

The Great Balancing Act:  
Explaining the Social Democratic Party's position taking on Democracy and  
Capitalism in Germany (1871-1959)

by  
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## **Abstract**

This thesis follows the history of the German SPD from its founding in 1871 to its ideological break with Marxism and reconceptualization as a mass party in 1959. I rely on three approaches to explain the positions that the party took in their party programs on the reconciliation between capitalism and democracy. The ideational approach is concerned with the role of ideas in party position taking. The Organizational approach focuses on internal dynamics of the party, its leadership, competing factions and membership. The positional approach draws inspiration from Downsian models of party competition where parties compete to be positioned closest to the majority of voters in policy space. For my purposes I split German history into three periods, the German Empire (1871-1913), the Weimar Republic (1918-1933) and the Federal Republic (1945-1959). I find that each of the approaches can help explain the positions taken by the SPD at different times in German history

## Chapter 1: Introduction

In 1875 in the small city of Gotha, located in the center of the German Empire, a small group of politically motivated citizens came together at the founding congress of the German Social Democratic Party (SPD). Spurred by a desire to unite the two dominant political organizations of the working class, the *Sozialistische Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands* (SAPD) and the *Allgemeiner Deutscher Arbeiter Verein* (ADAV), delegates debated issues concerning the project of working class liberation. Deeply aware of the unequal distribution of the fruits of the dominant economic system, the prospects of working class politics looked dire. The only hope laid in the members of the working class themselves against which all other classes merely constituted a “reactionary mass” (Gotha Program 1875). This sentiment is enshrined in the founding document of this congress, the Gotha Program. In this Program the party staked out its positions on understandings of, and the proper relationship between, democracy and socialism that would constitute the core of leftist politics in Germany for nearly one hundred years.

Eighty-four years later, in 1959, in a small town outside of Bonn, the recently established capital of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), members of the SPD met to discuss the future of their party. Historically the representative party of the Left in German political competition, the SPD had met numerous times since Gotha to discuss revisions of their *Grundsatzprogramm*, the party’s Manifesto. This latest meeting was held following three elections under the rules of the new Basic Law.

The Manifesto that the party agreed upon at the 1959 party congress, named the *Bad Godesberger Program* after the small town where the meeting was held, departed

significantly from earlier programs. In the aftermath of the Second World War, and under pressure from both the recently departed allies and the German voters, the Social Democrats completed their evolution away from the Marxist roots of the Gotha Program. Its class-based politics fared poorly in the post-war and cold war political-economic context. The change in positions from Gotha to Bad Godesberg coincides with a change in the party from a focus on class-based electoral organization to an electoral machine concerned first and foremost with votes. As a way of ensuring this, instead of categorizing all other classes as reactionary in the Godesberg Program the party makes peace with other classes and even attempts to make inroads with employers and other elites. This updated Program reflects not just its working out of a tension between democracy and socialism, but a final settlement with capitalism.

While a cursory glance at the two programs independent of their political economic context shows a difference, the question remains, why did the party change? Even embedded in the context of German political history, the differences in positioning by German parties cannot be simply explained as a reflection of the current political moment. The SPD's history as the oldest and largest of the leftist parties in Germany is full of programmatic renewals. Under each new political system, from the German Empire (1871-1914) to the parliamentary democracy of the Weimar Republic (1918-1933) and the Federal Republic of Germany (1949-), the party produced two distinct *Grundsatzprogramme*. Sometimes it took decades to construct a new program with only a few key changes; at other times the second manifesto was ratified within a few years of the first and shifted the party in an entirely new direction. As the German party with the longest continuous history, the SPD still functions as a competitive electoral party today,

though the German polity exists in its fourth iteration. In order to remain a viable political organization, the SPD was forced to alter some of its positions on key issues concerning capitalism and democracy. The SPD offers a fascinating window onto party change amidst sharply different political economic circumstances.

This thesis addresses questions of party competition in distinct polities. In order to understand any political system, we must understand the actors within the system.

Political parties as strategic actors have been studied widely and in a variety of different ways (Müller and Strøm 1999, Kitschelt 1994). This thesis explores issues ranging from party motivations to interactions with voters, and how these changes reflect different political economic contexts. These analyses are linked to another core issue taken up in this thesis, namely the relationship between democracy and capitalism. Leftist parties are uniquely positioned to be interrogated in search of an answer to these questions.

Historically, class has been the key issue for parties operating on the left of the ideological spectrum. Additionally these parties discuss the degree to which the *state* should regulate—or whether to allow at all—the operation of capitalism. This thesis asks the question *why?* Why do parties alter their commitments to these core issues? Taking a historical perspective, it furthermore asks *how* German leftist parties, and the SPD in particular, has altered its commitments.

In this thesis I will examine the positions that the SPD has taken on the transformation of capitalism over 84 years, in three distinct polities, and various political economic contexts. In doing so I will compare the relative explanatory power of three dominant approaches to party position-taking. I find that an *ideational* analysis both explains the early iterations of position-taking during the German Empire but

*organizational* and *spatial* approaches best account for the SPD's public commitments during the chaotic Weimar Republic. The devastation of the Nazi dictatorship and its aftermath established a new order for political competition in post-1945 Germany. An *organizational* account best explains the SPD's growing failure to adapt to changing circumstances and organizational changes eventually allowed the party to respond to electoral pressures by evolving into a catch-all party now fully reconciled to sanding capitalism's rough edges, rather than destroying it. In the remainder of this chapter I introduce the reader to my objects of inquiry, the literature concerning party positioning and my research methods.

