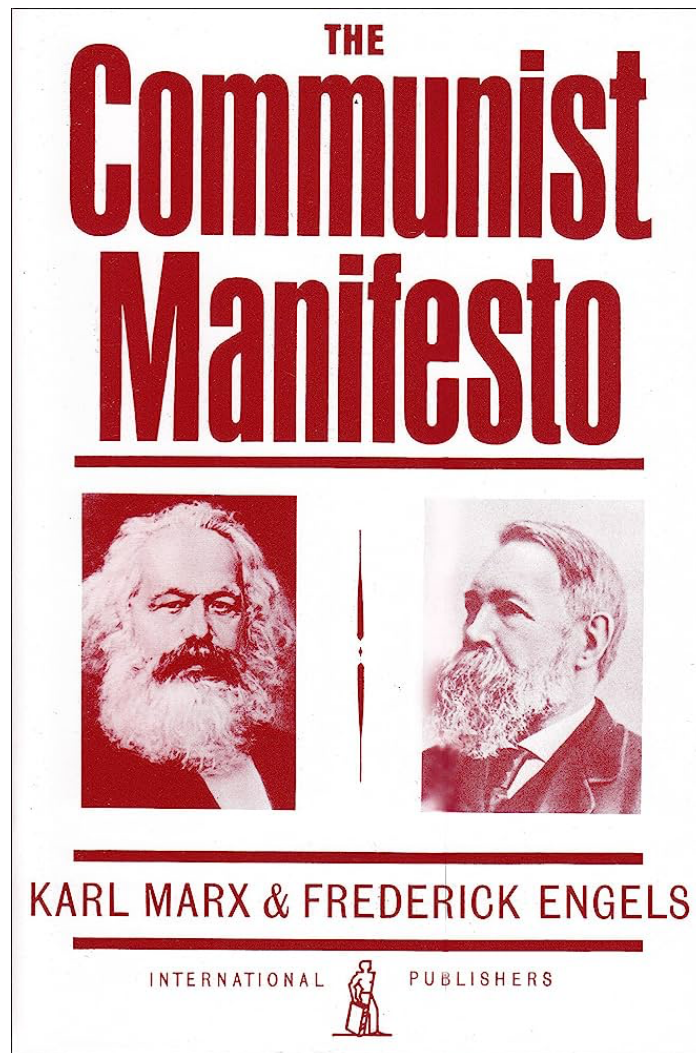


RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

Teaching about European
Socialism to Rethink our Societies

by Sandrine Kott



THE COMMUNIST MANIFESTO BY KARL MARX (AUTHOR), FRIEDRICH ENGELS

I have taught the history of European socialism several times, in different forms, at different levels, and in different countries in Europe and the United States. The following text is an assessment of these experiences. I explain the choices I made, the approaches I adopted, and the way in which, through the history of socialism, I try, together with the students, to question our present. In the United States, where socialist culture has largely been lost and socialism has been much caricatured, this teaching aims also at correcting the many misconceptions and errors which have been spread. Beyond the transmission of a controlled knowledge, it is also about giving students the opportunity to think about possible alternatives to the society in which they live as well as their limits. It is not about "converting" students to socialism but about giving them the tools to critically think about the world around them. For me, teaching about socialism is first and foremost about creating a space for free thinking.

My teaching is deeply influenced by these premises, so it is never apologetic. Starting from the original 19th century texts, I study with the students the way in which socialists drew the contours of a better, more just, less unequal, less oppressive society, but we also work on the contradictions and limits of these projects. Working with a recent historiography that is more interested in practices and implementations than in theoretical debates, we reflect on the successes obtained but also on possible drifts and failures. Socialism as it has been conceived and practiced in the wake of European industrialization does not offer a ready-made solution to the problems of our time, but the plurality of socialist projects and practices opens avenues for rethinking our world.

