Social Democrats in exile are outlined;
- the legacy of the resistance to National Socialism is elucidated.

*The situation on
23 March 1932*

When Otto Wels justified the SPD's rejection of the Nazis' Enabling Act before the Reichstag gathered in the Krolloper on 23 March 1932 the National Socialist terror was already under way. The SPD had long been a target of radical right-wing violence. The thugs of the SA had already targeted and attacked Social Democrats in the Weimar Republic. After the transfer of power to the National Socialists on 30 January 1933 their tyranny developed unchecked. Social Democratic and communist officials and trade unionists were vilified, arrested, abused and murdered; social democratic newspapers and publishers were smashed and the first concentration camps were set up.

Under the impact of this emerging tyranny the Social Democratic parliamentary faction gathered before the vote on the Enabling Act. Of the 120 elected SPD representatives only 94 took part in the meeting. Wilhelm Sollmann, former Social Democratic Minister of the Interior, lay in hospital after a severe assault. Julius Leber and Carl Severing were arrested on the way to the meeting, while others were detained in so-called preventive detention.

The term **transfer of power** designates the process in which the NSDAP came to power in the German Reich and subsequently established the National Socialist dictatorship. The National Socialists themselves termed what happened on 30 January 1933 as a »seizure of power«. Historians have shunned this expression because of its inherent propaganda. In addition, it disguises the problematic role of conservative groups who advocated and personally supported a Hitler-led government, for example, the role of Reich president Hindenburg, who instructed Hitler to form a government on 30 January 1933 and swore him in as Reich chancellor.

The MPs had to make their way to the meeting running a gauntlet of abuse from armed Nazis and the hall was immediately surrounded by the SS and the SA. When Otto Wels approached the lectern he had to rise above the clamorous roar of the National Socialists.

»Freedom and life can be taken from us, but not our honour. After the persecutions that the Social Democratic Party has suffered recently, no one will reasonably demand or expect that it vote for the Enabling Act proposed here. . . . We have established equal justice for all and a social labour law. We have helped to create a Germany in which the path to leadership of the state is open not only to princes and barons, but also to men from the working class. . . . The Weimar Constitution is not a socialist constitution. But we stand by the principles enshrined in it, the principles of a state based on the rule of law, of equal rights, of social justice. In this historic hour, we German Social Democrats solemnly pledge ourselves to the principles of humanity and justice, of freedom and socialism. No Enabling Act gives you the power to destroy ideas that are eternal and indestructible. . . . The Socialist Law did not destroy social democracy. German social democracy will draw new strength also from the latest persecutions. We greet the persecuted and the oppressed. We greet our friends in the Reich. Your steadfastness and loyalty deserve admiration. The courage of your convictions and your unbroken optimism guarantee a brighter future.« (Otto Wels 1933: 32f)

In the ensuing roll-call vote on the Enabling Act all the 94 Social Democratic MPs who were present voted against. Some communist MPs were also arrested and

could not carry out their mandate. All other parties – National Socialists, as well as Conservatives, the Catholic Centre Party and the liberal German State Party – voted for the Enabling Act.

Otto Wels's speech makes particularly clear three contexts that were important for the Social Democrats at the beginning of the National Socialist dictatorship:

Speech by Otto Wels

Further listening:

Otto Wels's speech is available as an audio document in the FES's Archive of Social Democracy: www.fes.de/archiv



Vote on the Enabling Act

Wels's key points

The so-called **Enabling Act** (officially: the Law to Remedy the Distress of the People and the Reich) was passed in the Reichstag on 24 March 1933. It provided the National Socialist dictatorship with a cloak of legality behind which they could pursue their aims. The Act enabled the Hitler regime, among other things, to adopt laws – which could, moreover, deviate from the Constitution – without the Reichstag. The SPD parliamentary party voted unanimously against the Act. The liberal, conservative and centrist parties, however, voted with the NSDAP.

*Opposition to
the Nazis*

First, Social Democrats were among the key opponents of the Nazi regime. They were – like the communists and the trade unions – thus among the first inmates of the new concentration camps and often had to pay for their resistance with their lives.

*Defence of the
Republic*

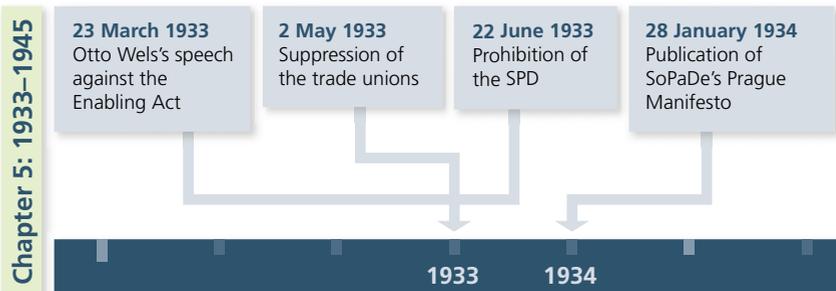
Secondly, Social Democrats understood themselves to be defenders of the Weimar Republic and thus operated within the constitutional framework of the Republic. They initially organised their resistance legally and strove not to break any laws – even in the face of the Nazis' breaches of the law. The leadership of the SPD did not want to endanger its members through illegal action. At the same time, they did not want to give the National Socialist government a pretext for banning the SPD.

*Hopes of being
able to »survive
the winter«*

Thirdly, many Social Democrats compared the beginning of 1933 to the time of Bismarck's Anti-Socialist Laws. They hoped that they could somehow weather the storm and perhaps emerge stronger from the period now commencing. During the period of prohibition between 1878 and 1890 (see Chapter 2) they had partly managed, at least at elections and informally to continue their political activities without endangering their own lives or those of others. Many Social Democrats hoped that this could also be achieved in the »Third Reich«. The consequences of the brutality and totalitarian claims of the National Socialist regime, which are clear to us today, could not have been foreseen or even imagined in 1933.

*Initially, no violent
resistance*

For Social Democratic Party members this meant that, initially, no violent resistance was offered. This surprised some Social Democrats. Together with Liberals and the Centre structures had finally been set up, in the form of the Reichsbanner Schwarz-Rot-Gold and the Iron Front, which could offer armed defence of the Republic, if needed. Throughout the country comrades awaited the call to action. In some trade union branches armed groups were on standby.



Contemporary events: National Socialist dictatorship, persecution, exile and Second World War

The **Reichsbanner Schwarz-Rot-Gold**

was a cross-party alliance to protect the Weimar Republic against National Socialists and communists. It was founded in 1924 as a group for First World War veterans and supported mainly by Social Democrats. It was supposed to defend democracy under civil war-like conditions in the Weimar Republic, if need be with weapons. The Reichsbanner was itself a member of the Iron Front founded in 1931, which was supposed to combine against the National Socialists with the trade unions and workers' gymnastic and sports clubs. However, open struggle for the Republic did not ensue after the transfer of power to the National Socialists in 1933. In any case, we cannot know what chance such a struggle would have had, given the inadequate arms and equipment of the members.

Theodor Leipart (1867–1947) was a skilled wood turner, SPD member and from 1921 to 2 May 1933, the day of the suppression of the trade union movement by the National Socialists, chairman of the ADGB. Leipart's attempt to maintain the ADGB first by declaring political neutrality and later by currying favour with the National Socialists failed.

But no orders to go into action came from headquarters, but more appeals to stay calm. It is debatable whether an open struggle could have succeeded. Lack of arms and equipment on the part of the Reichsbanner and the brutal violence of the National Socialists tend to make it unlikely.

The leadership of the SPD initially misjudged the National Socialists, believing that their legal status could be preserved and that at the next elections at the latest the Hitler-led government could be brought to an end. »After Hitler – us!« This solution was the expression of the Social Democrats' confidence that they would soon be able to be political players again.

Among the trade unions the hope was that even under National Socialism they could continue to exist as an independent organisation. Initially, they refrained from offering resistance.

»Organisation – not demonstration: that is the slogan of the hour« – this is how chairman of the General German Trade Union Federation Theodor Leipart

*Trade unions:
»organisation –
not demonstration«*

19 March 1941

Founding of the
»Union of German
Socialist Organisations
in Britain«

20 July 1944

Failure of the assassination
attempt on Hitler, followed
by the execution of many
participating Social Democrats
(including Leber and Leuschner)

18 October 1944

Various SAP members in
Stockholm join the SPD
(including Brandt)

1941

1944

summarised the tactics (cited after Schneider 2000: 223). Accordingly, the KPD's call for a general strike in protest against the Nazis was not supported by the trade unions

Ban on the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung

After the beginning of the National Socialist dictatorship the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung was also banned. Between 1925 and 1933 it had supported 295 scholarships. In 1946 the Socialist German Students' Association instigated its re-establishment, which took place in Hannover in 1947. Since 1954 the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung e.V. has had its head office in Bonn.

*Suppression of the
trade unions and
the SPD*

Over the coming months attempts were made in parts of the trade union movement to come to terms with the Nazi regime. By currying favour the trade union leadership hoped to keep their organisations going under the new government. It thus distanced itself from the SPD and warmly welcomed the National Socialist government's declaration of 1 May as a state »holiday of national unity«. How illusory was this hope of surviving by adaptation became clear only one day later, however. On the morning of 2 May 1933 SS and SA troops occupied the offices, newspapers and banks of the trade unions. This day marked the end of free trade unions under the National Socialist regime and for many officials it meant the beginning of arrest and torture or even murder.

For the SPD it was even clearer after this action that they were likely to suffer a similar blow in the near future. In fact, on 9 May 1933 all the Party's assets were seized.

*Preparations:
executive
committee in exile*

The SPD now stepped up the establishment of an executive committee in exile. In June 1933 finally the SPD in Germany was completely prohibited. The dispute within the SPD executive – which until then had remained unresolved – concerning whether an attempt should be made to use the minimal room to manoeuvre available in the Reich to rescue the organisation or adjust to exile and resistance thus became obsolete.

When talking about the SPD in the remainder of this chapter a distinction must be made between the segment of the Party that remained in Germany, surviving illegally, and the Social Democrats who were forced into exile.

*Forms of resistance
in Germany*

In the following months and years various forms of opposition and resistance developed in Germany. The labour movement was confronted by a particular problem. The SPD, the KPD and the trade unions had emerged as mass organisations aimed

at having a large-scale effect. Now, under conditions of terror, the Gestapo and informers, the exact opposite was called for: conspiratorial work. There was often a lack of experience and know-how concerning how to organise effective resistance in a dictatorship.

Paul Löbe (1875–1967) was a skilled typesetter. He became a member of the SPD in 1895 and in 1920 became the first President of the Reichstag. Paul Löbe was arrested several times by the National Socialists for his resistance activities. He spent long periods in prisons and concentration camps. One of the buildings of the Bundestag is named after him.

Otto Brenner (1907–1972) was a skilled industrial electrician and from 1956 to 1972 Chairman of IG Metall. In 1920 he joined the Young Socialist Workers and in 1926 became a member of the SPD, having previously been a member of the SAP. Brenner was arrested by the National Socialists for his resistance activities and sentenced to two years' imprisonment.

A large number of the 20,565 political prisoners that the National Socialist regime declared as early as 1933 in the Statistical Yearbook of the German Reich thus came from the labour movement (see Potthoff/Miller 2002: 153). They included prominent Social Democrats, such as former Reichstag President Paul Löbe, MP Julius Leber, later IG-Metall chairman Otto Brenner and representatives of the younger generation, such as Kurt Schumacher, who had been badly wounded in the First World War. But there were also activists and officials who operated in smaller circles.

What was the resistance to the National Socialist regime by the labour movement like? Who was involved?

Initially, there was a series of smaller groups associated with the SPD in which predominantly young comrades engaged in resistance against the Nazi regime. They went by names such as »New Beginning«, »International Socialist Militant League« (ISK), »Red Fighters« or »Socialist Workers' Party« (SAP)¹⁶ and had been founded in the Weimar Republic, often already with the aim of fighting National Socialism.

Fritz Erler,¹⁷ who was parliamentary leader of the SPD in 1964, belonged to the »New Beginning« group. The young Willy Brandt was active in the SAP before going into exile in Norway in April 1933.

These groups and circles were often more radical than the SPD itself and early on had formed a more realistic picture of National Socialism. They also fought across party lines. A flyer of the Lübeck SAP, presumably written by Willy Brandt,

16 On abbreviations see footnote p. 35.

17 See p. 93.

makes this clear: »If the workers stick together, Hitler and von Papen will be out of business« (»Wenn die Arbeiter zusammenstehen, müssen Hitler und Papen stempeln gehen«) (cited after Merseburger 2002: 51).

These left-wing socialist groups could often operate more successfully underground than the older and better known members of the SPD. Their young – and determined – members were often not under surveillance by the Nazis. Due to the manageable size of the groups and their preparations for work in the underground they operated conspiratorially and were detected less quickly.

For example, the ISK was able to keep up its resistance activities until 1938. It managed a number of spectacular acts, such as sabotaging the opening of the Reich autobahns in 1935. During the night before the opening by Adolf Hitler the ISK attached slogans critical of the regime on bridges and stretches of road. The National Socialist propaganda film on the opening of the autobahns thus had to be edited in many places so that slogans such as »Hitler = war« were not broadcast.

Trade union resistance

The ISK was supported by, among others, the International Transport Workers Federation. The transport workers were able to maintain contact between different resistance groups both at home and abroad because of their communication channels (railways, shipping).

The trade unions – similar to the SPD – were not prepared for resistance and illegal activities. However, immediately after the suppression of official trade union institutions on 2 May 1933 the organisation of trade union resistance began. Relatively quickly, for example, the metal workers were able to set up a Germany-wide network of shop stewards and thus to enable communications between them.

The aim of the resistance carried out by the SPD, the trade unions and left-wing groups was usually not militant struggle against the government. They rather tried to maintain communications between each other, to support those who were being persecuted and to make people aware of the true nature of the regime.

The goal of bringing about change through awareness-raising and information was fully in line with the traditions of the labour movement. The efforts to »tell the world the truth« were correspondingly great (*Neuer Vorwärts*, 18 June 1933, cited after Potthoff/Miller 2002: 158).

These efforts were made both by the Social Democrats who had remained in Germany and the social democratic organisation in exile, which operated under the name SoPaDe in Prague from 1933.

Sopade was the name of the SPD exile organisation which operated first from exile in Prague (1933–1939), later from Paris and from 1940 to 1945 from London.

Thus SoPaDe's Germany Reports were issued in the Prague exile. They collected, reproduced and disseminated systematic information on Germany's political, social,

economic and cultural situation. They provided a detailed picture of the actual situation beyond National Socialist propaganda. Via SoPaDe secretariats set up all over Germany information was gathered and distributed via a network of reliable activists.

Among the first awareness-raising materials was the first report on a concentration camp in Germany. Gerhart Seger, former Social Democratic Reichstag MP, was confined in KZ Oranienburg and with a few others was able to escape. His text *Oranienburg: First authentic report by someone who escaped from the concentration camp* gives a comprehensive insight into the beginnings of the National Socialist camp system.

Appeasement policy refers to the foreign policy of Great Britain, but also of France between 1933 and 1939. The strategy involved accepting Hitler's foreign policy provocations in order to avoid war.

In the rest of Europe, this information on the true face of Germany often failed to get a hearing. On the contrary, the reports were sometimes even kept under wraps

because relations with Germany and the appeasement policy were not supposed to be breached (see Potthoff/Miller 2002: 160).

But what was the effect of this kind of awareness-raising in Germany? It is clear that the information – like the resistance overall – was never able to seriously disrupt the National Socialist regime. However, this information and its exchange were important. They raised awareness, prevented the separation and isolation of still active comrades and preserved social democratic values.

Between the middle and the end of the 1930s these resistance activities diminished significantly. There were two main reasons for this.

Further reading:

Gerhart Seger (1934), *Oranienburg: erster authentischer Bericht eines aus dem Konzentrationslager Geflüchteten, Karlsbad.*

Gerhard Beier (1997), *Die illegale Reichsleitung der Gewerkschaften, in: Richard Löwenthal/Patrick von zur Mühlen (eds) (1997), Widerstand und Verweigerung in Deutschland 1933 bis 1945, Bonn, pp. 25–50.*

Ursula Bitzegeio (2009), *Über Partei und Landesgrenzen hinaus: Hans Gottfurcht (1896–1982) und die gewerkschaftliche Organisation der Angestellten, Bonn.*

*Reasons for
diminished
resistance activities*

First, the Gestapo were very successful in detecting social democratic groups and suppressing them. By 1939 almost all conspiratorial resistance groups had been exposed and many of their members arrested, abused or murdered.

Second, the resistance increasingly lacked a social base. Many people had – especially due to the armament drive – found work again. Their living standards had improved significantly and they attributed it to national socialism. In foreign policy, too, Hitler seemed to go from one success to another: from the reintegration of Saarland through the Anschluß of Austria to the first »lightning victories« of the war. The majority of Germans felt that the second half of the 1930s was a good time and were far from wanting to organise resistance or support it.

*Keeping their
composure in niches*

Under these circumstances the remaining Social Democrats often concentrated on maintaining contact with one another, keeping their composure in apparently unpolitical niches and refusing to allow themselves to be co-opted by the regime. While hiking, on allotments or on swimming excursions on sunny days the situation was discussed and people's resolve was maintained in the face of National Socialist propaganda. Thus at least on a small scale the remnants of the strong social democratic workers milieu could be preserved. However, this must not be overestimated. Ultimately, it can be counted as one of the Nazis' »successes« that they systematically infiltrated and almost destroyed the workers' milieu with their own offering.

*Recognition:
resistance would
not bring about the
fall of the regime*

Social Democrats and Trade Unions in Exile

Even to those parts of the German labour movement living in exile it increasingly became clear that resistance in Germany could not bring down the National Socialist regime. In the first years when the executive committee in exile was set up in Prague and the trade unions founded the Foreign Representation of Germany Trade Unions in Czechoslovakia, there was still hope that Nazi rule would not last long. Economic and political difficulties, but especially the desire for freedom of the German people would lead to the collapse of National Socialism. SoPaDe's Prague manifesto of 1934 is also characterised by this assumption.

The **Prague Manifesto** was born in exile. It was published by the exiled SPD party executive on 28 January 1934 and smuggled into Germany, among other things, in camouflage. The Prague Manifesto called for the revolutionary overthrow of the Nazi regime and was strongly influenced by the situation of exile and the prohibition and persecution in Germany. It was written primarily by Rudolf Hilferding.

Accordingly, SoPaDe's executive saw one of its key tasks as supporting resistance in Germany. At the latest with the beginning of the Second World War, however, the German exiles had to recognise that the fall of the Nazis would come only with Germany's defeat in the war.

For the exiles the war in Europe made their circumstances even more difficult. SoPaDe's executive committee in exile had to flee Prague for Paris and then for London. Other parts of the German labour movement were organised in Scandinavia and the United States. Besides the loss of their homeland, for many of those affected exile also meant the loss of their livelihood.

In the special conditions of exile ideological differences and different evaluations of the emergence of National Socialism were magnified. With the founding of the »Union of German Socialist Organisations in Great Britain« in 1941 these old conflicts were at least partly overcome. In Sweden, too, rapprochement was possible between various left-wing groups around Willy Brandt and Bruno Kreisky and the SPD and the Social Democratic Party of Austria (SPÖ).

At the same time, a series of memoranda and programme outlines appeared intended as a substantial foundation for reconstruction after the end of National Socialism. Three strands of discussion in particular should be mentioned here:

1. **Democratic socialism**

Already during the Prague exile the SPD differentiated itself from the Communists by clearly formulating that the realisation of socialism cannot be separated from the democratic principle. Rather the two should be linked indivisibly. For German Social Democrats »democracy was not just a means but a principle and a goal of its struggle« (Memorandum by the party executive on the »question of the united front«, cited after Grebing 2007: 117).

2. **The new social democracy as a national party**

Social democracy should be less confined to a particular milieu than in the Weimar Republic. Instead, it should open up to broad strata and groupings in society. This point was emphasised, for example, by Erich Ollenhauer, later chairman of the SPD.

3. **A single trade union**

In the discussion on the causes of National Socialist rule the »fragmentation« of the German trade unions was criticised. A strong single trade union that was yet to be created was supposed to overcome this fragmentation.

*Flight from Prague
through Paris to
London*

Debates in exile

All three strands of discussion were important in the reconstruction of Germany after 1945. Initially, however, the task was to defeat the National Socialist regime.

20 July 1944

Representatives of the organised labour movement also played an important role in the circle of opponents of Hitler involved in the events of 20 July 1944. They were, on one hand, tried and tested in the realm of practical politics and could bring these experiences to bear in preparing for 20 July. On the other hand, it was also clear to the conspirators from the middle class that the regime could be brought down only with the support of the working class. Thus a broad alliance was forged in the course of preparations for the attempt on Hitler's life between various tendencies and groupings, including actors from the nobility, the middle class and the military, but also the Church, the trade unions and the Social Democrats. For example, Social Democrat Reichstag MP Julius Leber was envisaged as Minister of the Interior and deputy chairman of the dissolved General German Trade Union Federation and Wilhelm Leuschner as Vice Chancellor. The Social Democrat Adolf Reichwein was to be Minister of Culture. After the failure of the assassination attempt, like many others, they were all sentenced and executed.

After the assassination attempt besides the conspirators Gestapo persecution took on a new character. Within the framework of »Aktion Gitter« many former SPD and KPD MPs were arrested, even if they had ceased to be active since 1933 and had kept a low profile. Quite a few of those who had been persecuted and resistance fighters were thus sent to concentration camps in the last months of the war or were simply murdered.

Julius Leber (1891–1945) was a member of the SPD's parliamentary faction from 1924 to 1933. He was a member of the Reichsbanner Schwarz-Rot-Gold and during the period of National Socialism he was active in the resistance. A veteran of the First World War he belonged to the group around Claus Graf Schenk von Stauffenberg, who planned the assassination attempt on Hitler on 20 July 1944, and was envisaged as Minister of the Interior in the wake of the attempt. Leber was arrested before 20 July on other grounds and after its failure he was sentenced and executed.

Wilhelm Leuschner (1890–1944) was a skilled wood carver, Interior Minister in Hesse from 1928 to 1933 and temporarily executive committee member of the ADGB. In 1933 Leuschner was arrested and spent a year in prisons and concentration camps. After his release he was active in the resistance and in the planning for the period after the assassination attempt on Hitler on 20 July 1944. After it failed the National Socialists took his wife as a hostage. He turned himself in and was executed in 1944.

The Good Germany Was Preserved – The Lasting Effect of the Resistance

The resistance against the National Socialist regime called for great sacrifice. At the same time, it was never in a position to bring the Nazis down. Only military defeat freed Germany from the dictatorship. Richard Löwenthal, who himself had fought in the resistance and later became an SPD member and deputy chairman of the SPD Basic Values Commission, posed the question: »was German resistance in vain?« (Löwenthal 1997: 24). He answered the question himself:

»Of course not. The resolve of those in the resistance movement ... was the basis for a new democratic consensus, which could also be implemented institutionally in the Western Zone and Berlin. The people who were freed from the prisons and the camps, such as Kurt Schumacher and Fritz Erler, or those who returned home from political emigration, such as Ernst Reuter and Willy Brandt, made a decisive contribution to democratic reconstruction ... In this way they all helped to preserve the moral and cultural tradition through the years of barbarism, which a Germany based on human dignity needs« (Löwenthal 1997: 24).

It is only 10.5 x 15 cm and has a red cover. On the first page are given the bearer's name, place of residence and local association; contribution receipts can be pasted onto the following pages. The party programme is also to be found in it. This small unassuming book – the **Party membership book** – documents membership of the SPD.

For many the Party membership book is more than just a proof of membership, however, but rather a symbolic expression of their Social Democratic identity. Thus it has considerable significance. This became particularly clear during periods of persecution and suppression. After the banning of the SPD during the National Socialist dictatorship Party membership books were often not destroyed but kept, at great personal risk. Whole local associations hid their Party membership books, for example, packed in watertight containers at the bottom of a lake or buried in a forest.

The Essen Party congress in 1907 adopted the introduction of individual Party membership books. They were important before the diffusion of digital data processing not least for the organisation of the party. The books have been in a number of different colours, such as blue in the 1950s and later on pink. Today Party books are red, but there is also an SPD party card, in the format of a bank card.

Further reading:

Michael Schneider (1999), *Unterm Hakenkreuz. Arbeiter und Arbeiterbewegung 1933 bis 1939*, Bonn.

Vorstand der SPD (2000), *Der Freiheit verpflichtet. Gedenkbuch der deutschen Sozialdemokratie im 20. Jahrhundert*, Marburg.

Richard Löwenthal/ Patrick von zur Mühlen (eds) (1997), *Widerstand und Verweigerung in Deutschland 1933 bis 1945*, Bonn.

What does this mean for social democracy?

- The SPD struggled against National Socialism and for the Weimar Republic within the legal framework for a long time. Their actions were shaped by their experience with the Anti-Socialist Laws. The National Socialist terror proved to be incomparably horrific, however.
- Many Social Democrats and trade unionists paid with their lives for their active resistance against the Nazis, for example, in connection with 20 July 1944.
- The specific culture and milieu structures of the labour movement were largely destroyed by the National Socialists. Prohibition, persecution and exile were unable to destroy the idea of social democracy, however. The debates of the resistance and in exile formed the basis for the programmatic development of democratic socialism and the SPD's emergence as a broad-based national party.
- The formation of unified trade unions after the collapse of the National Socialist dictatorship was a reaction to the fact that the fragmentation of employees' representatives in unions with particular ideological or party political links (»Richtungsgewerkschaften«) had favoured the rise of the NSDAP. Opposition to any form of totalitarian ideology is a lesson from the time of the National Socialist dictatorship.

6. NEW AND RE-ESTABLISHMENT AND MODERNISATION (1945–1965)

In this chapter:

- the new and re-establishment of social democracy in West and East Germany after 1945 is described;
- the unification of the KPD and the SPD in the Soviet zone of occupation as a result of pressure and compulsion is presented;
- the organisational integration of the trade unions in the German Trade Union Confederation (DGB) is outlined;
- how the SPD renewed itself and thus created the conditions for its emergence as a party of government in 1966 is described.

Germany 1945

Anyone entering a large German city in 1945 witnessed a scene of devastation: bombed houses, hunger, lack of clothing and heating, in many instances energy supply had collapsed, there was no radio or post and no functioning transport of goods and people. One saw bombed out families, people in distress: people liberated from concentration camps and from forced labour, millions of refugees from the East, soldiers wandering from place to place, often in search of their families.

1945: a scene of privation

Kurt Schumacher (1895–1952) was SPD chairman from 1946 to 1952 and from 1949 to 1952 he was the parliamentary party leader. Schumacher was undoubtedly the key figure of West German social democracy in the immediate post-War period. Marked physically by his time in a concentration camp and his war wounds, his determined and, at the same time, charismatic demeanour and his unwavering commitment to democracy he was a well-known personality outside Social Democratic circles.

At the end of the war unleashed by National Socialist Germany destruction was evident everywhere. After the liberation of Germany by the Allies Social Democrats came together astonishingly quickly throughout the country to re-establish their organisation.

As early as 6 May 1945 – two days before Germany's final surrender –

Kurt Schumacher gave a keynote speech in Hannover, his place of residence, to Social Democratic officials. With the title »We will not despair« he evaluated the

*Schumacher 1945:
»We will not despair«*

conditions under which National Socialism emerged and existed, looked at the current situation and outlined future Social Democratic policies.

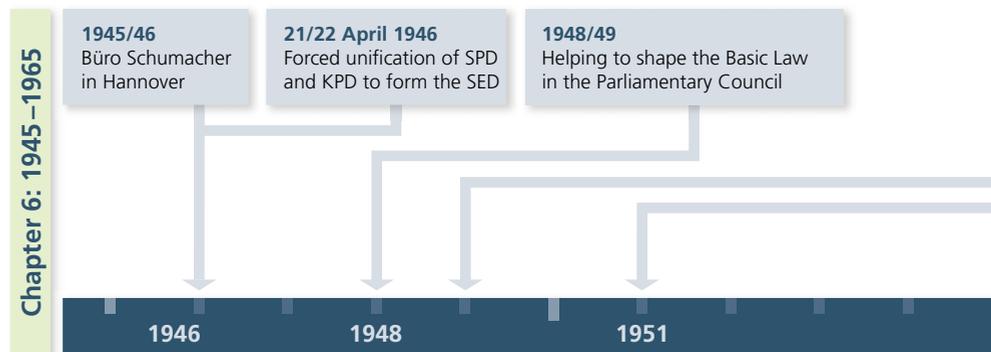
In Hannover, former exiles and younger Social Democrats of the Weimar period had gathered around Schumacher. Alfred Nau, Fritz Heine, Erich Ollenhauer and Annemarie Renger were important figures in this. This »Büro Schumacher« coordinated and directed – as well as it could, given the limited possibilities for communication due to the lack of paper – the re-establishment of social democracy. Membership growth was rapid: at the end of 1947 the SPD already had 700,000 members in the Western zones of occupation.

Coercion and Unification: The End of Social Democracy in East Germany

The SPD grew to become the largest party in the Soviet zone of occupation, too. It rapidly outstripped the KPD, supported and controlled by the Soviet occupying forces, in terms of membership.

In both West and East Germany the desire arose after 1945 in certain quarters to overcome the split in the labour movement between communists and social democrats. Not least against the background of the »fraternal strife« in the Weimar Republic, which assisted in the rise of the National Socialists, the notion of a unified party seemed natural.

The common experience of resistance against National Socialism encouraged these considerations.



Contemporary events: foundation of the state and reconstruction

»Büro Schumacher«

Further reading:

Peter Merseburger
(1995), *Der schwierige Deutsche*.
Kurt Schumacher;
eine Biographie,
Stuttgart.

Kurt Schumacher, however, gave short shrift to such ideas. He sharply criticised the dubious attitude of the communists to democracy and their one-sided orientation towards the Soviet development model and described them even before 1933 as »fascists in red«. Otto Grotewohl, chairman of the SPD in the Soviet zone of occupation, was also initially sceptical of a merger of the SPD and the KPD.

Schumacher on the KPD: »Fascists in red«

Given the rapid growth of the SPD and the elections in Austria and Hungary in 1945 – in both countries the communists did badly – the leadership of the KPD and the Soviet occupying forces feared that the KPD would be eclipsed. This was to be avoided by merging the KPD and the SPD in the Soviet zone of occupation.

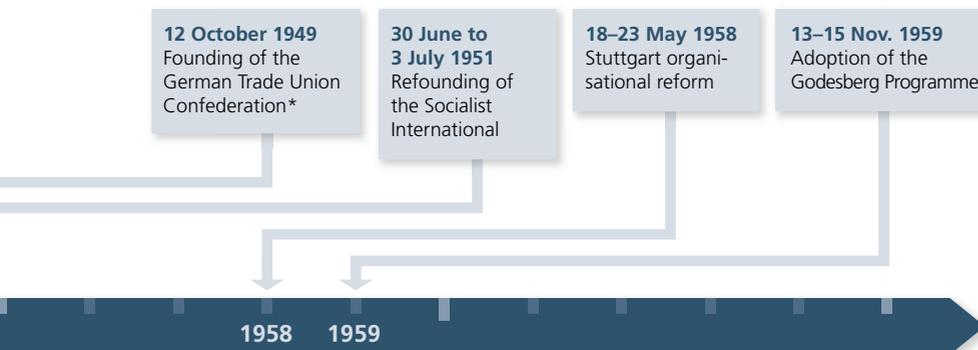
Accordingly, from September 1945 the KPD instigated a massive campaign in favour of a merger of the SPD and the KPD. Sceptical Social Democrats were to be won over by resolutions, recommendations, concessions and persuasion. When this did not achieve the desired result physical and psychological pressure, compulsion, coercion and violence were used, mainly with the support of the Soviet military administration.

Duress, pressure and compulsion towards unification

»After careful consideration in the period from December 1945 to April 1946 at least 20,000 Social Democrats were reprimanded, imprisoned for shorter or longer periods of time, and even killed« (Erich Ollenhauer 1961, cited after Fricke 2002: 34).

While some Social Democrats really hoped to overcome the fatal split of the labour movement and even to be able to preserve their convictions in a new united party, others bowed under the pressure. On 21–22 April 1946 a unifica-

1946: the SED emerges from the SPD and the KPD



*[Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund – DGB]

Further reading:

Beatrix W. Bouvier/
Horst Peter Schulz
(1991), „... die SPD
aber aufgehört hat
zu existieren“,
Sozialdemokraten
unter sowjetischer
Besatzung, Verlag
J.H.W. Dietz Nachf.,
Bonn.

tion congress was finally held. The Socialist Unity Party of Germany (Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands – SED) emerged from the SPD and the KPD.

Initially, the newly elected committees were composed of Social Democrats and communists on an equal footing. This changed rapidly, however. Many Social Democrats were removed from their posts, sometimes persecuted and arrested. Often it was those who had been persecuted under the National Socialist regime, who now had to endure the third prohibition of the SPD in German history. Anyone suspected of »social democratism« or who was deemed to be a »Schumacherling« risked severe consequences. Until the refounding of the SPD in October 1989 in Schwante there was no organised social democracy in East Germany.

**Reconstruction or New Construction –
Social Democracy in West Germany**

In the Western zones of occupation, by contrast, social democracy was an important political force. Often it was members of the Weimar SPD who drove forward the reconstruction of the SPD. They had remained true to their party during the period of dictatorship and now participated in the re-establishment of its organisation. At the same time, it was important especially to Schumacher not only to re-establish Weimar social democracy – often described as the »Traditionskompanie« (»the old firm«) – but also to forge a new beginning. What was meant by that? Two points in particular:

On one hand, the SPD was to be put on a broader social basis. The core of the movement, according to Schumacher, was to remain industrial workers, but the Party had to open itself up, for example, to the middle classes. The idea was to gather together »all makers«.

On the other hand, the party programme was to be expanded. Schumacher rejected a narrowing of the social democratic programme to a dogmatic Marxism. Rather social democracy was to open up further to the values of European humanism and to accept a wide range of motives for embracing social democracy, »whether they were anchored in the Communist Manifesto or the Sermon on the Mount« (Klotzbach 1996: 58). The previously devised notion of a pluralistic national or »popular« (in the sense of broad-based) party thus took on concrete form.

*SPD an important
force in the Western
zones of occupation*

Further reading:

Helga Grebing
(1995), „Neubau“
statt „Wiederauf-
bau“ der SPD – die
Lehren aus der Wei-
marer Republik, in:
Dieter Dowe (ed.),
Kurt Schumacher
und der „Neubau“
der deutschen Sozi-
aldemokratie nach
1945, Friedrich-
Ebert-Stiftung,
Gesprächskreis
Geschichte, issue13,
Bonn.

In view of this, different groupings and individuals linked up with social democracy. Besides left-wing socialists, such as Brandt, Fritz Erler and Heinz Kühn, ethical socialists, such as Willi Eichler, former communists, such as Herbert Wehner and former centre-liberal figures, such as Carlo Schmid and Karl Schiller, as well as younger ex-soldiers, such as Helmut Schmidt or Hans Matthöfer found their way to the SPD. This resulted in a complex and, depending on the region, diverse mixture of reconstruction and new construction of social democracy.

SPD gains: among others, Willy Brandt

Claim to Leadership and Principles

Both old and young members shared the conviction that social democracy would be the decisive force in the new Germany. The SPD was the only political force that had not succumbed to a fluctuating or doubting relationship to democracy. According to Schumacher, it was the only German party »which had remained true to the great line of democracy and peace without concessions« (cited after Klotzbach 1996: 55). The SPD understood itself as a representative of the good or, as Willy Brandt formulated it, the other Germany and from that it derived the claim to a decisive role in the reconstruction of the country.

SPD as representative of the »other Germany«

Willy Brandt described Schumacher's standpoint as follows:

»The Social Democratic Party that Hitler had destroyed, whose leaders were either executed or forced into exile, whose assets – houses, newspapers, libraries, money – had been stolen by the National Socialists, whose members, if they had not fallen on another front, whether at home or abroad, and maintained their political links only in small groups and circles, this party was to re-emerge, bigger and more important than before Hitler; it was to become the party of national salvation and to take power; it was to use that power to obliterate the mistakes of the past« (Brandt 1960: 194f).

Specifically, SPD policy for the reconstruction of Germany was oriented in terms of a number of principles:

Three principles for reconstruction

1. **Democracy**

Only in a democratic system can the freedom of the individual be ensured and, at the same time, societal changes enacted. Accordingly, socialism

can develop only in a democracy. A decisive advocacy of a parliamentary-democratic state thus pervaded all SPD policies.

2. **Nationalisation, planning and codetermination**

Based on the analysis that the rise of the National Socialists had been fostered by big capitalists and facilitated by capitalism's proneness to crises – specifically, the world economic crisis of 1929 – the demand arose for a new economic order. Furthermore, the Social Democrats were convinced that the reconstruction of a ravaged Germany could succeed only if key industries, large banks and insurance companies were in common ownership and there was framework planning of the economy by the state. For the non-nationalised part of the economy the SPD envisaged comprehensive codetermination.¹⁸

3. **Preserve the nation**

The SPD under Schumacher committed itself more decisively than other political forces to Germany's self-assertion and against the looming division of the country. As a passionate patriot Schumacher was resolutely against all measures and regulations that could deepen the division or make rapprochement between the two parts of Germany more difficult.

Some of the demands based on these three principles initially appeared within reach. Thus, for example, almost all political tendencies and parties shared the demand for nationalisation of some key industries. Even the CDU founded in 1945 advocated socialisation and in particular in the Ahlen Programme formulated in 1947 for the British zone of occupation. The international framework also appeared favourable. With the election victory of the Labour Party in 1945 Great Britain had a party of government whose aim was a socialist society. Michael Schneider thus talks of a »general socialist atmosphere« in the years 1946/47 (Schneider 2000: 261).

Trade Unions – Unification and Codetermination

In particular the demands for codetermination and nationalisation were also put forward by the trade unions during this period. Like the SPD, they had also been (re)founded immediately after the Allied invasion. At local and regional level numerous trade unions emerged.

*1945: political
climate favourable
for comprehensive
reforms*

*Development
towards unified
trade unions*

¹⁸ See Reader 6, *State, Civil Society and Social Democracy*, Chapter 6.

The multitude of actors was accompanied by various ideas on the organisational principles of trade unions. Thus the question arose, for example, of whether organisation should be based on occupation or industry.

There was consensus on the issue of party-politically neutral unified trade unions. After the experiences of the National Socialist dictatorship and joint resistance »trade unions separated on the basis of worldview or party politics were considered outdated« (Schneider 2000: 247). »Forge unity!« That was the legacy that former ADGB chairman Wilhelm Leuschner had given to posterity after his execution by the Nazis (see Steinbach 2000: 32).

The different ideas of the occupying forces led initially to different organisational developments in the respective zones. The founding of an umbrella trade union confederation was also initially hindered by this. It took until 1949 for the German Trade Union Confederation

(Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund DGB) to be founded. In the DGB 16 unified trade unions joined forces to form an umbrella organisation. The strongest single union was IG Metall, with 1.35 million members. The delegates to the founding congress elected Hans Böckler as the first chairman of the DGB. He was undoubtedly a key figure in German trade unionism after 1945.

Hans Böckler (1875–1951) was a German politician and trade unionist. He was a skilled gold and silver beater and in 1894 joined the SPD and the trade union the German Metalworkers' Federation. Under the Nazis he maintained contacts with the resistance circle responsible for 20 July 1944. After the end of the National Socialist dictatorship Böckler became the first chairman of the German Trade Union Confederation (DGB). He advocated equal rights for capital and labour, to which the Hans-Böckler-Stiftung, named after him, is also committed.

What were the trade unions' demands in the post-war period? Like the SPD, the trade unions called for fundamental change in the economic order. Codetermination and nationalisation were the key concepts. On codetermination Hans Böckler's position was clear:

»We have to be represented in the economy on an equal footing, not only in individual organs of the economy, not only in the economic chambers, but in the whole economy. The idea is thus representation on company boards and supervisory boards.« (Böckler, cited after Schneider 2000: 256f)

*Leuschner:
»Forge unity!«*

*Trade union
programme*

The demand for far-reaching nationalisations was not fulfilled. In particular the US occupying power had other ideas and prevented the socialisation plans.

With regard to codetermination, in contrast, considerable success was achieved. The possibility to form works councils adopted by the Allied Control Council in 1946 made company codetermination possible. Under considerable pressure from the trade unions in 1951 finally codetermination was also introduced in the coal and steel industry.

However, the trade unions were unable to extend this codetermination to other branches of the economy by means of the Works Constitution Act of 1952. This was also a sign that the balance of power had consolidated after the dynamics of the immediate post-war years. The capitalist order was once more firmly established.

The agreement on **codetermination in the coal and steel industry** of 1951, largely negotiated between Konrad Adenauer and Hans Böckler, brought about company codetermination, at least in mining, iron and steel. In companies in these branches with more than 1,000 employees representatives of the employees and the owners were now on an equal footing in the supervisory board. There was also a further member on whom the two sides have to agree.

»The market economic order, like the position of employers, was thus stabilised. The adoption of the Works Constitution Act thus brought the trade unions up against the limits of their political influence« (Schneider 2000: 279)

Success and Disillusion – The First Years of the Federal Republic

The SPD experienced individual successes, but also significant disillusion at the end of the 1940s and the beginning of the 1950s. One success story, for example, was its involvement in the development of the Basic Law. In the Parliamentary Council – established in 1948 to formulate a Basic Law for the Federal Republic of Germany – the SPD was represented by a number of outstanding personalities, for example, Elisabeth Selbert and Carlo Schmid.

Carlo Schmid headed the central committee of the Parliamentary Council. He was a collegial friend of one of the most important theoreticians of social democracy, Hermann Heller. Heller's »theory of the state« envisaged a social

Elisabeth Selbert (1896–1986) was a Social Democrat politician and jurist. She was a member of the Parliamentary Council and one of the »mothers of the Basic Law«.

Herta Gotthelf (1902–1963) was a Social Democrat politician and editor. From 1947 she was a member of the party's national executive and responsible for the SPD periodical *Gleichheit. Organ der arbeitenden Frau* (Equality. The voice of working women). We can largely thank Elisabeth Selbert and Herta Gotthelf for the fact that the **equality of men and women** was enshrined in the Basic Law. They were able with the support of various women's initiatives and other representatives to anchor equal rights as a constitutional principle against significant opposition: Article 3 of the Basic Law declares unambiguously that »men and women shall have equal rights«.

Carlo Schmid (1896–1979) was one of the SPD's key experts on constitutional law. He was an SPD member of the Parliamentary Council and was involved in the formulation of the Godesberg Programme in 1959.

democracy in which a fair system would also satisfy the economic and social interests of the socially disadvantaged. Schmid introduced this basic concept of the state dedicated to public welfare and the rule of law into the Parliamentary Council. The idea is reflected in Art. 20 of the Basic Law, in particular in the formulation »democratic and social federal state«.¹⁹

These successes, although undoubtedly important for the history of the Federal Republic, could not conceal that overall the SPD was far from achieving the aims it had formulated. It was unable to implement its demands for a far-reaching restructuring of the economic order, it had lost members since 1947 and received fewer votes than hoped in the state and local elections. At the first Bundestag elections in 1949 the expected claim to leadership was not realised. With 29.2 per cent the SPD received fewer votes than the CDU, which received 31 per cent. Konrad Adenauer was – by a majority of votes – elected Federal Chancellor and the SPD found itself in opposition once again.