The many socialist inspirations and currents

Contrary to the often vague ideas that students have, socialism should not be reduced to the "scientific socialism" of the Marxist tradition. In class, we begin by reading the texts of the first socialists, those whom Marx and Engels grouped together under the heading of "utopian" socialists. This allows us to become aware of a first diversity among the ones who see themselves or have been grouped under the label "socialists." We begin with *Report to the Country of Lanark* (1820) in which Robert Owen (1771-1858) outlined plans for a radical transformation of agricultural and industrial organization, where better educated workers would be given more power. We then read the *Letters from an inhabitant of Geneva to his Contemporaries* (1803) or the *Catechism of industrials* (1823-1824) of Claude-Henry de Saint Simon (1760-1825), who laid the foundations of an industrialist and technocratic vision of social organization. Through a selection of writings (*Selections from the Works of Fourier*, English, 1901) we study how Charles Fourier (1772-1837) envisioned a collective organization (the *phalanstère*) that would be based on the satisfaction of individual passions. In the *Travels in Icaria* (French 1840, English 2003) Etienne Cabet (1788-1856) drew plans for an egalitarian communist society in which the distribution of wealth would be organized by a central authority (State). Interestingly, the writings of Saint Simon, Charles Fourier,

Robert Owen, and Etienne Cabet even though sometimes obscure (Fourier in particular), often speak more to students than Marxist texts because they offer concrete solutions. For this first part of the 19th century, we also study movements that do not necessarily label themselves "socialist," but which laid the foundation of the workers' movement and were close to the socialists. The Luddites formulated claims not against the machines but for a reorganization of work and the Chartists took a stand for a true democracy of the people. These first socialists elaborated precise plans for the society to be built from concrete local experiences. Even if these community experiments, carried out essentially on the territory of the United States (like The Owenite New Harmony in Indiana) failed, they opened up fertile avenues of reflection. In many respects the prospect of establishing spaces of direct social and political democracy from below resonates with current political aspirations.

We then read the most accessible texts by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, large excerpts from the *Communist Manifesto* (1848), but also *Speech on Communism* (February 1845) by Moses Hess (1818-1875), which was a crucial source of inspiration for Marx and Engels. We also read political texts, in particular *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Napoleon Bonaparte* (1852) and *The Civil War in France* (1871) which clearly show that history is at the very foundation of Marxist thought. In accordance with this historical materialism, Marx himself did not, unlike the first socialists, indicate precise plans of the society to be established and left wide spaces for interpretation of his thought.

We discuss these various interpretations with texts by Rosa Luxemburg (*Reform or Revolution* (1900), Lenin, Jules Guesde in France, and also the revisionist or reformist current such as the German Eduard Bernstein ("Karl Marx and Social Reform," in *Progressive Review*, no 7, April 1897).

Marx and all Marxist authors mentioned above shared a vision of the society of their time penetrated by class conflicts, but they did not have the same definition of class. In our societies in which class conflicts take new forms, it is crucial to discuss this issue with the students. For Marx, social classes are formed and determined by the position that each member of a class occupies in a particular mode of production. In capitalism, beyond the founding opposition between capital and labor, reading of the historical texts shows us that Marx has developed a more nuanced approach to social classes. Moreover, beyond the objective existence of the "class itself," "class consciousness" is fully part of the Marxist definition of class. This class consciousness is a prerequisite without which the workers would not develop their revolutionary potential. On the other side, the revolutionary moment is the crucible in, and through which, class consciousness can develop. The question of revolution and the revolutionary class in Marxism needs explanations and discussion and leads to a redefinition of the distinction between socialism and communism. In Marx's political writings, the proletariat, as a revolutionary class, seizes the bourgeois state, and builds socialism, which, in the long run, must lead to the classless and stateless society in communism. The idea that in Marxist tradition, communism is the ultimate phase of history in which a classless, stateless

society is established is very counterintuitive to US students, for whom communism is associated with dictatorship and violence. This always leads to controversial discussions on the relationship between socialism and communism in the classroom.

Nevertheless, at the end of the 19th century, this conception of class and of the role of the revolution as a condition for political and social transformation was not shared by all Marxists. The German socialist Eduard Bernstein (1850-1932) argued that the class in itself was not a category determined solely by the position in the means of production but that it also depended on a larger range of factors like income, education, lifestyle, and so on.... For Eduard Bernstein, as well as for other Marxist authors, the class for itself was thus also an everyday and cultural experience (*Evolutionary Socialism: A Criticism and Affirmation*, 1889) and class consciousness was not just a social experience but a cultural process.