The SPD regarded itself as a »constructive opposition«. Accordingly, most laws in the first legislative period were passed with the votes of the Social Democrats. Thus the SPD played a decisive role in the laws on social house building, the integration of expellees and the reorganisation of pension insurance (see Potthoff/Miller 2002: 201).

However, considerable differences emerged in Germany and foreign policy. The SPD under the passionately patriotic Schumacher called for Germany's self-deter-

Further reading:
Karin Gille-Linne (2011), Verdeckte Strategien: Herta Gotthelf, Elisabeth Selbert und die Frauenarbeit der SPD 1945–1949, Verlag J.H.W. Dietz Nachf., Bonn.

Electoral success of the CDU

SPD: »constructive opposition«

Germany and foreign policy

¹⁹ See Reader 6, *State, Civil Society and Social Democracy*, Chapter 3.3.1 and 3.3.2.

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*Christian Krell/
Thomas Meyer/
Tobias Mörschel
(2012), Demokratie
in Deutschland.
Wandel, aktuelle
Herausforderun-
gen, normative
Grundlagen und
Perspektiven, in:
Christian Krell/
Tobias Mörschel
(eds), Demokra-
tie in Deutschland.
Zustand – Heraus-
forderungen –
Perspektiven,
Wiesbaden,
pp. 9–30.*

*Reasons for its loss
of significance*

mination and largely committed itself to an undivided Germany. Schumacher, for example, declared that Germany must not »fall into a position of subjugation« and that German unity for the SPD was »not a distant goal but the immediate goal« (cited after Potthoff/Miller 2002: 202).

This stance was used to justify the rejection of German participation in the European Coal and Steel Community, as well as of German rearmament and thus integration in the European defence community and later NATO. Schumacher branded the incipient form of European Western European integration »conservative, clerical, capitalist and cartelist« (Schumacher 1950, cited after Ritter 1964: 135).

The position was perfectly understandable. In each of these instances there was a worry that deeper Western integration on the part of the Federal Republic would hinder rapid reunification with East Germany. At the same time, the SPD's stance increasingly conferred on it the role of »nay-sayer«.

This image certainly contributed to the fact that the Bundestag elections of 1953 were disastrous for the SPD. It not only lost votes again, winning only 28.8 per cent, but also saw the CDU's share of the vote rise significantly. With 45.2 per cent the CDU/CSU increased its vote by 14 percentage points compared to 1949. The SPD, in contrast, appeared to be unable to break through the 30 per cent barrier.

The reasons for the election defeat were hotly debated at all levels and in every branch of the party. At least three states of affairs had contributed to the Social Democrats' decline beyond the 1953 election:

1. Social democracy's social base (the workers' milieu and the workers' cultural movement) had largely been destroyed by the National Socialists. The emerging consumer society weakened the integrative force of the traditional labour movement. At the same time, the SPD had not been able to attract other social segments in sufficient numbers.
2. The SPD's policies seemed outdated, in particular the fixation in Germany and foreign policy on reunification and a Germany with equal rights within the borders of 1937. The demands for a new economic order made in some quarters of the SPD seemed old-fashioned given the re-established economy and the beginning of the »economic miracle«.

3. The form of organisation and culture of the Social Democratic Party were also old-fashioned and rigid. After the dynamics of the immediate post-war years and the opening up of the party attempted under the heading »reconstruction« the old persons, symbols and habits of the Weimar years were dominant.

As crushing as the election result of 1953 was it did accelerate a comprehensive process of renewal, which led to the chancellorships of Willy Brandt and Helmut Schmidt.

Awakening and Renewal

In the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s the SPD underwent far-reaching renewal on three levels:

1. **Renewal of personnel**

With Willy Brandt, Fritz Erler, Waldemar von Knoeringen, Herbert Wehner and Carlo Schmid a new type of person was increasingly gaining responsibility in the SPD. Such people conveyed a party image of competence and dynamism.

2. **Organisational renewal**

Especially with the organisational reforms adopted at the Stuttgart party congress of 1958 the party's internal structure became more dynamic.

3. **Programmatisch-politische Erneuerung**

The Godesberg Programme marked the culmination of comprehensive renewal of the party platform, which led the SPD away from its previous narrowness of view and opened it up to broad segments of the population.

In the mid-1950s the SPD and its public perception were characterised by a function type originating in Weimar's community based on solidarity. This type was described by Peter Lösche and Franz Walter as »politically ... unimaginative, even bureaucratic party soldier« (Lösche/Walter 1992: 186). Specifically, for example, Erich Ollenhauer was associated with this. The Party chairman had undoubtedly done a great deal for social democracy in exile and during reconstruction, but he came over as old-fashioned and uncharismatic. A considerable part of the blame for the election defeat of 1957 was attributed to him, not entirely justifiably.

*Younger politicians
come to the fore*

In contrast, there was a series of younger politicians who embraced reform and appeared dynamic, embodying a new age. Besides the Mayor of Berlin Willy Brandt the »reformers« included Fritz Erler, Helmut Schmidt and Carlo Schmid. At the state level, one might mention Waldemar von Knoeringen from Bavaria, Heinz Kühn from North Rhine Westphalia and Georg August Zinn from Hesse.

*1958: Party reform
in Stuttgart*

Gradually, these »reformers« ousted the »traditionalists« in the Party and parliamentary leadership. An important step in this process was the organisational reform adopted at the Stuttgart party congress in 1958. With this reform the salaried members of the executive were abolished. In the eyes of many in the SPD they stood for a rigid and bureaucratic type of functionary. In future, a select committee elected from the executive was to take the place of the salaried members of the Party executive.

Besides this important – and implemented against the opposition of Party chairman Ollenhauer – organisational reform there were many debates on the Party's organisational culture: the »comrades' ›du«²⁰, the red flag, the singing of the old workers' songs²¹ – all this seemed to some people more as relics of a bygone age than the expression of a modern broad-based party.

*1959: Godesberg
Programme*

Undoubtedly, the **adoption of the Godesberg Programme** in 1959 was a major step on the way towards a modern national party. Formally, the origin of this programme lay in a decision of the Berlin party congress in 1954 to set up a commission to work out a new basic programme. In fact, however, the discussions that led to this programme went back as far as the 1920s. Helga Grebing thus speaks of the »long path to Godesberg« (Grebing 2007: 145).

What was new?

What was new in the Godesberg Programme? It was less the goal of social democracy that changed than the rationale for this goal, the way to achieving it and the establishment of a political practice in basic values that comprised the character of this programme. The goal of social democracy remained unchanged with Godeberg, too: in essence it concerns a social order in which everyone has an equal opportunity to freely shape a self-determined life based on dignity.

While in some earlier programmes this goal was derived from Marxist theory the Godesberg Programme dispensed with ideological determination. One could

20 See p. 141.

21 See p. 41.

pursue this goal from various motives, including Marxist analysis, Christian ethics or philosophical considerations.

Also with regard to political practice – the way to the goal – excessively narrow stipulations were renounced. The demand for general nationalisation of the means of production, for example, was not retained. However, the new programme did describe how with state control of economic power, codetermination, careful planning, the prevention of monopolies and competition the aims underlying the call for nationalisation could be achieved. »As much competition as possible, as much planning as necessary!« was the formulation in the programme that summarised these matters.

The specific policies of social democracy were to be oriented towards three basic values. By freedom was meant the freedom to lead a self-determined life, which is conditional on freedom from want and fear. Justice, the second basic value, is a condition of freedom. Because the same civil rights and liberties demand not only equal treatment of all before the law, but also a just distribution of opportunities for participation and social security. Solidarity as the third basic value describes not only people's sense of responsibility for one another but also a concrete experience of the labour movement. Wherever people show solidarity and stand up for one another they can overcome oppression, disfranchisement and poverty.

»The Social Democratic Party is the party of freedom of thought. It is a community of people holding different beliefs and ideas. Their agreement is based on the moral principles and political aims they have in common. The Social Democratic Party strives for a way of life in accordance with these principles. Socialism is a constant task – to fight for freedom and justice, to preserve them and to live up to them.« (Godesberg Programme 1959, cited after Dowe/Klotzbach 2004: 327)

The significance of the Godesberg Programme can scarcely be underestimated. With the discussion process that had led to the Programme the Party succeeded in developing a broadly shared understanding of itself.

Based on the Programme in the ensuing years important policies were modernised, such as economic policy and policy on Germany. With the pluralism of rationales that the Programme formulated in view of the goals of the SPD the Party built bridges in other areas of society. The enormous growth in member-

As much competition as possible – as much planning as necessary

The three basic values

Godesberg Programme: a foundation for later achievements

Further reading:

Karl-Wilhelm Fricke/

Peter Steinbach/

Johannes Tuchel

(2002), *Opposition*

und Widerstand in

der DDR. Politische

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München.

Kurt Klotzbach

(1996), *Der Weg*

zur Staatspartei.

Programmatik,

praktische Politik

und Organisa-

tion der deutschen

Sozialdemokratie

1945–1965, Verlag

J.H.W. Dietz Nachf.,

Bonn.

ship and votes in the following years far beyond the working class is unimaginable without the Godesberg Programme.

Although the SPD did not achieve governmental responsibility at the next election immediately after the adoption of the Godesberg Programme, at each of the following elections it made significant gains: in 1961, with Willy Brandt's first candidacy it managed 36.5 per cent; with the election result of 1965 (39.3 per cent) the basis was laid for the first social democratic participation in government at the federal level.

At the same time, it was certainly not the Programme alone that laid the basis for the SPD's path from opposition to government party. Klaus Schönhoven concisely describes the interaction of various conditions of success:

»An internal party will to renewal, acquisition of policymaking competencies and personal readiness to cooperate among the leading politicians [must] be interwoven ... if a party wishes to become capable of winning a majority and to receive a mandate to run the government.« (Klaus Schönhoven, Afterword to the new edition of Klotzbach 1996: 611)

What does this mean for social democracy?

- The creation of united trade unions, which overcame the fragmentation of individual trade unions, was an important achievement of the post-war period.
- Although the Social Democrats with their resistance to National Socialism stood for the »other« Germany initially the electorate relegated them to opposition.
- The Godesberg Programme was an important step in policy renewal and on the way to a modern broad-based party. Here the SPD defined its programmatic compass with the basic values of freedom, solidarity and justice.
- Winning political power, however, was possible only with a combination of policy programme, practice and state-of-the-art party organisation, together with a modern party image and internal willingness to cooperate.

7. SOCIAL PROGRESS AND NEW PATHS (1966–1989)

In this chapter

- how social democracy achieved government responsibility in the Federal Republic for the first time is described;
- the »social-liberal era« of Willy Brandt's and Helmut Schmidt's chancellorships is outlined;
- the transformation and renewal of the SPD against the background of social challenges and another period of opposition in the 1980s are reconstructed.

At the end of November 1966 the CDU and the SPD agreed on a coalition under Kurt Georg Kiesinger (CDU) as chancellor. Seventeen years after the founding of the Federal Republic of Germany the SPD was in government for the first time.

1966: first participation in government in the Federal Republic

Willy Brandt (1913–1992) was the first social democratic chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany from 1969 to 1974, from 1964 to 1987 chairman of the SPD and from 1976 to 1992 President of the Socialist International. Brandt was honoured with the Nobel Peace Prize for his Ostpolitik and peace policy based on détente and balance of power – symbolised by his falling to his knees in Warsaw in 1970 – in 1971.

Three years later, with Willy Brandt in the social-liberal coalition, they also provided the chancellor.

Key ministries in the Grand Coalition

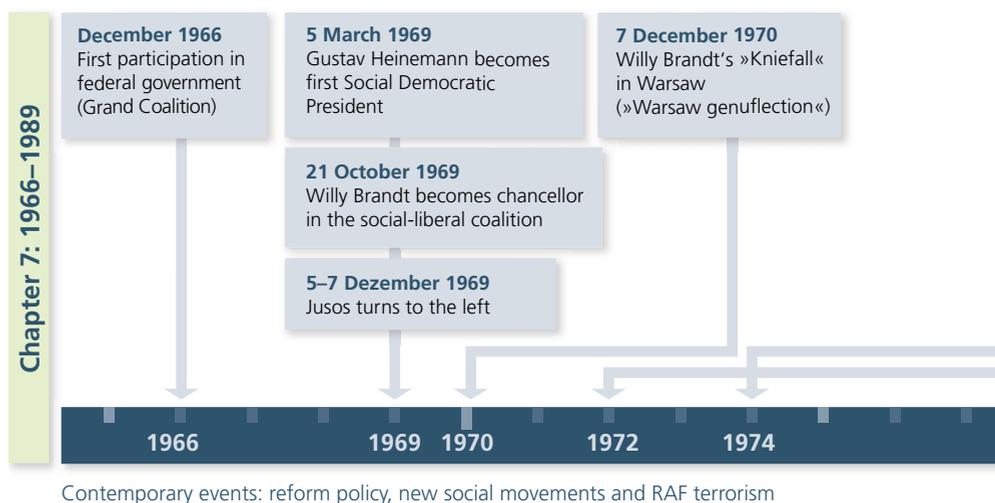
Fritz Erler (1913–1967) was an administrative officer by profession and active in the resistance during the National Socialist dictatorship. In 1938 he was sentenced to 10 years in prison; in 1945 he escaped from Dachau concentration camp. From 1964 to 1966 Erler was chairman of the SPD parliamentary group and leader of the opposition. The Fritz-Erler Forum of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung in Stuttgart is named after him.

In the Grand Coalition the SPD controlled some key ministries: Willy Brandt entered the cabinet as foreign minister and deputy chancellor, Gustav Heinemann held the office of Justice Minister, Karl Schiller became Minister of the Economy and Herbert Wehner Minister for All-German Affairs. Fritz Erler led the parliamentary party, although he died in 1967, to be replaced by Helmut Schmidt.

Willy Brandt (1913–1992)	Foreign minister and deputy chancellor
Gustav Heinemann (1899–1976)	Justice (until 26 March 1969)
Horst Ehmke (*1927)	Justice (from 26 March 1969)
Karl Schiller (1911–1994)	Economy
Georg Leber (1920–2012)	Transport
Lauritz Lauritzen (1910–1980)	Housing
Herbert Wehner (1906–1990)	All-German Issues
Carlo Schmid (1896–1979)	Federal Council and Länder
Käte Strobel (1907–1996)	Health care
Hans-Jürgen Wischnewski (1922–2005)	Economic cooperation (until 2 October 1968)
Erhard Eppler (*1926)	Economic cooperation (from 16 October 1968)

Figure 9: Social democratic ministers in the Grand Coalition 1966–1969

After the breakdown of the chancellorship of Ludwig Erhard the Grand Coalition was formed against the background of economic and democratic crisis. On one side, recession, budget deficit and new unemployment loomed, while on the other side there was the founding of the National Democratic Party of



Germany (NPD) in 1964 and their first inroads in the state parliaments of Hesse and Bavaria in 1966. Both these things were unfamiliar and a challenge for the young Republic after years of high economic growth and full employment..

The decision to enter coalition was controversial among Social Democrats. Herbert Wehner in particular saw major overlaps with the CDU in the problem areas mentioned above and was more confident in the reliability and stability of a Grand Coalition with a corresponding majority. The formation of a social-liberal coalition had already been discussed with the FDP in 1966, which came into being in 1969. At the head of the coalition in the persons of Kurt Georg Kiesinger and Willy Brandt a former National Socialist and an exile and resistance member came together.

The SPD saw the opportunity to prove its governmental competence in the Grand Coalition, to build trust and increase its popularity and so to prepare for future success in Bundestag elections. At the state level it had already celebrated a number of victories and taken on governmental responsibility. Not

least »Red Hesse« should be mentioned here, a social democratic model state under premier Georg August Zinn and countermodel to the »Adenauer Republic«, as well as Bremen, Berlin, Hamburg and Lower Saxony.

Debate: Grand or social-liberal coalition

Opportunity to prove governmental competence

Georg August Zinn (1901–1976) was a lawyer. He became a member of the SPD in 1919 and was also a member of the Reichsbanner Schwarz-Rot-Gold. From 1950 to 1969 Zinn was premier of the state of Hesse.

19 Nov. 1972
The SPD for the first time becomes the strongest party at the »Willy election« with 45.8%

16 May 1974
Helmut Schmidt becomes chancellor

30 Aug. to 2 Sept. 1988
Adoption of gender quotas in the SPD

18–20 Dec. 1989
Adoption of the Berlin Programme

22–25 Feb. 1990
Adoption of the Leipzig Programme of the SPD in the DDR

1988 1989 1990

1966: strongest party in North Rhine Westphalia

Further reading:
Reader 2, Economic and Social Democracy, Chapter 2.3, John Maynard Keynes: steering capitalism.

In the state elections of 1966 the SPD became the strongest force in the largest state, North Rhine Westphalia. Beginning with the premiership of Heinz Kühn the SPD was able to assert its supremacy in the following decades. The result of the North Rhine Westphalia election was an expression of social change, in particular secularisation.

The SPD first achieved electoral success in Catholic rural areas. The opening up to different segments of society which was one of the aims of the Godesberg Programme thus bore fruit.

To solve the country's economic problems the SPD and Karl Schiller as Minister of the Economy pinned their hopes on Keynesian demand-side policy. In this regard in particular forms of coordinated economic action, such as the »concerted action« with trade unions and employers' organisations proved successful. They were to determine economic governance also in later years. The Stability and Growth Act was also passed by the Grand Coalition.

Karl Schiller's counterpart in the Union was the Finance Minister and CSU leader Franz Josef Strauss. The two men worked surprisingly well together and came to be known as »Plisch and Plum« (from a story by Wilhelm Busch). The Grand Coalition was able to bring down unemployment again, and to boost production and growth.

Heinz Kühn (1912–1992) joined the SPD on his 18th birthday, worked as a journalist, among other things, and was a member of the Reichsbanner Schwarz-Rot-Gold. Kühn was premier of North Rhine Westphalia from 1966 to 1978. In 1978 he was the first Federal Government Commissioner for Aliens²² and from 1983 to 1987 was chairman of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung.

Concerted action is the agreement of different economic-policy actors. »Concerted action« in 1967 brought together, among others, representatives of the government, the trade unions, employers' organisations and the Bundesbank. The »Alliance for Jobs« initiated by the Red-Green coalition in 1999 was in this tradition.

The **Stability and Growth Act** in 1967 established the »magic square«, in other words, the equal weight of price stability, high employment, external economic balance and adequate and constant economic growth as economic policy goal of the Federal Republic.

»Plisch and Plum«

22 See Reader 5, *Integration, Immigration and Social Democracy*, Chapter 7.1.

Egon Bahr (*1922) was trained in industrial commerce and later worked as, among other things, a journalist. He was one of the key masterminds and architects of Willy Brandt's »new Eastern policy«. From 1972 to 1974 Bahr was Minister for Special Affairs and from 1974 to 1976 Minister for Economic Cooperation.

Furthermore, Willy Brandt, together with the congenial head of policy planning at the Federal Foreign Ministry Egon Bahr, was able to introduce the first elements of détente. They were stepped up later on in the guise of the »new Eastern policy« (Ostpolitik). For example,

diplomatic relations with Yugoslavia were resumed and negotiations with the DDR and the Soviet Union prepared for. Brandt thus supplemented foreign policy, which hitherto had been oriented primarily to Germany's Western neighbours, with a – in particular for Germany policy and European integration – new pillar. He himself described this as the »policy of active peacekeeping«.

Internally, the SPD faced a crucial test in the debate on the emergency laws. The change in the Constitution, which was adopted with the necessary two-thirds majority of the CDU/CSU and the SPD added regulations to the Basic Law relating to the state of defence and the occurrence of disasters. In such instances it provides for a strengthening of the executive and enables the restriction of basic rights.

The debate was very emotional both within and outside the SPD, particularly in light of past experiences. Advocates called for clear emergency laws to prevent the kind of misuse and undermining of democracy that occurred at the end of the Weimar Republic with its presidential regimes. Critics feared those very consequences and saw the emergency laws as a fundamental assault on democracy and the fundamental rights laid down in the Basic Law. The debate showed that a sense and expectation of democracy had grown in Germany: Bernd Faulenbach talks of a »fundamental politicisation« (Faulenbach 2011: 182) of the young Republic.

At the Federal congress in Munich in 1969 the Jusos carried out their **turn to the left**. Since then, the SPD's youth organisation has considered itself to be a »socialist organisation« within the SPD.

This dynamic also drove the »extra-parliamentary opposition« and strongly mobilised young people and students in particular. The old and the new students' organisations the SDS and the SHB and,

within the SPD, Jusos after their »turn to the left«, as well as the hawks also put other items on the agenda: criticism of the Vietnam War, the question of the guilt and responsibility of the older generation during the Nazi period and fundamental criticisms of the capitalist system. Radical elements of the extraparliamentary opposition were also convinced that new Fascist tendencies were emerging.

It was difficult for the SPD to deal with this. On one hand, the Party had to win over these groups with their idealistic, politicised and critical members in order to jointly shape a democratic and social awakening. On the other hand, however, the Party leadership and SPD policy provoked their displeasure.

There was agreement, however, that the Grand Coalition would not last. In the Bundestag at this time there were only three parliamentary groups. Besides the two large groups of the SPD and the CDU/CSU there was the FDP, which could tip the scales within the framework of government formation.

*Presidential
election 1969*

The presidential election of 1969, in this context, was a clear sign of the rapprochement between the SPD and the FDP and a harbinger of the later social-liberal coalition. On 5 March Defence Minister Gerhard Schröder (CDU) and Gustav Heinemann (SPD) announced their candidacies. At the third ballot Heinemann prevailed with the votes of the SPD and the FDP and thus became the first Social Democratic president of the Federal Republic.

Gustav Heinemann (1899–1976) was the first Social Democrat president of the Federal Republic of Germany from 1969 to 1974. He was a lawyer by profession and from 1945 to 1952 a member of the CDU. In 1949 he was Minister of the Interior in the Adenauer cabinet, but resigned in 1950 in protest at rearmament. In 1952 Heinemann founded the All-German People's Party and in 1957 became a member of the SPD. Before his election as president he was Justice Minister in the first Grand Coalition from 1966 to 1969.

The rapprochement between the Social Democrats and the Liberals reflected the growing liberalism in society: authority was questioned, there was resistance to traditional gender roles and self- and co-determination were demanded. The »conservative democracy« (Potthoff/Miller 2002: 228) of post-War Germany had faded away in the course of the 1960s and was increasingly being replaced by a more open social climate.

Dare More Democracy in the Social-Liberal Alliance

Transformation of social values and desire for reform were in the SPD's favour. During the Bundestag election campaign of 1969 it managed, also with reference to the successful reforms of the Grand Coalition, to pick up on and represent these feelings as the »modern reform party«. Based on an increase in votes among salaried employees and civil servants in the middle classes they managed a result of 42.7 per cent. This was a 3.4 percentage-point improvement on the Bundestag election of 1965. Although the SPD remained the second strongest party behind the Union (46.1 per cent) the 5.8 per cent of the FDP was enough for a joint government majority. What swung things in favour of successful coalition formation was the positions on foreign and Germany policy, which were oriented towards understanding and balance. With the election of Willy Brandt on 21 October 1969 as chancellor, 20 years after the founding of the second German Republic a Social Democrat led a federal government for the first time.

1969: Willy Brandt
becomes chancellor

»The government can succeed in a democracy only if it is carried by the democratic commitment of the citizens. We thus have little need of blind assent, any more than we need affected titles and majestic distance. We do not seek mirrors; we need people who are critically involved in thinking, decision-making and responsibility. This government considers itself to be based on tolerance. It will thus be able to appreciate the kind of solidarity that expresses itself in criticism. We are not the Elect, we are elected. Thus we shall try to talk with everyone concerned with this democracy.

Ladies and gentlemen, in recent years many people in this country have feared that the second German democracy will suffer the same fate as its predecessor. I have never believed this. I now believe it less than ever.

No, we are not standing at the end of our democracy, but are now really making a start. We want to become a people of good neighbours both at home and abroad.« (Brandt 1969: 223f)

In his inaugural address to the Bundestag Willy Brandt paraphrased the guiding principle of the coalition with the formula that has since become famous »We want to dare more democracy«. On both the political and the social side an attempt was made to achieve more freedom. The voting age was reduced from 21 to 18, the right to public demonstration was made more liberal, the

»Dare more
democracy«

welfare state was expanded, citizens' rights were extended, employment rights were strengthened, codetermination in firms was expanded, student grants were introduced (Bundesausbildungsförderungsgesetz – BAföG) and the legal system was liberalised.

Year	Issue	Selected regulations
1969	Reforms of social legislation	Continued payment of wages in the event of sickness for workers and salaried employees; flexible age thresholds for pensions
1969/ 1970	Reform of penal law	Adultery, procuring and homosexuality (between adults) were abolished as offences; the right to public demonstration was liberalised
1970	Lowering of the voting age	Active from 21 to 18, passive from 25 to 21
1969/ 1971	Reforms in education policy	Construction of universities stepped up; introduction of student grants
1972/ 1976	Expansion of codetermination	Codetermination Act
1976	Reform of marriage and divorce law	Both spouses may be employed; the name of the man is no longer automatically the family name
1979/ 1980	Reform of family law	»Parental authority« is replaced by »parental care«; children's rights are strengthened

Figure 10: Selected social-liberal reforms

The so-called Radicals Decree of January 1972 was controversial. It provided for a rigorous examination of the loyalty to the Constitution of applicants for public service employment and ultimately was directed against left-wing radicals in particular. This restriction of free choice of occupation and freedom of opinion showed how much the East-West conflict and the worries about communist

Further reading:

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Peter Borowsky (2002), Sozialliberale Koalition und innere Reformen, Informationen zur Politischen Bildung (issue 258).

The Radicals Decree of 1972

infiltration and subversion preoccupied the domestic politics of the time. At the same time, it fitted in with a whole series of tighter restrictions imposed by the SPD on communist ideas, systems, organisations and persons, which found expression in declarations, party exclusion procedures and resolutions on incompatibility.

The »New Eastern Policy«

The clear demarcation of social democrats from communism boosted the credibility of and confidence in the SPD's foreign and Germany policy. This Eastern and détente policy was to enter the history books as the »new Eastern policy« (Ostpolitik) and is inextricably linked with Brandt's chancellorship. It supplemented the Western policy and Western orientation of the Federal Republic shaped by Adenauer. The basic principle of the Eastern and détente policy was the conviction »that the key to loosening up was the Soviet Union« (Potthoff/ Miller 2002: 230).

The premise of Ostpolitik, besides the demarcation from communism, was military balance between East and West – a point that later became a bone of contention, in particular at the end of the 1970s and during the chancellorship of Helmut Schmidt. Military rearmament gave rise to the new peace movements.

The goal of Ostpolitik was a framework for peace in Europe. It was supposed to be preceded by a European security system and, as an important milestone along the way, the question of Germany's division. In the meantime agreements had to be reached with the Eastern neighbours. Brandt thus continued in foreign policy what he had started in the Grand Coalition. He focused on understanding and balance, transformation through rapprochement and ousted the traditional conservative »politics of strength« in Ostpolitik.

One of the first steps was to take up direct talks with the neighbour, including not least the first talks at the highest level between the two German states: Willy Brandt and Willi Stoph, chairman of the DDR Ministerial Council, met in March 1970 in Erfurt and in May 1970 in Kassel. An agreement was reached with the USSR on mutual renunciation of the use of force and the Moscow and Warsaw treaties signed. This was followed by the Four-Power Agreement and the Basic Treaty with the DDR.

*Goal: Framework for
peace in Europe*

»Historic act«

Eastern and détente policy was a »historic act« (Potthoff/Miller 2002: 231). And in the event, the treaties led to clear progress in keeping the peace and understanding between East and West. They secured the status of West Berlin. Travel from West to East and occasionally from East to West became possible again. Dialogue with the DDR made the division of the country more bearable for the people living on both sides. Furthermore, in the Eastern treaties the Federal Republic recognised the borders and the DDR itself.

*Brandt's »Kniefall«
(genueflektion)
in 1970*

The reconciliation with the East took place not only at the level of diplomacy and treaties but also in the political climate. The Germany represented by former exiles and resistance fighters took responsibility for the atrocities of National Socialist Germany and asked for forgiveness. A symbol of this attitude was Willy Brandt's genuflection before the memorial to the heroes of the Warsaw Ghetto in December 1970.

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(ed.) (2010), *Durfte
Brandt knien? Der
Kniefall in Warschau
und der deutsch-
polnische Vertrag...*
Verlag J.H.W. Dietz
Nachf., Bonn, pp.
218–224.*

*Helga Grebing/Gre-
gor Schöllgen/Hein-
rich August Winkler
(eds) (2005), *Willy
Brandt. Ein Volk der
guten Nachbarn, ...
1966–1974, Berliner
ed., vol. 6, Verlag
J.H.W. Dietz Nachf.,
Bonn.**

The Federal Republic gained international influence, recognition, trust and ultimately also the ability to act with the new Ostpolitik. The award of the Nobel Peace Prize to Willy Brandt in October 1971 represented particular recognition. Brandt, who since his time in exile had coined the term the »other Germany«, became a symbol of a new, modern, peaceful and tolerant Germany. The fulfilment of Weimar's social democratic dream, the linking of the republican and parliamentary state and living democracy in society seemed achievable.

The international approval of this policy was reflected only to a limited extent in the Federal Republic. In particular for the CDU/CSU and the conservative camp in general Brandt's recognition policy meant selling out German interests, although it merely accepted the realities of the aftermath of the Second World War. However, there was also individual opposition within the FDP and the SPD. There were even resignations from the parliamentary party and defections to the CDU/CSU so that the social-liberal coalition's majority became somewhat tenuous. The Union tried to exploit this situation in April 1972. It moved a vote of no-confidence and put up Rainer Barzel against Willy Brandt as candidate for chancellor. Brandt won the vote unexpectedly, however, by two votes.

The celebrations were short-lived, however. After the loss of another MP to the CSU the opposition and the government were in deadlock. Neither had the necessary majority for the chancellor and so new elections were agreed.

The Bundestag election of 1972, due to the political controversies and tensions, became »a kind of plebiscite on the policy of understanding, balance and peace and on the charismatic Nobel Peace Prize winner Willy Brandt« (Potthoff/Miller 2002: 33). The mobilisation was unprecedentedly high – turnout was more than 91 per cent – and the Social Democrats with their »Vote Willy!« campaign swept to their best result in a Bundestag election.

With 45.8 per cent of the votes the SPD was the strongest party in the Federal Republic for the first time. The biggest vote increases were among social groups who were also the focus of domestic and social policy reforms: young people, women and workers. Not least Willy Brandt's integrative effect opened up new voter milieus within the new middle classes, protest movements and churches.

Even the FDP improved its standing, so that the social-liberal coalition, with the re-election of Willy Brandt as chancellor on 14 December 1972, could continue on a solid footing. The combination of a progressive, liberal middle class and labour movement – referred to as society's »new centre« – worked.

The Change from Brandt to Schmidt

Brandt's second chancellorship began with numerous political problems and crises that harmed Brandt's reputation and support. Parliamentary party chairman Herbert Wehner spoke rather dismissively of Brandt on a visit to Moscow, but Brandt shied away from open conflict. A second issue was the affair concerning vote buying in Brandt's vote of confidence in 1972. Then came the economic problems and social consequences: the first »oil price shock« in 1973 and the months-long strike by air traffic controllers. On top of that came the strike and wage settlement in the public sector in 1974, which raised wages and salaries by around 11 per cent and – unlike today – was well above productivity, leading to cost increases. Finally, the government's showpiece policy – Eastern and

Détente policy – suffered setbacks. Thus the image arose of a chancellor who was unable to assert himself. Politically weakened, Brandt was then confronted by the Guillaume affair, which brought an end to his chancellorship.

Herbert Wehner (1906–1990) was a member of the KPD from 1927 to 1942, joining the SPD in 1946. From 1966 to 1969 he was Minister for All-German Issues and chairman of the SPD parliamentary party from 1969 to 1983.

1972: »Vote Willy«

*The strongest party
with 45.8%*

Further reading:
*Christoph Meyer
(2006), Herbert
Wehner, Biographie,
Munich.*

Günter Guillaume worked in the Chancellor's Office and from 1972 was a close colleague of Brandt as personal aide. Above all, however, he was a spy, an officer on special deployment of the DDR's Ministry of State Security. The biggest case of espionage in the history of the Federal Republic was born. Even though Brandt bore no individual guilt he was unable to remain in office and on 6 May 1974 announced his resignation. The need for it was not without controversy – in particular because the Office for the Protection of the Constitution had played an inglorious role in the affair. The then president of the Office for the Protection of the Constitution Günther Nollau and Interior Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher had urged Brandt to keep him in his post under covert surveillance, even though there was already justified suspicion about him. The chancellor was thus used almost as a pawn in the investigation.

1974: Helmut Schmidt elected as chancellor

There were no new elections. Helmut Schmidt, the Finance Minister, was elected as chancellor by the parliamentary parties of the SPD and the FDP on 16 May 1974 and succeeded Brandt. Brandt remained party chairman, however, and in 1976 became president of the Socialist International.

Helmut Schmidt (*1918) was the second Social Democratic chancellor from 1974 to 1982. He served as an officer in the Second World War, was a British prisoner of war and studied economics after the war. Schmidt joined the SPD in 1945. Since 1983 he has been co-editor of the weekly newspaper *Die Zeit*.

Economically, Schmidt's chancellorship started poorly. Growth rates were low and only recovered from 1976. Inflation and unemployment rose. In order to avoid the looming recession, Schmidt focused on budgetary consolidation and attempts to boost the economy. In his cabinet, Helmut Schmidt trusted more in pragmatists from the party and the trade unions, spanning the political spectrum, such as Hans Apel and Hans Matthöfer.

Sober crisis management

In his new office Helmut Schmidt rapidly achieved recognition. He led a task-oriented, sober coalition based on crisis management in troubled times. This was also demonstrated in the 1976 Bundestag election, the first with Helmut Schmidt as lead candidate. Although the SPD fell behind the Union again, the SPD and the FDP were just able to hang on to their majority.

Helmut Schmidt's second term of office from 1976 was also characterised by continuity. It was able to ameliorate the economic crisis. Although the Union under Franz Josef Strauss became more confrontational the coalition was also able to implement its Germany and Eastern policy.

Schmidt was confronted by the biggest challenge of his term of office in the so-called »German autumn« of 1977. The terrorism of the »Red Army Faction« (RAF) was intensifying. This included the kidnapping and liberation of the Lufthansa plane »Landshut«, the kidnapping and murder of the president of BDA and BDI Hanns Martin Schleyer and the collective suicide of the first generation of the RAF in Stammheim. It was now the Social Democrats, long portrayed as »journeymen without a fatherland« and subversives, who, under the leadership of Helmut Schmidt, successfully defended the rule of law and the state monopoly on violence, even though within the party many of the measures taken against terrorism were highly controversial.

In Europe, Franco-German relations achieved a new level. Helmut Schmidt and the French president Giscard d'Estaing worked closely together and in particular determined the direction of Europe's economic policy. With the world economic summits they created international forums for economic policy coordination. Another contribution to the internationalisation of politics and the assertion of human rights took place within the framework of the OSCE Final Act at the Helsinki conference on 1 August 1975, in which the United States and Europe reached agreement with the Soviet Union, and with it the DDR, on basic political and social rights.

The policy of military balance between East and West was confronted by a changed situation. Worldwide after the end of the Vietnam War and the defeat of the United States the balance of power was shifting considerably. The Soviet Union and China felt that things were moving in their favour. The Middle East conflict also smouldered after the Yom Kippur War between Israel and Egypt, as well as other Arab states. The Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan and the USSR's armament with SS-20 missiles also illustrated the shift in power.

Helmut Schmidt favoured Western rearmament in the event that negotiations with the Soviet Union failed, if this was the only way of achieving a balance of power. This position met with much criticism, not only across the party, but

The »German autumn« of 1977

Franco-German relations at a new level

NATO's double-track decision

also from chairman of the parliamentary party Wehner and party chairman Brandt. At the Berlin party congress in 1979, accordingly, there was a proposal to define the position of the SPD with regard to NATO's double-track decision. In the event, Schmidt prevailed at the party congress. In the country, however, this conflict had not been resolved, as the demonstrations in Bonn's Hofgarten later showed.

A heated debate arose in another area of social conflict, which was also discussed at the 1979 party congress. Nuclear policy was still perceived by some in the party as an important part of energy policy. Both nuclear policy and rearmament showed that Social Democrats had ceased to be able to lead the debate and act as an integrative force on the political left. The Bundestag election of 1980 nevertheless brought about a slight recovery for the coalition thanks to the chancellor's incumbent advantage and presumably also the polarising opposing candidate Franz Josef Strauss (CSU). The SPD and the FDP improved their results slightly and the SPD again provided the chancellor in the person of Helmut Schmidt.

The Party Changes

Among Social Democrats, who once more surpassed the symbolic figure of 1 million members in the 1970s, diversity and complexity increased in three respects.

More diverse membership

First, with regard to the members, their social backgrounds and biographies were more academic and their values markedly post-materialist. The large increase in membership also included many young people, so that there were also generational conflicts.

Founding of consortia

Secondly, organisationally so-called Arbeitsgemeinschaften (working groups) were set up to address the issues and interests of certain social groups. The Jusos, who since their turn to the left in 1969 had operated almost as an »autonomous militant association« (Grebing 2007: 183), were joined in 1972 by the Working Group of Social Democratic Women (ASF), which was oriented towards equality issues.

The SPD took a significant step with regard to equality policy in Münster in 1988 with the introduction of **gender quotas**. Committees and delegations now have to comprise at least 40 per cent of each gender.

In 1973, the Working Group for Workers' Issues (AFA) was established. It was organised, besides within the framework of territorial party structures, also in operational groups and was intended to contribute to the representation of workers' interests. This establishment illustrated the increased heterogeneity of the former workers' party particularly sharply. Further working groups followed for the self-employed, lawyers, doctors and educational issues.

Thirdly, the different wings of the party developed along programmatic lines, with a »Leverkusen circle« on the left, the »canal workers« on the right and the strongly centrist »Godesberg wing«. Under its long-standing secretary general Peter Glotz the party became professionalised in the 1980s with regard to party organisation and technical consultation.²³

The character of social democracy had changed to reflect social modernisation. In a way, this transformation was »diffuse«, however (Grebing 2007: 178). Clearly, the time of the exclusively worker and former class party was over. The party was increasingly characterised by »social movements, institutions and organisations along the lines of the labour movement ... for which the ideas of the labour movement were still valid but no longer comprised a labour movement« (Grebing 2007: 178).

The **Socialist International** (SI) is a global association of socialist, social democratic and workers' parties with its headquarters in London. Its common goal is democratic socialism. The Socialist International was refounded in 1951 and regards itself as in the tradition of the Second International, which was founded in 1889 in Paris and collapsed in 1914.

In its declaration of principles the Socialist International states: »Socialists strive for a peaceful world in freedom, for a world that prohibits the exploitation and subjugation of people by other people and populations by other populations, for a world in which the development of individual personality is a condition for the fruitful development of humanity as a whole« (Socialist International, Declaration of Principles, cited in Dowe/Klotzbach 2004: 275).

► www.socialistinternational.org

An authoritarian style of leadership was not compatible with the new diversity. Willy Brandt, as party chairman, thus adopted a moderating style and discursive forms of leadership that strove to integrate and appreciate the contribution of all participants and regarded policy disagreements as useful in the process of opinion forming, as long as they took place with the party.

This style was also in keeping with the SPD's self-image as a members' party. Brandt was clear, however, that every policy debate must ulti-

*Increased
polarisation*

*Brandt presides as
party chairman*

²³ The founding of the Historical Committee of the SPD party executive is also due to Glotz. He encouraged it in 1981 and in 1982 it met for the first time under first chair Susanne Miller; today Bernd Faulenbach is the chair.

mately lead to a decision that had to be supported by the majority. Thanks to his integrative effect and credibility Brandt was able to keep together the different groups and circles within social democracy, both nationally in the SPD and internationally in the Socialist International (SI). He had become a »figure of integration and identification beyond lines of conflict« (Münkel 2000: 55), despite many criticisms and tensions within the Social Democratic leadership and from Herbert Wehner and Helmut Schmidt, who at that time formed the Social Democratic troika with Willy Brandt.

The Democratic State as Guarantor of More Freedom

One programmatic formula of the time was the Social Democrats' »Model Germany«. Model Germany was focused on a just distribution of social wealth and aimed at reducing inequalities. The role of the state within this framework was to plan and intervene and to direct the overall economy. The social concerns and interests of workers were thus to be taken into consideration on the basis of social partnership, just as were the requirements for investment and profit on the enterprise side. The triangle of state, trade unions and employers' organisations were at the centre of political coordination.

For Social Democrats the further democratic interpenetration of society, economy and state was another far-reaching and important aspect. Legislation on codetermination, one of the key pillars of social-liberal reform projects and the direct political linking of the trade unions and the party, however, led to frequent conflicts with the FDP. The ideas of the SPD on these issues, as well as with regard to questions of redistribution, were more far-reaching than those of the FDP. The FDP developed increasingly into a party representing the interests of capital.

The SPD and the trade unions also linked up, besides on codetermination and a productivity-oriented wage policy, on a number of key reform projects. They included in particular the reduction of working time (35-hour week) and the humanisation of the world of work. In periods of economic recession the limits of Model Germany were clearly revealed. In terms of political ideals the awakening of democratisation and the further expansion of social freedoms now came up against a »conservatism laced with neoliberalism« (Grebing 2007: 181), which put the brakes on, where it could, and increasingly dominated the Union, the FDP and society.

»Model Germany«

*Joint projects
between the SPD
and the trade unions*

Because of falling growth rates and rising unemployment the SPD could no longer satisfy the interests of its core electorate, the working class, namely full employment, the expansion of social security and productivity-oriented wage development.

The End of the »Social-Liberal Era«

Anyway, the growth and industry orientation supported in particular by the SPD together with the trade unions suffered a setback: the thesis of finite resources and the »limits of growth«, as described by the influential first report of the Club of Rome,²⁴ led to an identity crisis among Social Democrats. In contrast to the social question the SPD was unable to represent the environmental question. Its social significance was demonstrated by the founding and rapid establishment of the Green Party. Parts of the new social movements with peace, environmental, feminist and democratic concerns had already turned away from social democracy.

A transformation was also under way in coalition partner the FDP. The differences between the SPD and the FDP on economic and financial policy widened. Helmut Schmidt tried to stabilise the government with a cabinet reshuffle in April 1982. Finance minister Hans Matthöfer took over as Minister for Post and Telecommunications. The new finance minister was Manfred Lahnstein, Heinz Westphal became Minister of Labour and Social Affairs and Anke Fuchs – now honorary chair of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung – became Minister of Young People, the Family and Health.

With the »Lambsdorff paper« it became clear, however, that the FDP had departed from its former social-liberal orientation, as represented in the Freiburg Theses, and had opened itself up to the emerging neoliberalism. In September 1982, the FDP terminated the coalition with the SPD and thus sealed the end of the »social-liberal era«. The FDP ministers resigned and in October a constructive vote of no-confidence followed, in which Helmut Kohl prevailed over Helmut Schmidt.