Studying closely these various interpretations of social classes with the students is crucial because the language of class has largely disappeared in Western Europe, even in the left, and is almost absent from any public discourse in the United States, where it has been replaced by a focus on other forms of social segmentation: race and/or gender. And yet class inequalities are rising in all Western countries and in particular in the US. Reading Marxist authors allows us to question this disappearance of class as an analytical as well as a political and social category and prompts us to reintegrate it as a component of a robust intersectional approach.

It is also important to remind the students that after 1848 and the writing of the *Communist Manifesto*, not all socialists became Marxists and not all saw class struggle and revolution as a motor of history. The French republican socialists like Jean Jaurès (1859-1914) or Léon Blum (1872-1950) insisted above all on the need for reforms to achieve a Social Republic in which the rights of each person would be respected, and solidarity between various social classes (Solidarism) was seen as the backbone of the nation. From the end of the 19th century onward, this social and national interpretation of socialism was very strong in the social democracies of Northern Europe; the Swedish social democratic party asserted its reformist orientation already in 1913. At that time, this reformism was also well represented within German social democracy, even though the party distanced itself officially from Marxism only in 1959 at the Bad Godesberg Congress (we study the Bad Godesberg Program). In 1959, under what was called "Ethical Socialism" the German SPD accepted the free-market economy and capitalism and abandoned references to class struggle. All European social democratic parties evolved in the same direction in the second half of the 20th century. In 1995, under the leadership of Tony Blair the British New Labour abandoned its commitment to "the common ownership of the means of production and exchange" and the call for nationalization; it endorsed a "democratic socialism" based on ethical values.

In class, we discuss the significance of the disappearance of the references to Marxist categories like working class, class struggle, common ownership of the

means of production. We question the parallel affirmation of an "ethical" or democratic socialism and try to understand what it has concretely meant and implied for the European socialist parties.

Thinking with the socialists: labor, democracy, gender

Teaching about socialism does not mean "glorifying" this or that thinker but analyzing the various and often diverging visions that they offer as well as the various strategies they propose to achieve a better society. These projects as well as these strategies stemmed from political choices, but they were also linked to specific contexts in which they have been elaborated. This contextualization is key and allows us to understand the progressive abandonment of the reference to Marxism in most socialist and social democratic parties nowadays. Nevertheless, all the authors who claimed to be socialists or were labelled socialists shared to a certain point a belief that a better society was desirable and possible. These projects varied, but they all offered alternatives which still open up avenues of reflection that in one way or another can resonate with the questions of the present. In what follows I will discuss three topics which we generally discuss during the class. Other important issues like the environment, religion, or internationalism that I also discuss with the students could have been added to this list.

Up to the 1950s, a central element common to all these socialist currents concerned the nature and place of work and workers. They all insisted on the centrality of work seen as self-fulfillment and on the necessity of preserving its creative part and its emancipating dimension. This is one of the important lessons that should be drawn from English Luddism at the beginning of the 19th century. The movement was not directed against the machines themselves but against the way they were used to dispossess the workers of their agency and the meaning of work (Kevin Binfield, *Writings of the Luddites*, Northwestern Documents, 2004). Moreover, because the socialists saw work as a central element of the social fabric, the ones who performed this work -- craftsmen, peasants, industrial workers -- should be entitled to participate fully in political decisions. This meant abolishing the domination of a minority of owners and/or capitalists, who were living from the work of others. In the various socialist traditions, this view was not necessarily associated with the idea of class struggle, but all 19th century socialist thinkers insisted that work was ennobling and should confer rights. The French Socialist Louis Blanc (1811-1882) is emblematic of this orientation. He proposed to organize "social workshops" with the financial support of the state in which the workers would organize themselves in production cooperatives. The management would be elected by the workers among themselves. Only workers would be allowed to invest money in these cooperatives (*The Organization of Labor*, French original 1839, English translation, 1911). This conception of labor and labor organization remained an important reference in certain segments of the socialist movement as in the French Parti Socialiste Unifié, (Unified Socialist Party) founded in 1960.