From now on, the FDP looked towards the CDU at the national level. At the Bundestag election of 1983 a strengthened CDU (48.8 per cent plus 4.3 percentage points) and a weakened FDP (7 per cent minus 3.6 percentage points) achieved a

»Limits of growth«

*1982: The FDP
leaves the coalition*

*1983: The Greens in
the Bundestag for
the first time*

24 The Club of Rome is a group of scientists and experts oriented towards environmental sustainability.

majority. The SPD lost 4.7 percentage points and slipped under the 40 per cent mark to 38.2 per cent. The face of Parliament was changed in another way, too, however: the Greens entered the Bundestag for the first time.

Programmatic, Strategic and Personnel Renewal in the 1980s

Besides running out of ideas the SPD also found it harder to form government majorities. The old three-party system²⁵ with the two large parliamentary parties of the SPD and the CDU/CSU, together with the FDP, with its ability to »tip the scales« in an election, had outlived itself and in its place two political camps were established. While conservatives and liberals both historically and in the government of the time were familiar with one another the composition of the left-wing camp had changed.

The post-materialist and radical democratic Greens motivated by peace and the environment were supported by new social movements that had not been able to find a home in the SPD because of its traditional growth model, its energy policy and its hierarchically oriented political style.

At the same time, the two parties were linked by their desire for social democratisation, the precedence of democracy over capitalist market power and the unconditional need for an extensive welfare state and gender equality, as well as, later on, a critical approach to nuclear power and military armament on the part of the SPD.

Over time the two parties came closer together: the first experiences of tolerance and coalition were in Hesse under Holger Börner and in the SPD the left-alternative demands of Erhard Eppler concerning the environmental restructuring of the industrial society and Peter von Oertzen's concerning the comprehensive democratisation of the economy and society found increasing support.

Holger Börner (1931–2006) was a skilled concrete worker. From 1976 to 1987 he was premier of Hesse and led the first red-green government at state level. From 1987 to 2003 Börner was chairman of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung.

Erhard Eppler (*1926) is a teacher by training. From 1968 to 1974 he was Minister for Economic Cooperation and from 1975 to 1991 chairman of the SPD's Basic Values Commission.

²⁵ Or four-party system if one takes the CDU and the CSU individually.

From three-party system to two political camps

Hesse: first experiences with the Greens

The SPD chose another strategy under Johannes Rau²⁶ in North Rhine-Westphalia. In this state, that is heavily reliant on industry and mining, the party achieved an absolute majority in the state elections in 1985. After this success Rau also stood as candidate for chancellor. The Bundestag election of 1987 was lost, however. The SPD still lacked the ability to link up with the new social movements and at that time Rau was not in a position to form new social and party alliances with the Greens.

NRW: absolute majority

Heidemarie Wieczorek-Zeul (*1942) is a teacher by training. From 1974 to 1977 she was national chair of Jusos and from 1998 to 2009 Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development.

Björn Engholm (*1939) studied political science and worked as a lecturer in youth and adult education. From 1988 to 1993 he was premier of the state of Schleswig-Holstein and from 1991 to 1993 party chairman of the SPD.

Willy Brandt was followed as party chairman by Hans-Jochen Vogel, who also headed the parliamentary party. At the personal level the generation of »Brandt's grandchildren« came to the fore: Björn Engholm, Gerhard Schröder, Rudolf Scharping, Heidemarie Wieczorek-Zeul and Oskar Lafontaine.²⁷ Hopes rested particularly on the latter: in 1990 he was candidate for chancellor.

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In its policy programme the Social Democrats showed their receptiveness to society's changing values and discourses. This was demonstrated by the **Berlin Basic Programme** of 1989. The new basic programme set out to construe the issues of the time in a social democratic way. It was preceded by the discussions of the Basic Values Commission²⁸ on updating the Godesberg Programme from the beginning of the 1970s, the medium-term action programme »Orientation Framework '85« adopted in 1975 and the unsuccessful »Irsee draft« of a new basic programme.

The Berlin Programme tried to build bridges between the various milieus close to social democracy, which had become ever more volatile and finally no longer corresponded to the comparatively rigid structures of the nineteenth century. The programme was a further development of the Godesberg Programme and was still based on the three basic values of freedom, justice and solidarity. It took more account of the economic structure of society, however. Democratic social-

Attempt to build bridges

26 See p. 121.

27 See Schröder: p. 119, Scharping: p. 118, Lafontaine: p. 115.

28 The Basic Values Commission of the Executive of the SPD was set up in 1973 by Willy Brandt to look »beyond the present«. Its first chairman was Erhard Eppler; currently, it is led by Julian Nida-Rümelin.

ism was also maintained: »Realising these basic values and achieving democracy is the permanent task of democratic socialism« (Berlin Programme 1989, cited after Dowe/Klotzbach 2004: 358).

*Opening up to
ecological issues*

A change could be discerned in political attitudes to questions of growth and progress, however. The Social Democrats took up the environmental question in its deliberations on the basic programme and took a critical and differentiated stance. It called for an environmental restructuring of industrial society and linked economic growth and its view of progress to qualitative criteria, such as quality of life. The programme determined the social democratic view of people in accordance with their dignity and rationality and clearly referred to human rights, to whose realisation social democracy was committed. It proclaimed a new culture of co-existence, opened up the notion of labour beyond wage labour to include all socially useful activities and advocated a qualitative restructuring of the welfare state, not its curtailment. The notion of »democracy as a form of life« is interpreted with regard to state and society and in particular economic democracy.

The SPD repositioned itself once more as a left-leaning broad-based party seeking to build a broad reform alliance of old and new social movements in order to realise its radical reforming basic programme.

*A lot of room:
international issues*

The Berlin Programme also addressed international issues (global democratisation, deepening of European integration, overcoming of North-South conflict and armament). At the same time, it was precisely these sections whose social context was to change massively and rapidly after the Programme was adopted in 1989 on the eve of German unification. The attitude of the Social Democrats to the increasingly wavering DDR was split at that time.

Some members of the party around Lafontaine, Bahr and Schröder called, for different reasons, for two German states to continue and focused on democratisation of the DDR. They were worried that a united Germany, charged with German nationalism, could develop in opposition to European integration. For them, social justice and equal life chances were more important than national considerations.

The other segment of the party around Brandt, Rau and Eppler saw no possibility of the DDR becoming legitimate in the eyes of its population and thus considered unification to form one German state as inevitable. Regardless of the inconsistency of the initial approach to German unification one thing was clear: the social democratic policy of détente had borne fruit.

What does this mean for social democracy?

- Internally, the Social Democrats in the social-liberal era were able to implement many democratic and social reforms for the benefit of individual freedom and social mobility.
- In foreign policy and in dealings with the DDR its new Eastern policy based on peace, détente and understanding proved itself.
- The SPD's development as a broad-based party was demonstrated by its membership structure and level. The SPD achieved 1 million members for the first time and it was able to build bridges with various social milieus.
- In policy terms, the Social Democrats were affected by the transformation in notions of growth and progress and by the peace, environmental, women's and democracy movements within and outside the party.

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8. MODERN SOCIAL DEMOCRACY: BETWEEN DISILLUSION AND RENEWAL (1990–2013)

In this chapter

- the unification of the Western SPD and the newly founded Eastern SPD is described;
- the path of social democracy back into government from 1998 is presented;
- the milestones and characteristics of the red-green government coalition (1998–2005) and the Grand Coalition (2005–2009) are pointed out;
- besides an analysis of the Bundestag election of 2009 we look at the renewal of social democracy.

*1998: return to
government*

The path of social democracy back into government was long and difficult. Its return to national government in 1998 was not lacking in controversy despite all the successes. One reason for this was, not least, the rapidly changing political context.

Social context

After the end of the East-West conflict globalisation accelerated. Capital internationalised itself much faster than politics. German unification was an economic challenge. Demographic change became ever more striking. After the fall of the Iron Curtain and the disappearance of the »alternative system« neoliberal discourse shaped the political debate more and more. The welfare state, a core social democratic project, came under pressure in this context both economically and in the political debate.

Chapter 8: 1990–2013

7 Oct. 1989

Founding of the Social Democratic Party in the DDR (SDP)

22–25 Feb. 1990

Adoption of the SPD's Leipzig Programme in the DDR

19 May 1993

Heide Simonis becomes the first woman state premier

27 Oct. 1998

Gerhard Schröder becomes chancellor of the red-green coalition

1989

1990

1993

1998

Contemporary events: German unification, further European integration, global economic and financial market crisis

German Unification

In 1989/90 the SPD, like all other parties, was surprised by the escalating events. It discussed different variants of the future state organisation of Germany, ranging from the unification of the two states to close cooperation.

*Bundestag election
campaign 1990*

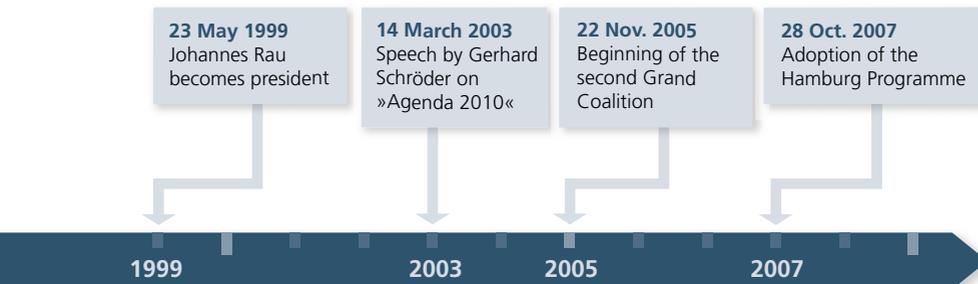
Oskar Lafontaine (*1943) is a physics graduate. From 1985 to 1998 he was premier of Saarland, in 1990 SPD candidate for chancellor and from 1995 to 1999 SPD chairman. In 1999 as SPD chair and finance minister he resigned from Schröder's first cabinet. In 2005 he became a member of the WASG party and from 2007 to 2010 he was chairman of »Die Linke«.

In contrast to the election campaign of the conservatives, who put the 1990 Bundestag election primarily in the context of unification and focused on Helmut Kohl's incumbency advantage, the SPD campaign, under the leadership of candidate Oskar Lafontaine, had no national colouring.

The SPD is oriented towards a united Europe. It regarded the unification of the two German states as an important step in its development. The party had already outlined this in the »new Eastern policy«. German unification alone was thus not the overriding goal.

SPD: United Europe!

In particular Oskar Lafontaine strongly advocated a transnational perspective. For him, this made social justice achievable. With a view to possible unification this meant that if equal living standards and social freedoms can be realised east and west in a united German context then German unification should be favoured. The nation as such had no special value. Freedom and justice, from this standpoint, did not necessarily go hand in hand with the nation. Rather for Lafontaine the latter resulted from the former.



*»Flourishing
landscapes«?*

A central controversy in connection with German unification was its financing. The Union hoped to finance it through the social insurance funds. It also relied on an economic upturn – the famous »flourishing landscapes«. With this upswing unification would partly support itself. The Social Democrats, by contrast, were convinced that additional resources would be needed. In order to be able to provide equal living standards tax rises were inevitable. In fact, the Kohl government introduced a solidarity surcharge in 1991.

*1990: the replace-
ment of Kohl fails*

But people seemed to overlook such alleged »matters of detail« in the euphoria over unification. Thus the CDU clearly won the 1990 Bundestag election with 43.8 per cent of the votes. The SPD got 33.5 per cent. The SPD with its leading candidate Oskar Lafontaine, who was wounded in a knife attack during the election campaign, was thus unable to replace Helmut Kohl. The coalition comprising the CDU/CSU and the FDP could therefore continue its work.

*PDS: competition
from the left*

The first all-German election presented the SPD with a challenge that still confronts it today: the unprecedentedly strong competition from the left posed by the then PDS, now Die Linke.

While the SPD in western Germany achieved 35.7 per cent, in eastern Germany it managed only 24.3 per cent. The successor to the SED, the PDS, in western Germany did not rise above the status of splinter party, with 0.3 per cent, while in eastern Germany its 11.1 per cent made it the fourth largest party, even topping the Greens. The old social democratic bastions, such as Saxony and Thüringen, no longer existed and the »total de-social democratisation« (Grebing 2007: 236) in the DDR proved sustainable.

Founding of the East German SDP and Later Unification with the SPD

*1989: founding
of the SDP*

In the break-up and upheaval of the final phase of the DDR the Social Democratic Party in the DDR (SDP) was founded on 7 October 1989 (bravely on the 40th anniversary of the DDR). The founding as a party and thus in competition with the SED distinguished the SDP from other opposition groups. For the first time since the forced unification of the SPD and the KPD to form the SED an independent social democratic party emerged in eastern Germany. As in the peaceful revolution overall the church played an important role as shelter.

The SDP and later the SPD accepted no former SED members and did not benefit from SED property. The clear demarcation of the SDP from the SED and its members is an important factor in the lasting competition between the SPD and the PDS and the Left Party (Die Linke). It can be explained from the life histories of Social Democrats who had been persecuted in the Soviet Occupation Zone and in the DDR. With a glance at social experiences in the DDR this demarcation was ultimately also an expression of the labour movement's democratic precept.

Social democracy had to be refounded in the DDR. The CDU and the FDP, by contrast, united with their sister parties in the east. They thus took over their assets, members and organisational structures, although the block parties in the DDR had supported the system.

In 1989, even the young SDP did not expect that unification of the two German states would take place immediately. It thought that there would be permanent coexistence which it considered not unjustified, as a consequence of the National Socialist period. Accordingly, it sought room to reform in the DDR and in 1990, already under the SPD name, described its aim as being »an environmentally oriented social democracy« in its manifesto, the **Leipzig Programme**. It wanted comprehensive social democratisation. It located itself, not uncontroversially because of the experience of »socialism« in the DDR, ultimately in a tradition of democratic socialism, which it did not want to cede to the SED's successor party, the PDS, and saw itself as linked to international social democracy. On 28 November 1989 Helmut Kohl presented his »Ten-point Plan«, a roadmap for state unification. German unity was now within the bounds of possibility. The SDP now – like the SPD – advocated a gradual unification.

The milieu that sustained the SDP was different from that of the western German SPD. While in the west workers from the private sector and white-collar workers and civil servants predominated, the SDP was based on members from the »left alternative intellectual milieu of the DDR« (Grebing 2007: 236), above all scientists, people in technical occupations and pastors. To the latter group belonged two influential founding fathers of the SDP: Martin Gutzeit and Markus Meckel.

The SDP was less of a members'

Martin Gutzeit (*1952) and **Markus Meckel** (*1952) studied theology and were co-founders of the SDP. Meckel was foreign minister of the DDR in 1990 in the cabinet of Lothar de Maizière and from 1990 to 2009 a member of the German Bundestag. Gutzeit today works as Berlin state commissioner for the Stasi Archives.

*Demarcation from
the SED*

*1990: the SPD's
Leipzig Programme
in the DDR*

*Comparing the
milieus of the SPD in
eastern and western
Germany*

party than the SPD and in fact the membership figures of the eastern German SPD state associations even 20 years after unification are still much smaller, another indication of the abovementioned »de-social democratisation« of the social milieu.

In January 1990 the SDP renamed itself the SPD. In 1990 it was part of the final DDR government under Christian Democratic Lothar de Maizière and on 26 September 1990 united with the western German SPD. Its then chairman was Wolfgang Thierse.

Wolfgang Thierse (*1943) was President of the German Bundestag from 1998 to 2005 and the first former citizen of the DDR to hold this second highest office of the Federal Republic of Germany. Thierse was chairman of the SPD in the DDR in 1990 and from the unification of the eastern and western SPD to 2005 was deputy party chairman and from 1991 to 2009 chairman of the Basic Values Commission. Thierse is a graduate in German and cultural studies.

The Way Back into Government (1990–1998)

Both in the first all-German election in 1990 and the next Bundestag election in 1994 the Social Democrats were unable to defeat the Union. Although in 1994 they recovered slightly, they remained behind the Union on 36.4 per cent. The SPD's leading candidate was party chairman Rudolf Scharping. He was followed as party chairman in 1993 by Johannes Rau, who stepped in when Björn Engholm resigned in the wake of the Barschel affair.

What was interesting about Scharping's election was the procedure: he was able to win through in the up till then sole membership consultation against Gerhard Schröder and Heidemarie Wieczorek-Zeul.

Rudolf Scharping (*1947) was premier of Rhineland-Palatinate from 1991 to 1994, Federal Defence Minister from 1998 to 2002 and from 1993 to 1995 SPD chairman. Scharping stood as SPD candidate for chancellor in 1994. He graduated in political science.

The election debates in 1994 mainly concentrated on reducing mass unemployment, again on the question of financing unification, the future of the welfare state and the environmental restructuring of industrial society. Two public debates in the years preceding the election led to controversies among Social Democrats and its hinterland: the question of foreign deployment of the German army under a UN mandate and the restriction of the right of asylum. The SPD finally decided on both in the so-called »Petersberg reversal« in 1992.

The 1994 election was not contested by leading candidate Scharping alone. Instead, for the second time a social democratic troika had formed, with Gerhard Schröder and Oskar Lafontaine alongside Rudolf Scharping. This political marriage of convenience was only of short duration, however. At the Mannheim party congress in 1995 the break was blatantly apparent. During the congress Oskar Lafontaine declared his candidacy after a stirring speech directed against former chairman Scharping and was able to win the party leadership.

As a consequence, Lafontaine led the SPD in a confrontational manner to defeat and a CDU-FDP government. The SPD after election successes in the federal states had significant momentum. Among others, in 1993 in Schleswig-Holstein Heide Simonis became the first woman premier of a German *Land*. In the run-up to the 1998 election the SPD with its majority in the Bundesrat was able to prevent much legislation planned by the CDU-FDP coalition.

The party had also already begun to integrate many target groups and interests with its working group model. A prominent example was AG 60 Plus, founded in 1994.

1998: The Transformation Works

On 27 September 1998 the stage was set: the SPD won the Bundestag election. In the election campaign it had brought core social democratic concerns back into focus, especially combating unemployment and defending the achievements of the welfare state, such as continued payment of wages in the event of illness.

With its leading candidate Gerhard Schröder the SPD managed to defeat Helmut Kohl. It received 40.9 per cent of the vote, the Union 35.1 per cent. Thus the SPD became the strongest force in the Bundestag, for only the second time in the history of the Federal Republic after 1972.

1998: Gerhard Schröder becomes chancellor

Gerhard Schröder (*1944) was the third Social Democrat chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, from 1998 to 2005. From 1990 to 1998 he was premier of Lower Saxony and from 1999 to 2004 party chairman. Schröder is a lawyer.

The election slogan was »work, innovation and justice«. Not least with the leading duo Gerhard Schröder and Oskar Lafontaine, who personified the party programme, the SPD pulled off a balancing act between different voter milieus.

The Greens' result of 6.7 per cent was enough for a red-green federal government. Thus for the first time one government coalition was completely replaced by the next. After 16 years in opposition the SPD was once more in the chancellery. The Greens for the first time held government office at the federal level. The coalition agreement was entitled: »Awakening and renewal – Germany's path into the twenty-first century«.

Gerhard Schröder, because of his talent for symbolic evocation, rapidly became known as the »media chancellor«. Schröder's rise was also accomplished due to his economic competence and electoral success in Lower Saxony, long governed by the CDU. Joschka Fischer of Bündnis 90/Die Grünen became foreign minister and vice chancellor.

The third key figure in the government was Oskar Lafontaine. He was finance minister and chairman of the SPD. Only a few months later, however, Lafontaine surprisingly resigned from both offices in March 1999. His resignation was preceded by economic and financial policy arguments with Gerhard Schröder. In the same year Schröder followed Lafontaine as party chairman and former Hesse premier Hans Eichel became finance minister.

The resignation of Lafontaine, who had been a leading figure on the left wing of the party, changed the balance of power between the two wings of the SPD. The conservative wing of the party, which met in the »Seeheim circle«, benefited from this. In 1998 the »Berlin Network« re-emerged, initially a generational alliance of young MPs who positioned themselves as independent and non-ideological. The party left organised itself in the parliamentary party in the »Parliamentary Left«.

Red-Green Government Policy – Joint Projects and New Challenges

The period of red-green government from 1998 to 2005 was not lacking in achievements. In particular on the international front, peace and security policy issues predominated. The red-green government broke with previous post-war German policy. For the first time a German government deployed the German army abroad – in Kosovo in 1999 – a decision that was taken in the context of an international transformation in the concept of security reaching beyond Germany.

This transformation was characterised by a stronger focus on the protection of individuals, while the inviolability of the state in the case of serious human rights violations receded. The second military conflict – against the Taliban regime in Afghanistan – followed in the wake of the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, which included the World Trade Center. The changed international security situation had domestic ramifications. Interior Minister Otto Schily (SPD, formerly Greens) pushed through comprehensive and controversial »anti-terrorist laws« in the Bundestag.

The later war of the United States and its »coalition of the willing« against Saddam Hussein’s Iraq was rejected by the red-green government in alliance with France and Russia. This decision also had a strong influence on its re-election in 2002.

The red-green government pushed through two radical social-policy reforms that took account of social diversity: it recognised the fact that Germany had become a

country of immigration and reformed the law on citizenship. It also created a legal framework for same-sex partnerships. Johannes Rau, who was elected the second Social Democratic president in 1999, also focused on an integrative course, based on acceptance and tolerance.

Radical social-policy reforms

Johannes Rau (1931–2006) was the second Social Democratic president of the Federal Republic, from 1999 to 2004. From 1978 to 1998 he was premier of North Rhine Westphalia. In 1987 Rau stood as SPD candidate for chancellor and in 1993 became interim party chairman. Rau was a publisher and editor by profession.