This centrality of work is something that students have difficulties understanding in a world in which work is rather seen as alienating. Again, the history of socialism offers some food for thought since the socialists themselves have turned their back to this positive vision of labor. Since the 1950s, the trade unions and the social democratic parties accepted the Fordist compromise whereby productivity gains and the deskilling of labor were exchanged for increases in workers' living standards and a reduction in working hours. Until then, the question of the standard of living had tended to prevail over the value and meaning of work and this emphasis on the emancipatory dimension of work has tended to get lost. In a post-COVID period during which the meaning of work has been deeply questioned, this prompts us to think about the new forms of alienation through work in the case of the "uber workers" who become dependent on algorithms on a platform. More broadly, the lack of decision-making power of workers in private companies still underlines the devaluation of the role of labor in favor of that of shareholders.

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This point leads us to reflect on democracy. The expression "dictatorship of the proletariat", often misinterpreted and largely misunderstood by the students, tends to give credence to the idea that socialists were not really interested in democracy, or even rejected it. This representation is reinforced by the existence of communist dictatorships and, in the US, by strong anti-communist and anti-socialist propaganda that has deliberately confused the socialist projects with the authoritarian regimes led by communist parties. It is therefore necessary to discuss the difference between the long socialist tradition and the new communist parties which have been founded in the wake of the Bolshevik revolution. For the revolution to triumph the Leninist parties were organized according to the model of democratic centralism in which there was no room for disagreement within the party itself. This disciplinary/authoritarian path diverged from the socialist and social-democratic traditions. During the Tours congress in December 1920, the French socialist Léon Blum pointed to this authoritarian drift to explain why he would not join the Communist party and would "keep the old house." He was not alone in his condemnation; even Rosa Luxemburg, who founded the first German communist party in 1919, expressed serious doubts about Lenin's authoritarianism. We read these texts in class and we discuss them thoroughly because contrary to the communist model, democracy lies at the heart of the socialist project. Representative democracy and universal suffrage were seen by the Chartists or the reform socialists until the end of the 19th century as a powerful instrument for political and social

change. The British Chartists ("The People's Charter of 1838"), as well as socialists and social democrats, were the first to commit themselves to real universal suffrage (even for some of them including women), which they saw as a means for the people to make themselves heard and to exercise their full power. For the students, this vision of suffrage as empowerment resonates with the campaigns against voters' suppression in today's United States.

Besides, Louis Blanc or Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (1809-1865) offered another definition of democracy in the workplace. They were both proponents of ownership of the means of production by the workers and of workers' self-management. This workers' democracy was promoted by various socialist currents and has been experimented with in Spain during the Popular Front government between 1936 and 1939 and in Socialist Yugoslavia under Josip Broz Tito (1948-1980). In Germany, it gave rise to provisions encouraging *Mitbestimmung* (Co-management) under the Weimar Republic (1919-1933). This becomes a central element of the discussion in class because it opens up new ways of thinking about democracy.

This deep belief in the virtue of democracy did not prevent some socialists from criticizing bourgeois representative democracy which was confiscated by a social elite. That is the reason why the French Proudhon, who has been classified among the libertarian socialists, saw in direct local democracy even at the workshop level the only real democracy (*Principle of Federation*, French 1863). This bottom up "federalism" has inspired recent direct democracy movements. The "indignados" in Madrid, "Occupy Wall Street" in New York, the "Nuit debout" in Paris are all part of these new ways of doing politics from below that have been practiced by young people since the second decade of the 21st century. Some of the students I had in the past have been involved in these or similar movements or have followed them closely and they share their experience or criticism with the class, leading to interesting discussion about how our own democracies are functioning and the current multiplication of illiberal democracies. They question the relationship, which was far from obvious in the 19th century, between liberalism and democracy.

Another misconception, widely shared among students about the socialists, is their alleged indifference to other forms of division besides class conflicts. They often accused them of neglecting the role of patriarchy in their analysis of capitalist society. I always point to the fact that the reality is much more complex and that, even if it has been forgotten, the socialists were at the forefront of the struggle for women's rights up to the 1950s. This did not mean that they were "feminists" as we now understand it, but in their time some of them were very progressive. Since the beginning of the 19th century some socialists have condemned social and political inequality between men and women. In this respect, Charles Fourier can be regarded as a precursor who exerted a great influence on the socialist movement. In excerpts of *The Theory of the Four Movements* (French, 1808) that we read in class, he affirmed that "Social progress and changes of historical period take place in proportion to the advance of women toward liberty, and social decline occurs as a result of the diminution of the liberty of women." In the society of his