Year	Area	Legislation/Project
1999	Preventive welfare state	Welfare state programme
1999/ 2000	Energy/environment	Eco-tax, renewable energy law (including 100,000 roofs programme) phasing out of nuclear energy
2000/ 2004	Integration policy	Reform of the citizenship law, first immigration law
2001	Equality	Law on civil partnership
2001/ 2004	Education	Expansion of the BaföG education grants, whole-day school programme

Figure 11: Selected red-green reforms

Further reading:
*Christoph Egle/
 Tobias Ostheim/
 Reimut Zohlnhöfer
 (eds) (2003), Das rot-
 grüne Projekt. Eine
 Bilanz der Regierung
 Schröder 1998–
 2002, Opladen.*

However, the red-green coalition wanted to modernise more than social policy – many even spoke of a »red-green project« and the economic foundations of »location Germany« were to be renewed and thus tied closely to the welfare state.

Tax cuts

Under the Kohl government the number of unemployed rose from 2.6 million in 1991 to over 4.2 million after reunification. The red-green government promised to reduce unemployment especially by means of a stronger supply-side orientation in economic and fiscal policy.

In 2000 the government adopted a comprehensive income tax reform. The income tax rate fell from 25.9 per cent to 15 per cent, the top rate from 53 to 42 per cent. There were also hopes of an additional economic boost. Reform of corporate taxation was supposed to bring increased competitiveness and more investment.

Ecotax

At the same time, the red-green coalition passed an environmental tax reform that was supposed to boost the environmental restructuring of the industrial society. In particular, the use of mineral oil was taxed more heavily. Together with the phasing out of nuclear power and the promotion of investment in renewable energies, which led to a boom in the branch, the energy transition was introduced.

Goal: stable social contributions

The coalition regarded the welfare state as a key area with regard to strengthening competitiveness and budgetary consolidation. It was to be made more efficient and spending was to be cut. The red-green coalition focused on stabilising – and ideally reducing – social contributions. The previous government had already set out on this path. Low social contributions were supposed to make the »labour factor« cheaper. In connection with a reduction of the tax burden this was intended to increase company competitiveness. At the same time, it was hoped that companies would re-invest their wage savings in new jobs. The coalition renounced the original Keynesian idea of combating unemployment and lack of growth by means of state investment via economic stimulus programmes. The demand-side orientation was replaced by a supply-side orientation with cuts in taxation and social contributions.

Social Democratic Search for Orientation: Cul de Sac of the Third Way?

These priorities were reflected in social democratic policy discussions during this period. In the debate on a possible »third way« an attempt was made to formulate a policy and strategic approach between neoliberalism and »traditional« social democracy. Inspired by President Bill Clinton's »New Democrats« the »third way« debate was shaped by British Prime Minister Tony Blair, whose transformation of the Labour Party into »New Labour« and ensuing electoral success was also a model for Gerhard Schröder.

The two jointly published the »Schröder-Blair paper« in 1999, entitled »The way forward for Europe's Social Democrats«. The core of this impulse was the conviction that globalisation was an inevitable »fact of life« whose basic features could not be changed. Policy must therefore be compatible with an internationally free-moving capital in search of investment opportunities in »global competition between locations«.

These ideas were almost entirely in line with news reporting during this time. They were supported by the majority of academic studies, in particular from economics, which virtually uniformly represented neoclassical – in other words, supply-side oriented – standpoints. Social freedoms, according to this, could be defended or expanded only if the right adaptation strategy was chosen. A key element was the new appreciation of markets. Markets, unlike previously, were no longer regarded as inherently crisis-prone and producing inequality. Rather one was to rely on their innovative power and efficiency.

This also had consequences for the relationship between market and state. The market was to be granted more scope and influence. Market principles were to be extended to large parts of the public and private sectors, for example, through the privatisation of parts of the welfare state and public services. The concept of justice also changed: the social democratic notion of justice was reinterpreted from a more strongly material equality of outcomes to one of equality of opportunity. Social democracy transformed in this way could be described as »market social democracy« (Nachtwey 2009). Many party members and trade unionists regarded this development as a breach of identity.

Policy discussions

1999: »Schröder-Blair paper«

*Relationship
between state and
market*

Further reading:
*Oliver Nachtwey
(2009), Marktso-
zialdemokratie. Die
Transformation von
SPD und Labour
Party, Wiesbaden.*

The »Agenda Policy«

»Agenda 2010«

This market orientation is clearly discernible in the welfare state reforms of the period. They were implemented partly before the well-known Agenda speech of 14 March 2003 and the »Agenda 2010« outlined in it and partly thereafter. The reforms were ideologically interlinked, however.

Riester pension

For example, the regular benefit level of statutory pensions was cut and an additional private, state-subsidised pillar introduced, the so-called »Riester pension«, named after Walter Riester, then Minister of Labour and Social Affairs. Part of retirement arrangements were thus coupled with private provision. Some segments of the SPD had hoped that the private pillar would be added as a bonus to the existing pension. The Riester pension, however, was conceived as a way of offsetting falling pensions. Only in the case of strongly rising financial markets could an overall increase in pension levels be assumed, however. Given the abovementioned orientation towards competitiveness, despite demographic change, social insurance contributions were not to rise. For lower income groups the Riester pension can scarcely be financed because of low wage development.

»Hartz laws«

In labour market policy the coalition passed a number of legislative packages that became known as the »Hartz laws« after Peter Hartz, who headed the Labour Market Commission set up by this government. The Commission identified various barriers to employment: overregulation of the labour market, inefficient intermediation structures and too little stimulus to take up paid employment.

Minijobs

In order to raise the employment rate – that is, the proportion of those in work – mini- and midi-jobs were introduced. These were marginal forms of employment that replaced the old »630 DM jobs«. They were supposed to make first-time entry to the labour market easier and to result in subsequent re-entry to the regular labour market.

In fact, companies often transformed regular jobs subject to statutory social insurance contributions into several mini- and midijobs that were favourable for tax purposes. These jobs often proved to be deadends and not springboards to the primary labour market. Because of the reduction in the number of jobs subject to statutory social insurance contributions there was even a fall in social insurance revenue and the hoped-for contributions to budgetary consolidation fell short.

Better placement of the jobless and an increased incentive to work was promised by restructuring of the Employment Agency, reform of unemployment benefit and the merger of unemployment and social benefits. The duration of the newly introduced Unemployment Benefit I, which as a rule was payable after losing one's job, was generally shorter than the old model. However, it still aimed at matching individuals with employment in keeping with their qualifications.

The then new Arbeitslosengeld II (ALG II – unemployment benefit II), the benefit that emerged from the consolidation of the old unemployment benefit with income support and which is popularly known as »Hartz IV«, had a range of effects. On one hand, it was inclusive. Many of those previously receiving income support who had done poorly when it came to obtaining qualifications and job placement now had new entitlements. On the other hand, ALG II was subject to a list of strict rights and obligations. Besides the level of the benefit there were also criticisms of its sanctions and disclosure requirements. Protests also arose in response to the fact that henceforth it was considered reasonable to expect job seekers to accept work below their level of qualifications and previous economic status.

Evaluations of the effectiveness of the labour market reforms diverge. On one hand, Germany's competitiveness improved massively and went from being the »sick man of Europe« to an economy that even the economic and financial crisis was unable to damage much. In some European countries the labour market reforms are considered exemplary. On the other hand, in particular the below average wage development in Germany, in the context of Germany's one-sided export orientation, reinforced economic imbalances in the Eurozone.

In this case one perception of the reforms – shared in some quarters of the SPD and those close to it – was extremely problematic for the SPD, namely that an SPD-led German government, by establishing a low-wage sector, had devalued labour and had transferred the responsibility for unemployment to the individual instead of seeking economic causes of unemployment and combating them.

The reforms deeply harmed relations between the SPD and the trade unions. The trade unions had lost their social and workplace anchoring since German unification. This was reflected in the lower level of trade union organisation and reduced level of wage agreement coverage, especially in the eastern *Länder*.

ALG II

Evaluation of the reforms

Trade unions and the SPD

*SPD electoral
defeats*

Further reading:

*Christoph Eglel
Reimut Zohlnhöfer
(eds) (2007), Ende
des rot-grünen Pro-
jekts: Eine Bilanz der
Regierung Schröder
2002–2005,
Wiesbaden.*

*2005: new federal
elections*

A courageous step in the direction of better organisation of workers in services was taken in 2001 with the founding of the cross-industry service sector trade union federation ver.di.

The SPD did not profit from its new course. It lost not only Landtag elections and confidence, but also party members. Finally, it even lost the status of the party with the most members in Germany. The public and party pressure increased and even the results of the reforms, at least in the short term, were not encouraging. In the public perception, »Agenda 2010« was reduced to the controversial labour market reforms, although many broadly accepted and uncontroversial instruments of the energy transition and a successful whole-day school programme were included in the legislative package.

The level of **trade union organisation** describes, for example for a single company or a whole branch, the ratio between organised workers and non-organised ones. A high level of organisation usually means a position of strength for workers and corresponding wage agreements.

Decision to Call New Elections 2005

The end of the red-green government coalition came on 22 May 2005. The Social Democrats lost the Landtag election in its »ancestral homeland« of North Rhine Westphalia, finishing almost 8 percentage points behind the CDU. On election night chancellor Gerhard Schröder and party chairman Franz Müntefering appeared before the press in Berlin. They announced – surprising the public and their coalition partners – new elections for the autumn. Later that evening Schröder justified the move by the need for broad societal support for »Agenda 2010« and all the welfare state reforms introduced by the red-green coalition. The Bundestag election was supposed to send a political signal to continue on course.

Behind this attempt to take the bull by the horns we can discern an effort, after a series of election defeats, to pre-empt increasing criticism from parts of the party and the parliamentary party, as well as from the trade unions. In the election campaign that now got under way there was no time for discussion of the policy corrections demanded by the left. They hoped to outflank the Union and looming new party competition from the left by calling elections a year early.

The decision was criticised. Finally, the majority in the Bundesrat, in which the Union-led Länder were veto players, would not have been changed even by a

red-green victory in the Bundestag elections. Against this argument was the hope that the public debate could have been changed with a positive outcome for the red-green coalition.

Bundestag Election 2005

Bundestag elections were called for 18 September 2005. The election campaign of the SPD and the Greens focused on the leading candidates Schröder and Fischer. It was conducted on the border of the two political camps. Red-green was presented as a coalition based on a policy of social justice that was needed to defend the welfare state against a neoliberally inclined CDU with its leading candidate Angela Merkel. In particular health policy came to the fore. The Union demanded an end to the link between income and contribution rate and a general health care premium, referred to by critics as a capitation fee.

Tax policy was also debated in terms of justice. The Union advocated a 2 per cent increase in VAT. They also favoured a tier system for income tax. This would have deviated from the principle of progressive taxation. The tax and constitutional lawyer Paul Kirchhof, pencilled in by the Union as finance minister, even called for the introduction of a »flat tax«, in other words, a uniform tax rate for all. The SPD rejected the VAT increase and the Union's income tax plans. Nuclear policy also played a role in the election campaign. The Union and the FDP sought to deviate from the phasing out of nuclear power negotiated by the red-green coalition.

The SPD was able to mobilise reasonably well in the election campaign and to achieve party unity. The SPD and the Greens lost their majority, however. The SPD fell by 4.3 percentage points to 34.2 per cent and thus 1 percentage point behind the Union, while the Greens fell slightly (by 0.5 percentage point). In opinion polls the SPD had still been 18 per cent behind the CDU in May 2005.²⁹

Among the winners of the election, besides the Union with candidate Angela Merkel, was the party formation Linkspartei.PDS. Behind it was the PDS, which entered the election with open lists on which members of the party »Election Alternative Labour and Social Justice«, founded in western Germany in January, were candidates. The two parties, headed by Gregor Gysi and Oskar Lafontaine, stood for election together and were able to amass 8.7 per cent

*Polarised election
campaign 2005*

*Linkspartei.PDS
and WSAG*

²⁹ Infratest dimap, 27 May 2005.

of the votes between them, with, on average, 4.9 per cent in the west and 25.3 per cent in the east. In 2007 the two parties merged to form new party »Die Linke« (The Left). In the eastern *Länder* the party, supported by the structures of the former PDS, is in many places like a broad-based national party. Its western state associations are fed primarily by former Social Democrats, trade union members (in particular from IG Metall and ver.di) and members of small left-wing splinter groups.

They are united by opposition to neoliberalism and especially by traditional positions on the welfare state, wage and employment policy and a tax policy based on redistribution. Add to this an unconditional rejection of foreign deployment of the German army. A glance at The Left's electorate shows that male trade union members and middle-aged unemployed people predominate. The Left has often benefited from protest votes against the SPD in elections – a consequence of the SPD's reduced ability to represent and integrate its traditional electoral groups.

Continuing to Govern: The Second Grand Coalition

The result of the 2005 Bundestag election was that neither the SPD with the Greens nor the CDU/CSU with the FDP had achieved a majority. Coalitions with more than three parliamentary parties could not be achieved politically. This was clear at the end of the first discussions: the Federal Republic would be governed by a second Grand Coalition. Angela Merkel followed Gerhard Schröder and the SPD found itself as junior partner in the coalition. Vice Chancellor and Minister for Labour and Social Affairs was Franz Müntefering. Foreign minister was former head of the Chancellor's Office under Gerhard Schröder, Franz-Walter Steinmeier.³⁰ The Ministry of Finance went to Peer Steinbrück,³¹ who until the election defeat had been premier of North Rhine Westphalia.

Franz Müntefering (*1940) trained in industrial management. From 1998 to 1999 he was Minister of Transport, Building and Housing and from 2005 to 2007 Vice Chancellor and Minister of Labour and Social Affairs. In the SPD he was party chair from 2004 to 2005 and from 2008 to 2009, chair of the parliamentary party from 2002 to 2005 and secretary general from 1999 to 2002.

30 See p. 134.

31 See p. 135.

Before the Grand Coalition was confronted by the bursting of the speculative bubble on the US real estate market and the ensuing financial and economic crisis from September 2008 it pursued a number of domestic policy projects:

- In the two sets of reforms of federalism (I and II) controversial new allocations of tasks and resources, especially in education, were adopted between the federal level, the Länder and municipalities.
- With the introduction of parental benefits an incentive was given to start a family. The model that has been successful in Scandinavia had already been advocated by former SPD Minister for the Family Renate Schmidt.
- With the Health Fund a compromise was reached between the positions of the Union and the SPD. The involvement of private health insurance funds was not achieved, however.

Three other decisions were much more controversial:

- Contrary to their election pledges the coalition agreed on an increase in VAT. As a consumption tax it affects lower and middle incomes more because their savings rate is lower and the proportion of consumption correspondingly higher. The agreed-on level was suggestive: while the Union had demanded 2 per cent in the election campaign and the SPD had rejected any increase, after the election a figure of 3 per cent was decided on.
- A so-called »debt brake« was built into the Constitution that provides for balanced budgets up to 2020 by means of a deficit limit. The debt brake was criticised by parts of the SPD because it risks putting more pressure on expenditure. In particular welfare state services could come under pressure because of their volume if taxes – in other words, the revenue side of the state – are not taken into consideration.
- The most difficult decision for the Social Democrats was pension reform. The »pension at 67« policy provides for a gradual increase in the general pensionable age from 65 to 67 years of age. In particular the trade unions were indignant. They pointed out that the unemployment rate of older workers is well above average. The raising of the age limit could thus ultimately lead to a reduced pension. The relationship between the trade unions and the SPD was again put to the test.

15 September 2008:
Lehman Brothers

The Financial Market Crisis: Crisis Management

On 15 September 2008, however, these questions became less important. The US investment bank Lehman Brothers announced bankruptcy. The speculative bubble on the US real estate market had burst. Payment defaults in the network of uncovered and sometimes dubious financial products followed and a worldwide domino effect could not be ruled out. The internationally intertwined banking system came under pressure, threatening economic development and pension funds covered by international capital.

The Grand Coalition reacted in three stages. First, troubled banks were supported with public funds within the framework of a »bank bailout« and saved from immediate insolvency – this affected in particular Hypo Real Estate and Commerzbank.

Second, in order to avoid an economic recession as a result of the credit defaults, economic stimulus packages were put in place. They were supposed to lead to economic growth, increase state revenues and ensure employment. Particularly effective were the promotion of the energy optimisation of buildings, infrastructural measures by cities and municipalities and the so-called scrappage premiums to support the automobile industry. The latter provided for state subsidies to replace older cars with new ones. Thirdly, the government sought to secure employment with extensive resort to short-time working by companies and adjustment based on state short-time working allowances.

Short-time working is a temporary reduction in regular working time. In periods of crisis short-time working is supposed to prevent dismissals for operational reasons and to retain skilled workers in companies. In the event of short-time working lower wages are paid, partly compensated with a **short-time working allowance** from the Federal Labour Office. In the financial and economic crisis from 2008 the maximum duration of the short-time working allowance was significantly increased and thus an important foundation stone was laid for the later rapid economic upturn.

The Grand Coalition's crisis management was largely carried out by the Social Democrat-led ministries of Finance, under Peer Steinbrück, and Labour and Social Affairs, led by Olaf Scholz. Peter Struck led the SPD parliamentary party. In contrast to previous years the SPD again focused on a demand-oriented Keynesian policy and was repaid for its efforts: Germany came through the first phase of the crisis of financial market capitalism relatively well and remained stable.

*Economic stimulus
packages*

*Crisis management
carried out by SPD
ministries*

Peter Struck (1943–2012) was Defence Minister from 2002 to 2005 and from 1998 to 2002 and from 2005 to 2009 chairman of the SPD's parliamentary party. From 2010 to 2012 Struck was chairman of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung.

After the first stabilisation of the banking system other rapid successes in relation to the international regulation of the financial markets did not occur. Also a crisis-proof restructuring of the banking

system – in other words, without banks that are »too big to fail« because when it comes to the crunch they simply must be bailed out – came to nothing.

The situation intensified in a second phase: in many places a sovereign debt crisis arose from the financial and economic crisis. The bank bailout packages with which private losses were socialised and the economic stimulus packages imposed a heavy burden on state budgets and led to high budget deficits. The countries that were particularly hard hit included previously economically stable ones, such as Ireland and Spain, which had at times even run budget surpluses, as well as economically afflicted ones, such as Greece. The financial market thus gave rise, via the sovereign debt crisis, to a »Eurocrisis«.

The causes of this crisis were as follows: under-regulation of the financial markets, imbalances in foreign trade and marked inequalities of wealth and property both in Europe and worldwide. These factors mutually intensified one another and shaped the dynamics of the crisis.³²

Those who thought that neoliberalism had been weakened as a result of the crisis and that there was now a possibility to change course were wrong. The policy of deregulation and privatisation in favour of the financial markets played a decisive role in precipitating the crisis; in the Eurocrisis, which set in after the end of the Grand Coalition under the CDU/CSU and FDP government, states went back on the defensive with regard to markets.

The Grand Coalition can claim to have managed the first phase of the crisis well. The policy oriented towards demand and safeguarding employment implemented by the SPD also improved relations with the trade unions. Besides the management of the crisis this relaxation found expression in joint projects and, for example, the efforts in the direction of »decent jobs«, statutory minimum wages and a social Europe.

Financial market crisis becomes a debt crisis

Further reading:
*Christoph Egle/
Reimut Zohlnhöfer
(eds) (2010), Die
zweite Große Koalition.
Eine Bilanz der
Regierung Merkel
2005–2009,
Wiesbaden.*

³² For more information on the issue see the publications of the FES's International Policy Analysis (www.fes.de/ipa) and the Economic and Social Policy department (www.fes.de/wiso), as well as Horn 2009a, 2009b und 2009c.

The Hamburg Programme: Freedom, Justice and Solidarity in the Face of Globalisation

In 2005, there was a change in the leadership of the SPD. It was not to be the only one over the next few years – in any case, a glance at the period since Willy Brandt makes it clear how exceptional were his 23 years as chairman.

New party chairman

The new party chairman was Matthias Platzeck, premier of Brandenburg. Franz Müntefering had announced his resignation after a defeat in the vote on who should become the SPD secretary general. Platzeck gave up his new position for health reasons after only six months, however, and Kurt Beck, premier of Rhineland-Palatinate, took over as chairman.

Kurt Beck (*1949) was premier of Rhineland-Palatinate from 1994 to 2013 and from 2006 to 2008 SPD party chairman. Beck is an electrician by training. He has been a member of the board of directors of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung since 2010.

*Hamburg
Programme:
answers to
globalisation*

Under him the party programme process, ongoing with varying intensity since 1999, was concluded with a new Basic Programme. In the run-up to the Bundestag election Kurt Beck resigned after disagreements concerning the nomination of the candidate for chancellor in September 2008. He was followed by Franz Müntefering – again – up to the Bundestag election of 2009.

Frequent changes in the party leadership, controversial government decisions, conflicts between the different wings of the party and transformation and acceleration in the politics of the twenty-first century overall increased the party's need for some introspection. A party programme directed towards integration and orientation was supposed to meet this need and answer the question of what social democracy stands for today.

The **Hamburg Programme** is an attempt to formulate answers to ongoing internationalisation, in other words, to problems that go beyond individual nation-states, such as climate and environmental crises. In this connection it explicitly extends the SPD's basic policy orientation to include the idea of a »social democracy« (see Chapter 9) and thus aims at the (global) implementation of basic political and social rights.

For the sake of shaping globalisation the Hamburg Programme calls for a deepened European integration, although one that must urgently be complemented by a form of European welfare state. The agenda of the European Union thus needs more social minimum standards, an orientation towards employment and economic coordination.

The new SPD basic programme pays greater attention to the relationship between state and market, as well as the question of what tasks and goods should be provided privately – that is, via the market – and which ones should be provided publicly (in other words, by the state). The Social Democrats are opposed to the economisation of further areas of society in order to protect social cohesion and, ultimately, democracy. The demands for the expansion of public services of general economic interest or for an education system that is free of charge are examples of such demarcation between state and market. In contrast to what was sometimes witnessed during the years of red-green government, in the Hamburg Programme – as in the preceding Berlin Programme – the Social Democrats grant the state an active, interventionist and shaping role.