time, Fourier criticized the enslavement of the woman in marriage and pleaded for free love. Women and men should receive the same education and engage in the same activities. Therefore, women should not be confined to the domestic sphere. Fourier's "feminism" (he was credited with inventing the term) had a great influence on the socialist and feminist Flora Tristan, who knew him and quoted him in her *Peregrinations of a Pariah* (French, 1833-English 1985), as did Léon Blum in *On the Marriage*, published in 1907, in which the French socialist asserted that "as soon as she comes of age, a woman will be the master of her own body". Among early socialists, Fourier was far from alone. In Great Britain Owenists, like Anna Wheeler (1785-1848), advocated in favor of equal civil and political rights. During the years 1830-1840, many French women, among them Eugénie Niboyet (1796-1883), Désirée Gay (1810-1891), and Jeanne Deroin (1805-1894), attracted by the Saint Simonians school, spoke out against the domination of men along with the exploitation of proletarians. As socialists and as women, they denounced the family, the civil code, and the political and social inequality of which they were victims. If they found the support of a large part of the socialists, they were also scorned by Proudhon, who, although a libertarian socialist, developed a very patriarchal conception of society. What the students see as a contradiction in Proudhon's work always gives way to controversial discussions. I have to point to the fact that the male workers, and Proudhon was part of them, rather saw in the equality of rights between women and men a threat to their own position in the family and society. This may have led to contradictions between the socialist leaders and their social base, something that we discuss abundantly in class.

Nevertheless, socialists were among the ones who have been at the forefront of the criticism of male domination. Engels proclaimed that "within the family the wife represents the proletariat" (*Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State*, German 1884), something which had already been expressed by the socialist Flora Tristan in 1833: "The most oppressed man finds a being to oppress, his wife: she is the proletarian of the proletarian." Engels, like Rosa Luxemburg after him, was in favor of a recognition of unpaid reproductive domestic labor ("Suffrage and Class Struggle", 1912, Second Democratic Women's Rally, Stuttgart). A little later the leader of the German social democratic party, August Bebel, in *Woman and Socialism* (first published in German in 1879), also denounced the exploitation of women in capitalism.

However, this correlation between the denunciation of capitalism and the oppression of women had its limits. For Engels, as for Bebel, male domination was essentially thought of in economic terms and was seen as a by-product of capitalism: revolution and the victory of socialism would solve the "women" question. This point of view was also held by the German socialist Clara Zetkin (1857-1933), who organized socialist women (*German Socialist Women's Movement*, October 9, 1909) in opposition to "bourgeois" feminism. For Clara Zetkin and a large part of German social democratic women, the political struggle against capitalism had priority over the feminist struggle. Although it was a common view of the time, it had been challenged by the French feminist and socialist Madeleine Pelletier (1874-

1939). As a member of the French Socialist Party (SFIO) in 1906, she succeeded in passing a resolution according to which the SFIO would introduce a bill in favor of women's suffrage, a demand that was already in the first program of the German social democratic party (1875). Nevertheless, she had to come to terms with the lack of real involvement of socialists in the cause of women. At the end of the 19th century the situation was not different in England, where the Labour party refused to make women's suffrage one of its priorities. This led to the constitution of an independent suffragist women's organization. While remaining a socialist until 1920, Madeleine Pelletier progressively developed feminist thought which was incredibly ahead of her time. Before Simone de Beauvoir, she emphasized that it was the social environment that "made" women; she denounced the subjection of women to maternity and advocated in favor of the right to abortion (*Le Droit à l'avortement*, 1911). Against her socialist colleagues, she emphasized that male domination was not only a product of capitalism and that women's demands could not be reduced to the socialist program. This leads us to explore the relationship between the second wave of feminism and the demand for reproductive rights, with the first wave focused on political and civil rights, as well as the role that certain socialist figures, even marginal ones like Madeleine Pelletier, played in linking the two waves.