After the controversial social policy reforms the new social democratic mission statement for the welfare state drew particular attention. On this issue the Hamburg Programme calls for a »preventive welfare state«. The preventive welfare state, as the name implies, focuses on prevention and thus seeks to forestall life's contingencies or at least to reduce their extent. Furthermore, it puts more emphasis on public services, especially the expansion of the (early childhood) education system. The insurance systems hitherto divided into private and public funds are to be consolidated in a combined citizen's insurance. Citizen's insurance is intended to cover all income groups and kinds.

This orientation makes it clear that the Social Democrats, after the stronger liberal influences of the »third way«, are now borrowing from the social democratic leaning Scandinavian countries. In the Hamburg Programme the SPD continues to position itself as a »left-wing broad-based party«. It formulates the goal of representing the »solidaristic majority« in society and seeks close cooperation with the trade unions and new social movements.

Back behind the »30% Barrier«?

The Bundestag Election of 2009 and Its Consequences

The Bundestag election of 2009 was a reality check with regard to the social acceptance of the SPD and its ability to mobilise support. In 2009 the European election had already been lost. The Landtag election results did not bode well, either.

New mission statement: preventive welfare state

The SPD hoped nevertheless to be able to win people over with the social justice issues of the minimum wage, citizen's insurance and the involvement of the banks in meeting the costs of the crisis, as well as taking action to further expand renewable energies and hold firm to the phasing out of nuclear power.

*2009: Steinmeier
the candidate for
chancellor*

The Party constantly emphasised the successful crisis management of the Grand Coalition, implemented by SPD ministers. Frank-Walter Steinmeier, former foreign minister and vice chancellor, was the leading candidate. He supplemented the election manifesto with a »Plan for Germany« entitled »Work Tomorrow«.

Frank-Walter Steinmeier (*1956) is leader of the SPD parliamentary party. In 2009 he was SPD candidate for chancellor, from 2005 to 2009 foreign minister, from 2007 to 2009 vice chancellor and head of the chancellor's office under Gerhard Schröder. Steinmeier has a doctorate in law.

In the end it was not possible to win back lost confidence, to restore credibility and to win people over with policy demands. The traditional narrative that the SPD stands for a just and better tomorrow had taken too much of a battering. The incumbent advantage of Chancellor Merkel did the rest: the successful crisis management of the Grand Coalition was attributed to her and the SPD's election defeats hit a new low: the party received only 23 per cent of the votes. The loss of 11.2 percentage points in comparison to 2005 was disastrous. Since the glorious election result of 1998 the SPD had lost around 10 million voters in absolute terms.

The **Plan for Germany** was a scheme under which growth and employment – involving up to 4 million new jobs – would be created in industry, health care, the creative industry and services. As in the Hamburg Programme the idea of a »green economy«, an environmental industrial policy and investments in education and further training played a major role.

Further reading:

*Christoph Egle/
Reimut Zohlnhöfer
(eds) (2010), Die
zweite Große Koalition.
Eine Bilanz der
Regierung Merkel
2005–2009, Wies-
baden.*

*Election
defeat: 23%*

Thus the SPD suffered its worst election result in the history of the Federal Republic. Interestingly, it was not the Union that benefited from the losses. It also lost ground, if only slightly (1.4 percentage points). Instead, it was the so-called »small parties« who were the real winners of the election. The FDP, »Die Linke« and Bündnis 90/Die Grünen achieved double-digit results. The black-gold CSU/CSU and FDP coalition won a clear majority and the SPD, after 11 years in government, returned to opposition.

Sigmar Gabriel (*1959) has been leader of the SPD since 2009. From 1999 to 2003 he was premier of Lower Saxony and from 2005 to 2009 Environment Minister. Gabriel is a teacher by profession.

Frank-Walter Steinmeier was elected chairman of the parliamentary party. The leadership of the party also changed hands again. At the Dresden party congress in November 2009 Franz Müntefering

Gabriel becomes party leader in Dresden in 2009

announced that he would not stand again and former environment minister Sigmar Gabriel was elected as party leader. Andrea Nahles became general secretary. In his speech Gabriel described the loss of the ability to set the agenda and the abandonment of an independent and original social democratic vision of society as the main causes of the SPD's loss of profile, credibility and appeal:

»Not everywhere, but in important areas we have ceased to try to set the agenda in our own terms. Instead of changing the means we have changed ourselves. We gradually adapted to the dominant agenda, in common with many other social democratic parties in Europe. If we can draw one lesson from electoral defeat – both at home and in other parts of the world – it is that the SPD may not allow others to set the agenda but must always fight to win the high ground. ... But in adapting to the dominant view, which we mistook for the centre, we also developed policy ideas that large parts of our membership did not accept and which damaged our electorate in their need for social security and social justice and which did not awaken, for example, the joy of moving up in the world, but rather the ›fear of falling.« (Gabriel 2009: 7, speech at the SPD party congress in Dresden)

On the eve of its 150th anniversary and the next Bundestag election in 2013, in which Peer Steinbrück will be the candidate for chancellor, the Social Democrats find themselves immersed in a process of renewal that commenced in Dresden. In

Renewal process initiated

Peer Steinbrück (*1947) graduated in economics and since 2009 has been a Bundestag MP. From 2002 to 2005 he was premier of North Rhine Westphalia and from 2005 to 2009 Finance Minister and deputy leader of the SPD. The SPD selected Peer Steinbrück as its candidate for chancellor in the 2013 elections at its extraordinary party congress on 9 December 2012.

tax, pension and labour market policy the party has returned to ideas that have always been at the heart of classic social democracy, such as fair and just distribution and social security. For example, the top tax rate should be increased once again and the labour market should be

regulated more strongly. Furthermore, the SPD has launched an organisational reform aimed at opening up the party much more to society and to involve non-members much more in the formation of party policy.

The dominant question in 2013, however, remains the future of the European Economic and Monetary Union and even of the European Union as such. The SPD advocates a policy to ensure growth and employment. In contrast to the conservatives and the liberals it does not prioritise consolidating the budget via spending cuts. The SPD has also put the issue of social distribution of income and wealth back on the agenda.

*The SPD regains
its strength*

The SPD has begun to recover its popularity at the ballot box. In 2012 alone it managed to enter the government in all three Landtag elections – including in its »ancestral homeland« North Rhine Westphalia. How it does in its anniversary year remains to be seen at the time of writing. It is certain, however, that the Social Democrats have proven themselves adaptive in dealing with today's political challenges and able to learn from their own past decisions. They appear to be in a position to regain credibility and political strength.

Further reading:

*Wolfgang Merkel
et al. (2005), Die
Reformfähigkeit der
Sozialdemokratie.
Herausforderun-
gen und Bilanz der
Regierungspolitik in
Westeuropa,
Wiesbaden.*

*Max Reinhardt
(2011), Aufstieg und
Krise der SPD. Flügel
und Repräsentanten
einer pluralistischen
Volkspartei, Baden-
Baden.*

What does this mean for social democracy?

- In 1989 the Social Democrats had to refound the party in the DDR. They did not accept any former members of the SED, in stark contrast to the conservatives and liberals, who simply united with their sibling block parties.
- The years of red-green government were a learning process in policy terms, in the course of which the Social Democrats initially enthusiastically took up the British »New Labour« model, but eventually turned to the Scandinavian model of a preventive welfare state and coordinated capitalism.
- The development of social democracy in the 2000s showed the SPD that it needed to formulate its own alternative policy programme in keeping with its own identity and political history.
- The financial and economic crisis confirmed the social democratic analysis that markets need strong regulation so that they do not jeopardise democracy and the welfare state. The ongoing environmental modernisation shows, however, that policy can be made even under the conditions of globalisation.

9. SOCIAL DEMOCRACY: WHERE ARE WE HEADED IN THIS NEW ERA?

In this chapter:

- the question will be posed of whether social democracy's very success has brought about its demise;
- the *theory of social democracy* is presented;
- questions about the future and challenges for social democracy are described.

The liberal intellectual Ralf Dahrendorf spoke in 1983 of the »end of social democracy«. »At the end of it we have (almost) all become social democrats« (1985: 16). In his opinion, the demands of social democracy were no longer in dispute. On the contrary: social democracy has achieved its core concerns (democracy and the welfare state); social mobility has become possible to a greater extent than ever before for broad segments of society.

Such or similar views had been expressed by others, too. The message was clear, however: social democracy had fulfilled its historic mission, a social democracy had been achieved and the end of social democracy (as a movement) was nigh. How do things stand today with social democracy, 30 years after Dahrendorf's prognosis? Has the social question really been solved and is democracy secure, accepted and alive?

It does not take long to realise that the questions that social democracy has posed since it was founded, the two interwoven and continuous traditions of social democracy, the unconditional striving for political and social freedoms, have become even more important. The reason for this is not least the recent neoliberal decades and the crisis of unbridled financial capitalism that broke at the end of 2008.

Against this background, can the task of social democracy today be reduced to the defence of what social democrats have achieved in the past 150 years or so? This thesis was posed by the social democratic British historian and progressive thinker Tony Judt – who died in 2010 – in his book *Ill Fares the Land*.

The end of social democracy (Dahrendorf)?

On the contrary: its significance is increasing!

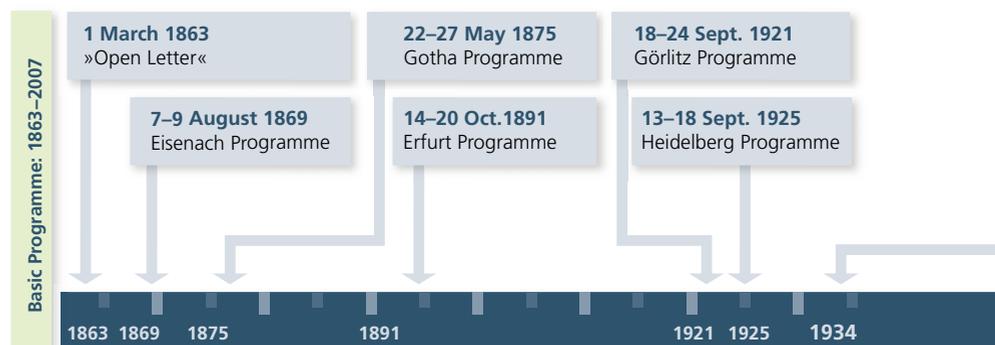
Tony Judt: defending what has been achieved?

He was certainly right to the extent that a number of advances are no longer secure. But, on one hand, it is important not to lose a global perspective. The fundamental problems of war, poverty and hunger, environmental crisis, resource scarcity and the still only limited implementation of human rights remain unsolved. Their answers must be found within the framework of international conflict resolution, regulations and institutions such as the EU and UNO. Ultimately, social democracy is not confined to western industrialised nations but formulates a universal claim.

On the other hand, as far as the industrialised nations are concerned, there is no social democratic tradition of defensiveness. The British academics Richard G. Wilkinson and Kate Pickett have shown from their research on social inequality how decisively social equality influences quality of life and the level of freedom in a society. The German title of their study gives expression to this: »*Gleichheit ist Glück*« [equality is happiness]. A modern social democracy must therefore not limit itself to defending social protection. It must also strive for more social equality. It must formulate a convincing, credible and motivating political narrative of a better tomorrow with timely answers and instruments.

A look backwards reveals the policy history of social democracy to be a process of constant adaptation, although based on a stable value foundation. It has involved realising political goals and attaining the ability to form a majority and set the agenda.

Recently, the SPD adopted a new basic programme: the Hamburg Programme. In it the party extended its basic orientation towards democratic socialism to an explicit reference to the idea of social democracy:



No social democratic tradition of defensiveness!

»In our understanding democratic socialism remains the vision of a free and fair society in solidarity. Its realization is a permanent task for us. The principle for our actions is social democracy « (Hamburg Programme 2007: 16f)

But what exactly is meant by »social democracy«? Social democracy is not only a political movement – which encompasses social democratic parties and trade unions – but also a particular policy programme conception that has developed little by little through the history of the labour movement. In order to describe the concept of social democracy three dimensions must be considered:

1. basic values;
2. basic rights; and
3. practical politics.

These three dimensions are closely intertwined, but they can also be addressed individually.

1. Basic Values

Freedom, justice and solidarity – these have been the basic values of social democracy since the Godesberg Programme of 1959 (see Chapter 6). No doubt their history is somewhat older: the call of the French Revolution of 1789 for »liberty, equality and fraternity« adumbrates the triad of the basic values of social democracy. There are references to these values in all social democratic programmes. However, they make their first appearance as systematically thought-out and mutually referring fundamental ethical values in the Godesberg Programme of 1959.

In the first instance, freedom means the possibility of living a self-determined life. Only persons who are free from external compulsion can develop their persona-

What is social democracy?

Three basic values

Freedom



lity. Freedom requires other prerequisites, however. Actual freedom is achieved when the economic conditions for exercising freedom are created. There can be no freedom in destitution and poverty. Social democracy thus emphasises that freedom must be available not only for some – for example, the wealthy or the strong – but everyone, regardless of skin colour, gender, religion and wealth, is entitled to the same freedom.

Justice

Justice is founded on the equal value of all people. It calls not only for equality before the law but also for a certain level of material equality. This is because inequalities in the distribution of income and wealth also entail injustices with regard to opportunities for freedom.

Solidarity

Solidarity is, on one hand, people's willingness to stand up for each other and to help each other. It thus promotes a humane society, also based on legislation. On the other hand, solidarity constitutes the historical experience of the labour movement. Whenever oppressed, externally controlled or excluded people show solidarity, they can unleash the power to change society.

The mutual relations of the basic values are crucial to understanding social democracy. They are of equal rank and mutually determine and support one another. But they also delimit one another. This distinguishes social democracy from other political tendencies. Liberals, for example, would weight the value of freedom more than justice or solidarity. This entails considerable dangers. Because if freedom of the individual is not restrained by justice, this leads to freedom for a few – for society's strong – and not for the many. Social democracy emphasises that the three basic values cannot outweigh one another, but mutually condition one another.

2. Basic Rights

Theoreticians of social democracy describe it in terms of the mutual relations of the basic values, which are accessible to one and all. Basic rights can be divided into negative and positive civil rights and liberties.

Negative civil rights and liberties

Negative civil rights and liberties are protective rights that defend the individual from the arbitrary incursions of society or the state. This applies, for example, to the right to personal freedom and security. If the state seeks to restrict free

expression or free choice protection is afforded by constitutionally guaranteed negative civil rights and liberties.

The »*du*« (thou) form belongs to the SPD in a similar way to its red logo or party membership book. It is closely associated with the salutation »comrade«.

It was not always so. In the early years of the SPD it was important to the Lassalleans to preserve bourgeois manners. Accordingly, addressing someone as »Mr« or »Madam« and »*Sie*« (formal »you«) was a matter of course. Only during the ban on the SPD during the period of the Anti-Socialist Laws (1878–1890) did the salutation »comrade« establish itself. The »*Sie*«, however, was initially retained. At the beginning of the twentieth century, finally, the socialist youth movement established the use of »*du*« throughout the party.

Not without reason the use of the **comradely *Du*** spread at this time. The identity of the labour movement was propagated further and further. It was not only common interests that were decisive, but also similar patterns of life. People not only fought for a common cause but also lived together. A »social democratic community of solidarity« (Lösche/Walter: 1989) emerged. Expressions of this included not least the leisure organisations that were established at this time, such as the Workers' Gymnastics and Sport Association (1882), the Friends of Nature (1895) and the Workers' Chess Association (1912) (see Grebing: 2007: 43ff).

In the eventful history of the SPD there were constant debates on the *du*-form and the »comrade« salutation. New members reacted and still occasionally react with surprise. Even Herbert Wehner, otherwise known for his clear and straightforward utterances, was inconsistent on this issue. When he was asked by an ordinary colleague whether it was permissible to use the »*du*« form Wehner replied: »you can stick to *Sie* if you [*du*] want.«

Notwithstanding all the debates, the »comradely *du*« has remained and continues to be an expression of solidarity between party members. Regardless of differences on individual issues and someone's background the »comradely *du*« points to a common concern to realise more social justice.

Positive civil rights and liberties, by contrast, are enabling rights. They are supposed to enable the individual to exercise their civil rights and liberties actively. They include, for example, the right to work, to freely chosen education and social security. Positive civil rights and liberties are conditions for using negative civil rights and liberties. To take an example, anyone without at least a minimum degree of education will not be able to fully exercise their right to free expression.

Thus Social Democrats emphasise that positive and negative civil rights and liberties are of equal rank. Again, a glance at other political tendencies is helpful: some representatives of liberalism emphasise that negative civil rights and liberties must have absolute priority over positive ones, since positive civil rights

Further reading:

Hermann Heller
(1934), *Staatslehre*,
Gerhart Niemeyer
(ed.), Leiden.

Thomas H. Marshall
(1965), *Class,
Citizenship and
Social Development*,
New York.

Thomas Meyer
(2005), *Theorie der
Sozialen Demokra-
tie*, Wiesbaden.

*Positive civil rights
and liberties*

*Positive and nega-
tive civil rights and
liberties have equal
rank!*

and liberties can limit negative ones. From the standpoint of social democracy, however, positive civil rights and liberties are decisive for the equal enjoyment of negative civil rights and liberties.

Only if enabling positive civil rights and liberties are realised will everyone be in a position to really exercise their negative ones. Social democracy thus aims at the global realisation of positive and negative civil rights and liberties for everyone on an equal footing.

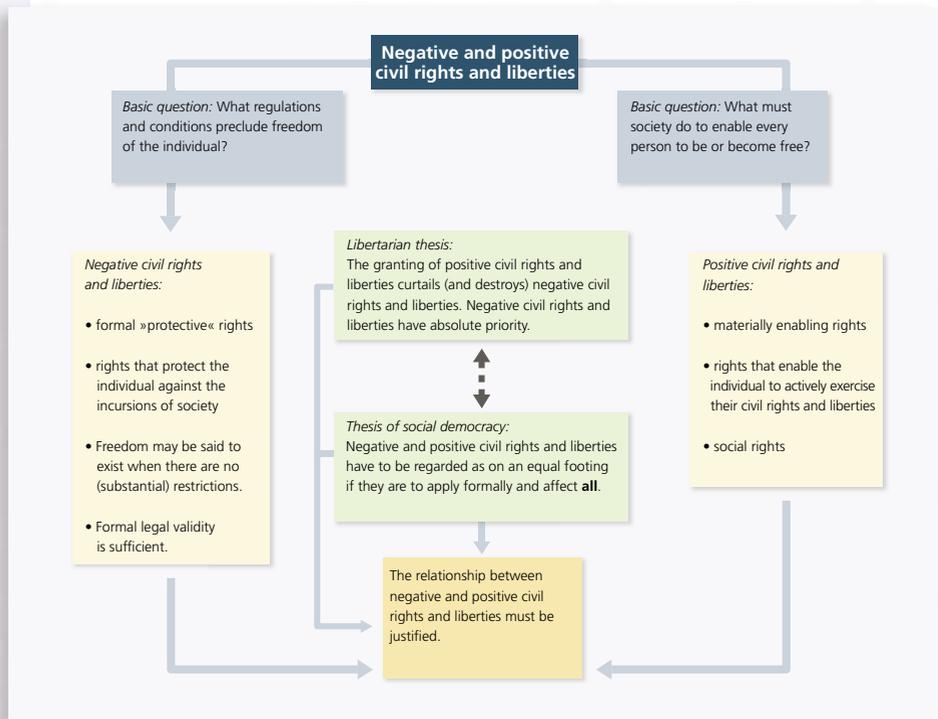


Figure 12: Negative and positive civil rights and liberties

3. Practical Politics

Specific tasks arise for practical politics from the three basic values and the idea of equal basic rights. A politics oriented towards these values will, for example, seek adequate minimum material security for all, as well as free education and training, adequate health care, gender equality or a fully developed democracy with functioning public sphere.

Derivation of specific tasks

In the history of the labour movement these motives recur constantly, not only in Germany but worldwide. In different countries these specific social democratic policies are applied differently, so that by international comparison a ranking of social democracies can be described.

The Scandinavian states, with their comprehensive social security systems, can ensure that educational opportunities are relatively independent of social origin and their well functioning democracies can be characterised by comparison as social democracies to a high degree.

The United States, however, cannot be described as a social democracy. There, the negative civil rights and liberties are valued much more highly than positive ones, with corresponding consequences for political practice: a weak welfare state with a high poverty rate, a high level of inequality, strong dependence of educational success on social background and an increasingly fragmented and polarised population, which significantly impedes democratic decision-making.

The causes of these different practices and thus the reasons why people live such very different lives are undoubtedly to be found in the history of social democracy in the respective country.

The idea of social democracy is closely tied to a specific conception of humanity. Social democracy – unlike various communist ideas – is not based on creating a »new man« who is one-sidedly oriented towards the good. At the same time, it is not a matter of a vision of humanity oriented towards the bad, as expressed in Homo oeconomicus, the rationally calculating and benefit-maximising egoist of the libertarians. Social democracy takes a realistic perspective with regard to humanity and emphasises that people can develop differently. Although they are capable of evil, they are capable of good. Whether people are able to apply their aptitude for the good in free action oriented towards understanding depends in large part on social circumstances and institutions.

This describes the concept of social democracy. It is clear that the struggle for equal freedom for all is never-ending. This is because no social order is imaginable that is organised conclusively on the basis of freedom, justice and solidarity and is secure against relapses. A glance into the immediate past makes this clear. In almost all European countries, under the influence of the dominant

Social democracy in different countries

Scandinavia

USA

Different conceptions of humanity

Further reading:

Richard Saage/Helga Grebing/Klaus Faber (eds) (2012), Sozialdemokratie und Menschenbild. Historische Dimension und aktuelle Bedeutung, Marburg.

Issue	From demands come reforms
Free school education (1869; 1919)	»Obligatory education in elementary schools and free education in all public educational institutions« (Eisenach Programme 1869, cited after Dowe/Klotzbach 2004: 161)	In the Weimar Constitution in 1919 general compulsory schooling and free education and learning materials in elementary and training schools is laid down in Art. 145.
Equal voting rights (1875; 1919)	»General, equal, direct voting and election rights with secret and obligatory casting of votes by all nationals from the age of 20« (Gotha Programme 1875, cited after Dowe/Klotzbach 2004: 165)	In the elections to the National Constitutional Assembly in 1919 women were able to vote for the first time. The voting age was lowered from 25 to 20 years of age.
Eight-hour day (1891; 1918)	»Establishment of a normal working day of eight hours at the most« (Erfurt Programme 1891, cited after Dowe/Klotzbach 2004: 175)	The eight-hour day was first (provisionally) established by the Council of People's Deputies in 1918 under Friedrich Ebert.
Labour legislation for women (1921; 1977)	»General right to employment for women« (Görlitz Programme 1921, cited after Dowe/Klotzbach 2004: 190)	The social-liberal coalition in 1977 saw to it that married women could seek employment, among other things without the permission of their husbands.
Education grants (1959; 1971)	»Generous support should be provided for students to ensure their education« (Godesberg Programme 1959, cited after Dowe/Klotzbach 2004: 341)	In 1971 the social-liberal coalition introduced the BAföG.
Economic democracy (1959; 1972/76)	»Democracy, however, demands codetermination of workers in their workplaces and in the economy as a whole. Workers must cease to be economic subjects and become economic citizens.« (Godesberg Programme 1959, cited after Dowe/Klotzbach 2004: 400)	Workplace codetermination was reregulated in 1972 and in 1976 company codetermination was extended.
Promotion of renewable energies and phasing out of nuclear power (1989; 2000)	»We are above all committed to renewable energy sources. ... We consider the plutonium economy to be a mistake.« (Berlin Programme 1989, cited after Dowe/Klotzbach 2004: 400)	In 2000 the red-green coalition passed the Renewable Energy Act and the phasing out of nuclear power.
Same-sex partnerships (1989; 2001)	»For us all forms of cohabitation are entitled to protection and legal security. None may be discriminated against, including those involving persons of the same sex.« (Berlin Programme 1989, cited after Dowe/Klotzbach 2004: 371)	In 2001 the red-green coalition passed the Law on civil partnership.
Minimum wages (2007; remains open)	»We are striving for minimum wages in Germany and Europe that can ensure a living wage.« (Hamburg Programme 2007: 54)	A statutory minimum wage that provides a decent income remains a task for the future.

Figure 13: Selected policy demands based on a »surplus of the visionary«

Note:

This overview presents a selection of social democratic policy demands which at the time were conceived of as something for the future, but which it was ultimately possible to realise.

neoliberal policies – with the notable exception of the Scandinavian countries and France – policies were implemented that have led to too little freedom and too little equality.

Supply-side oriented economic and tax policy, the dismantling of regulations in the economy, finance and the labour market, as well as the privatisation of some branches of the welfare state and public services of general interest have had consequences. They have led to a polarisation in the distribution of wealth, growing wage differentials, rising poverty rates, high foreign trade imbalances and increasing public debt. This policy has not only played its part in the instability of the Eurozone and the world economy, but has also directly impaired the material living standards of many.

The social democratic promise of tangible freedom and political self-determination in the sense of a social democracy was thus frustrated. Social democracy has lost public approval, voters, members and the support of associated organisations, in particular the trade unions. It was no longer perceived as a force for a just society and as a social alternative. In its sympathetic trade union milieu, in particular among the core electorate of trade union-organised skilled workers, the impression arose that it had lost its sense of their interests.

The process of renewal instigated in the wake of the defeat in the 2009 Bundestag elections thus has the goal of regaining credibility and appeal, as well as reviewing and correcting specific policies.

From their history and policy programme Social Democrats can offer convincing answers to the important questions of our time:

- **Basic Values**

Freedom, justice and solidarity: these basic values have proved to be a good compass in the history of the labour movement. Social Democrats can also build the future on them. The basic rights of democracy correspond to the basic rights laid down in the two basic rights covenants of the UN agreed in 1966. The goal of social democracy is to implement the political, civil, social, economic and cultural basic rights described in the UN covenants in such a way that they do not merely apply formally, but have a real effect. Social democracy is at its core a programme to accomplish democracy and lived freedom.

*Struggling for
social democracy:
never-ending*

*Renew the promise
of social democracy!*

*ASD Module:
Foundations of
Social Democracy*

- **Coordinated Capitalism and Qualitative Growth**

The key question of our time concerns the regulation of capitalism. Social democracy advocates a coordinated capitalism. The democratic state sets the framework for the market, not vice versa. This includes strong workers' rights and company financing oriented towards the long term. Social democracy focuses on a measured combination of growth, social balance and sustainability. Thus arises qualitative growth because it is important what grows, not only how much.

- **The Preventive Welfare State**

The preventive welfare state is aimed not only at alleviating life's contingencies, but also at preventing them as far as possible, while also creating equal opportunities and possibilities for development for all. It thus focuses on education and public services throughout the life course. The expansion of early childhood care takes on a dual meaning: from an education policy perspective, but also with regard to the reconciliation of family life and work and thus especially with regard to women's options for participation in the labour market.

- **Social Europe**

The future of the European Union remains open. For Social Democrats the EU is an important actor in realising basic rights in, with and beyond Europe. It offers the opportunity to realise prosperity, social balance and sustainability jointly in peaceful and democratic cooperation. A social Europe also means minimum standards with regard to the welfare state and the coordination of fiscal, economic and employment policy. With a united Europe it is possible to balance the power deficit of the nation-state in relation to international capital.

- **Mutual Recognition and Participation**

Modern societies are becoming ever more diverse with regard to cultures and views of life. Not only social status but also the question of which values predominate and are accepted in the public sphere determines the extent to which each person can enjoy their civil rights and liberties. Contrary to conservative ideas of a »leading culture« to which all members of a society have to submit social democracy focuses on the principles of recognition and participation as a basis for a common polity.

- **Living Democracy in State, Economy and Society**

The English political scientist Colin Crouch has developed the thesis of the hollowing out of parliamentary democracies in the West. In the »post democracies« that are being established, according to Crouch, it is no longer

elected politicians, but all-powerful economic and capital actors that determine the public agenda. Social democracy seeks to counter this threat with an active and viable state, a vibrant civil society and more democracy, including in the economy. Thus emerges a living democracy: spaces for a sense of community and lived solidarity and direct, societal self-determination.

- **Solidarity-based Globalisation**

In terms of its policy programme social democracy is in the internationalist tradition of the labour movement. It advocates the global realisation of the UN human rights covenants. A fair and solidarity-based development of globalisation is possible only if development policy harnesses the potential of the developing countries themselves and if the international framework is development-friendly. Free trade unions have a key role to play in this worldwide.

- **Peace and Security**

The international aspiration of social democracy, the aspiration to realise basic rights worldwide, is also reflected in peace and security policy. Conflict prevention plays as much of a role as a multilateral strategy based on international institutions.

A glance at these policy approaches and their strong topicality contradicts Dahrendorf's thesis of the end of social democracy: social democracy has not become obsolete. By no means have all social and democratic issues been solved. As long as people find themselves confronted with the question of a just order questions of social democratic identity remain in play.

The history of social democracy in Germany is impressive. Social democracy, despite all the obstacles, temporary bans and crises has shown staying power and an ability to assert itself over 150 years. It is the only political force in Germany that can look back on an unbroken 150-year democratic history. It is the political force in Germany that has constantly advocated democracy and social progress and has imbued Germany with its understanding of freedom. Whether it will continue to find assent to its idea of a free and just society in the future depends primarily on whether people will commit themselves to and for social democracy. Democracy and justice do not come about of their own accord. Friedrich Ebert expressed this succinctly:

»If the German Republic is to live, it requires work. Socialism requires effort!«
(Friedrich Ebert, 1918: 215)

ASD Module: Globalisation and Social Democracy

ASD Module: Peace, Security and Social Democracy

150 years: the social and the democratic!

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► www.erinnerungsorte-der-sozialdemokratie.de



The Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung is staging a travelling exhibition throughout Germany on the 150 years of social democracy as an organised party.

At the same time, instead of a traditional exhibition catalogue there will be a deluxe volume of incisive essays, icons and historical sources with current significance.

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We invite you to participate in the debate on social democracy. The Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung's Academy of Social Democracy provides a forum for this purpose. Eight seminar modules deal with the basic values and practical domains of social democracy:

Foundations of Social Democracy

Economics and Social Democracy

Welfare State and Social Democracy

Globalisation and Social Democracy

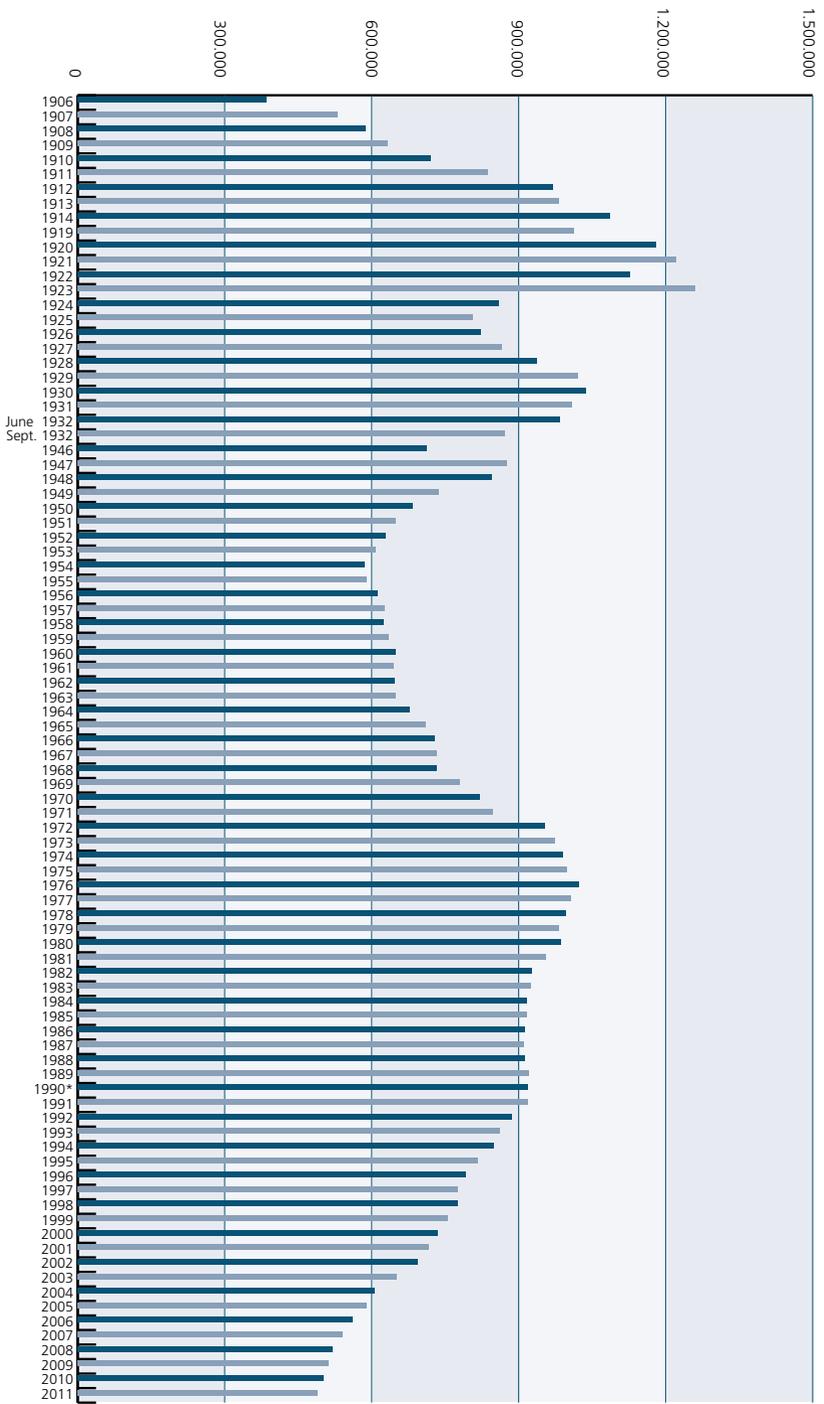
Europe and Social Democracy

Integration, Immigration and Social Democracy

The State, A »Society of Citizens« and Social Democracy

Peace and Social Democracy

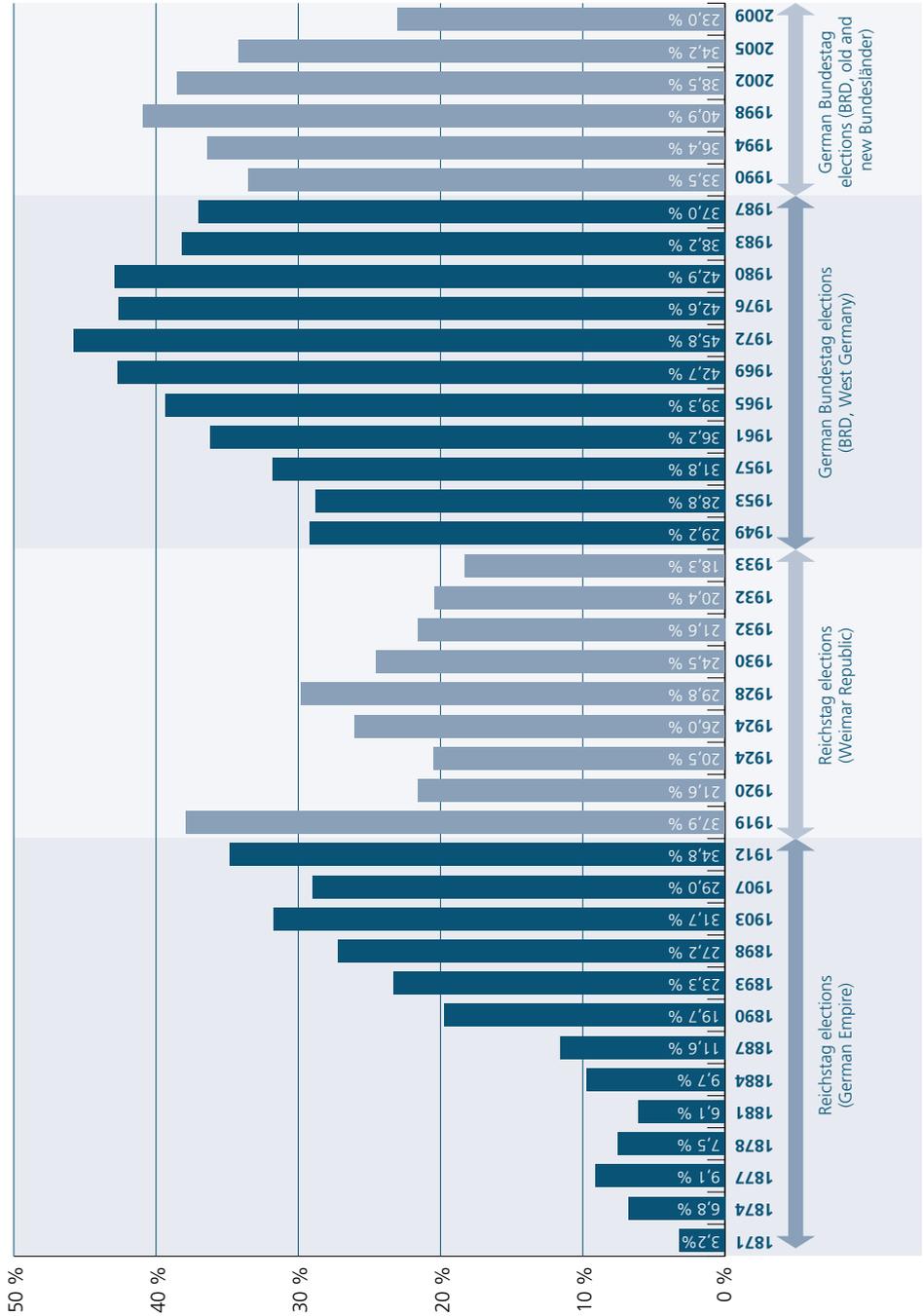
Note: In 1864, a year after its foundation, the ADAV had around 4,600 members, the SDAP in 1870, also a year after its founding, around 10,000. At the merger of the two parties in 1875 the SDAP had around 9,000 members, the ADAV 15,000 (see Pothhoff/Müller 2002: 41). Wilhelm Schröder observes that the »number of organised party members was established precisely for the first time in the party executive's report to the party congress at Mannheim in 1906« (Schröder 1910: 333). For some periods, for example, 1933 to 1945, there are no reliable data.



Source: SPD-Parteivorstand // * for 1990 for the last time only old Bundesländer

Figure 14: Membership development of the SPD, 1906–2011 (number of members at year end)

Note: The figures up to 1875 were the combined results of the ADAV and SDAP. During the period of the Anti-Socialist Laws (1878–1890) although the party was banned individuals could stand as social democratic candidates.



Sources: Osterroth/Schuster (2005a) and www.bundeswahlleiter.de

Figure 15: Election results of the ADAV, SDAP, SAPD and SPD, 1871–2009

Name	Year	Contents	Context	In detail
Hamburg Programme	2007	Social democracy and the primacy of politics	Heightened globalisation	pp. 132ff
Leipzig Programme of the Eastern SPD	1990	Environment-oriented social democracy and national unity	Basic programme after the founding of the party	pp. 117ff
Berlin Programme	1989	Differentiated understanding of progress and growth	Connection to new social movements	pp. 111ff
Godesberg Programme	1959	Ideological pluralism and establishment of the triad of basic values	Opening up to become a broad-based party and increasing its ability to form a majority	pp. 90ff
Prague Manifesto	1934	Call for the downfall of the National Socialist dictatorship	Exile and resistance to Nazi rule	pp. 74ff
Heidelberg Programme	1925	Reversion to the Erfurt Programme of 1891	Unification of the MSPD and the USPD	p. 59
Görlitz Programme	1921	Commitment to the Weimar Republic	Demarcation from the KPD and the USPD	p. 59
Erfurt Programme	1891	Marxist social analysis and trade union demands	Reorientation after the abolition of the Anti-Socialist Laws	pp. 38ff
Gotha Programme	1875	Compromise between Lassallean and Marxist ideas on the path and goal of the labour movement	Unification of the ADAV and the SDAP to form the SAPD	p. 35
Eisenach Programme	1869	Linking together of ideas on a free national state and the abolition of class rule	Founding programme of the SDAP as a democratic alternative to the ADAV	pp. 33f
Open Letter	1863	Linking of the democratic and the social questions	Independent representation for the labour movement	pp. 31ff

Figure 16: Brief overview of social democratic basic programmes

SUGGESTED READING

The following suggested publications are for all those wishing to tackle the issues of the welfare state and social democracy beyond this Reader.

Social Democracy Readers



Gombert, Tobias et al.:

**Reader 1:
Foundations of Social Democracy.** 2012.
Division for International Cooperation
(ISBN: 978-3-86498-080-0)



Vaut, Simon et al.:

**Reader 2:
Economics and Social Democracy.** 2011.
Division for International Cooperation
(ISBN: 978-3-86872-698-5)



Petring, Alexander et al.:

**Reader 3:
Welfare State and Social Democracy.** 2012.
Division for International Cooperation
(ISBN: 978-3-86498-103-6)

AUTHORS / EDITORS / ASSISTANCE

Jochen Dahm (*1981) is desk officer at the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung's Academy for Social Democracy. He studied political science, communication science and public law in Münster and Málaga.

Tobias Gombert (*1975) works as desk officer for political education in the SPD district of Hannover/Lower Saxony and as a trainer, consultant and mediator. He studied educational science, German philology and philosophy.

Prof. Dr. Helga Grebing (*1930) has worked as a commentator on politics and current affairs in Göttingen and now in Berlin since her retirement in 1995. Before that she was a professor specialising in the social history of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries at the universities of Göttingen and Bochum and also head of the Institute for Research into the European Labour Movement. She also studied history, constitutional law and philosophy, graduated from the Freie Universität Berlin and did her habilitation in political science at the University of Frankfurt am Main. She has experience in political education work and as a reader and editor at a publishing house.

Dr. Viktoria Kalass (*1980) is a graduate political scientist. She studied political science, medieval and modern history and English philology at the University of Cologne. She subsequently graduated at the University of Kassel in economics and social sciences.

Christian Krell (*1977) heads the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung's Academy for Social Democracy. He studied political science, history, economic science and sociology at the University of Siegen and the University of York. In 2007 he received his doctorate in political science on the European policies of the SPD, the Labour Party and the Parti Socialiste and has published on many other issues of the theory and practice of social democracy, most recently in 2012 together with Tobias Mörschel: "Demokratie in Deutschland – Zustand, Herausforderungen, Perspektiven."

Michael Reschke (*1983) is a freelance trainer and author, as well as editor-in-chief of the "Zeitschrift für sozialistische Politik und Wirtschaft" (spw). He studied political science, medieval and modern history and sociology in Kassel. At the Academy for Social Democracy he heads the seminars on the foundations of social democracy.

Dr. Meik Woyke (*1972) has been editor of the Archive for Social History since 2009, head of the »Public History« section at the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung's Archive of Social Democracy since 2012 and visiting lecturer at the University of Cologne. He studied history, educational science and Germanistics at the University of Hamburg, where he graduated in 2004.

Politics needs clear orientation. Only those who are able to state their goals clearly will achieve them and inspire others. In keeping with this, this reader *History of Social Democracy* asks: What distinguishes the history of social democracy? What are its origins? What were the key milestones? Where is it leading in the twenty-first century?

Knowing where one is going requires knowing where one came from. History means identity. The Academy for Social Democracy was set up by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung to provide advice and courses for people involved and interested in politics. Its symbol is a compass.

Further information on the Academy: www.fes-soziale-demokratie.de