Even though in all the European socialist parties women were a very small minority (about 3% in the French SFIO in 1940), even though socialists were late to acknowledge the specificity of the gender issue, they also were the first to bring women into government. This was the case in France with Léon Blum's government in 1936, while in François Mitterrand's socialist government a ministry for women's rights was created. Women obtained the right to vote in Germany in 1918 with the support of the social democrats. The first country which granted abortion rights was the Soviet Union in 1920 -- it was forbidden again between 1936 and 1955.

Revolution, reforms, or "third way"

Beyond the study of programmatic and theoretical texts, I also consider it essential to work with students on socialism as a practice and an experience.

Socialism was first expressed as a political current through protests that took various forms. Nevertheless, it is important to revisit the misconception, among many students, that 19th century socialists were systematically promoters of violent revolutions. Most of the first socialists, who were still under shock from the violence of the French Revolution, were fiercely anti-revolutionary and believed that they would succeed in spreading their model of an ideal society thanks to the successful example of ideal communities that they intended to create. On the other hand, insurrectionary episodes, brutal and violent revolutions, and the seizure of power by arms were far from being the prerogative of socialists. The European revolutions of 1830 were liberal; those of 1848 -- except perhaps for June 1848 -- and even the Paris Commune of 1871 were primarily national. Only the revolutionaries at the beginning of the 20th century in Russia, Germany, and Hungary aimed

at establishing socialism violently, but they were led by communists. As we find out with the students, during the 20th century the extreme right has made more use of political violence than the socialists, as demonstrated by the attack on the US Capitol on January 6, 2021. This leads to interesting discussions in class.

Indeed, instead of violence, socialists and, more generally, the workers' movement invented and deployed repertoires of actions that have become resources and models for all forms of popular protest. Among these we discuss various forms of mobilization like petitions, demonstrations, strikes, the planting of freedom trees, and the organization of banquets or funeral processions but also the development of political clubs. This often gives way to lively exchanges in class during which European students -- it is less the case in the US -- who have been involved in political activities share their experience and try to evaluate the effectiveness of these different forms of action.

Only at the end of the 19th century would mass parties become the preferred mode of socialist political organization. In this respect, German social democracy offers a kind of paradox. Founded in 1875 it became a mass party after 1890, with a clear program and a political project aimed at promoting a socialist society. Meanwhile, it also became the place of an organized counter-society. Through its various associations of leisure and mutual aid, it developed a socialist working-class community next to and yet inside the global society. Nevertheless, as historians have shown, this alternative community largely reproduced the models of the bourgeois society that it was supposed to challenge. In the end, German social democracy has largely contributed to the integration of workers into capitalist society. This also opens discussions, in particular in the US, where involvement in political parties is not seen as a way to make one's claims heard. I must explain how socialist parties, often without changing their overall revolutionary discourse, have in fact developed new strategies and set new goals.

By the end of the 19th century most European socialist and social-democratic parties had lost their revolutionary impetus and saw participation in local and national governments as a means of rapidly improving the situation of the working classes, who by then constituted the bulk of their voters. In 1899, Alexandre Millerand was the first French socialist to enter a bourgeois government. This enabled him to pass a law reducing working hours. Criticized as too reformist by his fellow comrades, he was expelled from the Socialist Party in 1904. In France, as in other socialist parties in Southern Europe, the recognition of the legitimacy of reformist practices took time; this path was not really acknowledged until the 1970s. It was different in Northern Europe, where social democratic parties became openly reformist by the beginning of the 20th century and even joined forces with the liberals to be able to govern. The German social democrats came to power several times during the Weimar Republic (1918-1933); the Swedish Social Democratic Party came to power in 1930 and kept it with some interruptions until 2022. In the second half of the 20th century, social democratic governments have been in power at various times in almost all European countries. Until the 1980s, socialist and social democratic governments

implemented social policies and a generous redistribution financed by progressive taxation and high-level taxes on the wealthiest. Here we examine in class the programs of the Swedish and French social-democrat and socialist parties. We discuss the achievements of the government of Pierre Mauroy between 1981 and 1983, which was established after the election of François Mitterrand in 1981, the first socialist president of the Fifth French Republic (1958-now). Among the very progressive social measures that were put in place at the time that we discuss are the fifth week of paid vacations, the 39-hour work week, the tax on large fortunes, and, on another note, the abolition of the death penalty. All of this looks very progressive to US students. Nevertheless, I also remind the students that the socialists were neither the first nor the only ones to implement social legislation. In Germany, the first social insurance laws of the 1880s were put in place during the authoritarian regime of Chancellor Bismarck with the aim of strengthening national cohesion. By then, the German social democrats, still very much influenced by the letter of Marxism, were hostile to measures which they interpreted as "crutches" for capitalism. But from the end of the 19th century, German social democrats, like most of those in other European countries, saw labor legislation protecting the workers as well as social insurance and the financing of education, all as means of improving the condition of the working classes, of reducing social inequalities, and creating the conditions for a more harmonious society.

These social reforms have become an essential feature of the program and the government action of the different socialist and social democratic parties up to the 1980s. Those who oppose these social policies accuse them of being an instrument of excessive strengthening of the state at the cost of individual freedoms. Again, to overcome misconceptions, in particular for US students, I point out that, in many countries, such as Germany and France, social redistribution was and still is largely based on self-managed organizations of social insurance systems and has thus greatly contributed to increasing forms of social democracy from below.

Moreover, during the interwar and the post-World War II period, many social measures promoted by socialists were implemented locally, some under the label of "municipal socialism." The municipalization of water, gas, and public transportation was intended to provide the population with basic infrastructure at a reasonable price to guarantee a decent life for all and create a solidarity among the people. In addition, schools were built, subsidized housing was constructed, municipal baths and swimming pools, health clinics, sports fields multiplied, and, especially, after the Second World War, a variety of cultural activities were offered to the population. Together with a colleague who specializes in the history of architecture, we studied in depth with a group of students in Geneva, the case of Vienna, a city continuously run by social democracy since 1918 except during 1934 through 1945 (the period of Austrofascism and Nazism). We studied several housing complexes like the Karl-Marx-Hof erected between 1927 and 1930. Through its measures in favor of social housing, the social democratic municipality of Vienna not only ended the overpopulation of the slums but also promoted the construction of true

"workers' palaces." These "palaces" established the working class as an important and dignified part of the society while spreading progressive esthetical canons. In these "palaces" common spaces and services were developed and created the conditions for a collective life. This in-depth study allows for a better understanding of the nature, objectives, and results of these social/socialist measures which, without radically challenging the inequalities generated by capitalism, led to the creation of a more harmonious and less violent society.

Nevertheless, European students are now confronted with a new type of socialism, and this raises many questions about the true nature of socialism today. Since the 1990s and the end of the communist alternative in Europe, social democrats who governed in Germany with Gerhard Schröder (1998-2004), in England with Tony Blair (1997-2007), in Sweden with Göran Persson (1996-2006), or in the Netherlands with Wim Kok (1994-2002) have drastically revised this social-reformist agenda and abandoned the language of class. They all committed to what they have labelled the "third way," advocating in favor of private entrepreneurship and the valorization of personal responsibility against collective organization. Concretely they developed measures which aimed to reduce taxes on higher incomes and to cut social spending. Schroeder has been responsible for the large dismantlement of the generous German welfare state while Göran Persson had initiated pension reform on the model of the Swiss three-pillar system, which privatized part of the pensions. Even more left leaning socialists began cutting social spending and promoting more business-friendly politics. It was the case with François Hollande (2012-2017) in France and even in Greece with Tsipras, the leader of the more radical new left party Syriza (2015-2019). They all have offered weak resistance to the neo-liberal turn by promoting the disengagement of the State in the economy and did not stop the financialization of capitalism that they had previously condemned.

For students, it appears -- and rightly so -- as a contradiction with what we had studied so far. In order to question this contradiction, we look at the room for maneuver that socialists and social democrats still have in a highly entangled world where multinational corporation are more powerful than many states. But we also take a closer look at the orientations of these "third way socialists" by studying the program of New Labour and some of Tony Blair's statements. We try to understand what they mean when they claim to promote an "ethical" socialism, free of any Marxist influence, and propose to draw inspiration from the writings of the first socialists.

At the end of a semester during which we have dealt with the first socialist currents, the diversity of Marxist inspirations, the reformist social-democratic turn at the end of the 19th century, and municipal socialism, the students are well equipped to discuss this alleged return to the "roots" of socialism and more broadly to look critically at our world.

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