### **Party Platforms, Manifestos or Programs**

In order to answer the questions posed above, namely why do party commitment change, I look at party programs. I understand party programs to be the equivalent to party platforms and party manifestos. Programs are the collectively agreed-upon principles and policies of a party and combine the theoretical and practical dimensions of politics (Borg 1966: 97). Political competition, ideology and party organization contribute to the content of these documents due to the strategic elements of program formulation. Indeed, "changes from one platform to the next reflect deliberate decisions of the party to alter that identity" (Harmel and Svasand 1997: 321). Consequently, changes in the nature of party manifestos' can have numerous possible explanations.

In essence, these documents outline the particular principles that specific parties organize and campaign around. Due largely to shorter campaign cycles, the US electoral system places comparatively minor importance on the commitments made in party platforms. Most European systems, however, center on party platforms as the primary way for parties to interact with voters. The platforms themselves consequently have a far



greater impact (Mudde, 2002). Written in German, most of these party platforms are inaccessible to American political scientists and only a few scholars have conducted close readings of them. Even in Germany these programs have rarely been analyzed in light of party theory. I will address this lacuna and study these programs from the party's organization in the era of rapid industrialization in 1875 to the post World War Two era. Following a sustained period of increased economic prosperity, the German left broke with its past in 1959 to reconcile itself to a vision of politics that was no longer based on zero-sum competition between classes.

My research draws on a number of useful, authoritative studies that trace the programmatic history of the SPD. Some of these works follow the programs from the party's beginnings to the contemporary period. Others focus on a distinct period of time and analyze the change from one program to another. Many such studies have been published only in German and offer historical narratives rather than seeking to provide a social scientific explanation for these changes (Winkler 1982; Münkel 2007).

For example, Heinrich August Winkler (1982) traces the change in the SPD *Grundsatzprogramme* during the Weimar Republic. He focuses on the Görlitz Program of 1921, the first SPD *Grundsatzprogramm* after WWI, and specifically the internal party debate on the inclusion of non working-class members in the party's electoral base. Winkler is uniquely attuned to the complex relationship between the party's ideology and its organization. His study draws on party literature other than the programs themselves to substantiate his claims concerning the process of program ratification. Though he pays careful attention to the socio-political climate during the Weimar Republic and attributes the changes to external pressures that might be categorized largely as ideational and

organizational, he does not classify his approach in these terms. Rather, Winkler investigates the party's actions at a certain moment in time and analyzes the program in order to discuss the classification of the SPD as a class or mass party (Winkler, 1982).

Münkel (2007) provides a more complete overview of the programmatic history of the SPD, but sacrifices a close look at the internal politics of positional change in favor of a broad description of programmatic commitments. Both Münkel and Winkler implicitly and explicitly discuss the role of ideas on the party, and both trace an organizational shift in the party throughout the early twentieth century. Yet the spatial model of party competition, so central to political scientists, receives little to no attention in either of these studies. While relevant studies exist in English, most are either general histories of the Left in Europe (Eley 2002) or offer surveys of the SPD, touching on programmatic shifts without analyzing language in any detail (Wilson, 1989; Katz and Mair, 1992; Harmel and Janda, 1994).

### **The SPD**

I focus on the German Social Democratic Party, the SPD. Since its founding in 1875, the party has served as the standard for other European social democratic parties (Sassoon 1996). Many of the leading Marxist theorists—other than Karl Marx himself and his closest collaborator Friedrich Engels—were affiliated with the German SPD. Indeed, the party had the second-highest electoral success in Europe prior to the outbreak of the First World War, and had over four times as many members as the second largest social democratic party during that time (Eley 2002: Table 4.2). In addition to its international importance, the SPD has been the largest party on the left in Germany since its founding. Though other parties competed with the SPD for socialist voters these parties had little long-term success when compared to the SPD. And while smaller leftist parties, such as

the Communist Party (KPD) during Weimar, did achieve electoral victories, they are less interesting to study in terms of position taking on the issues of capitalism and democracy. This is due to their relatively clear, unwavering positions on such issues. The KPD, for example, never strayed from its distinct anti-capitalist stance and opposition to the foundation of liberal democracy the Republic. The relative importance of the SPD in German and European politics, coupled with the party's resilience in the face of political change and continued development of its positions on the transformation of the capitalist system, make it a unique party worth taking a closer look at, both in terms of understanding better the dynamics of socialism amidst democracy and in terms of understanding party position change more broadly.

### **Literature Review**

Scholars of political parties have drawn on several competing approaches when seeking to explain why and how parties change their position taking or commitments. I have identified three prominent strains in this literature. The *spatial* approach is rooted in economic theory applied to political parties. This approach explains party position taking relative to other electorally competitive parties. Second, the *organizational* approach focuses on the individual parts of the party and explains changes in positions by focusing on internal changes in who is empowered to determine the party's public issue positions and ideological components. Finally, the *ideational* approach describes changes in party doctrine in terms of the independent causal impact of ideas as they swirl in and about parties. Disagreements among the various approaches reflect different views on the motives of parties.

The dominant motivations for political parties are found in the title of Strøm and Müller's *Policy, Office, or Votes* (1999). Each realm, policy, office, or vote, places an emphasis on a particular motivation. If one believes capturing the most votes is the primary motivation of any party, a spatial approach lends itself well to further analysis. However, if the goal of a party is to enact policy, it may not need to capture the most votes to enter in a governing coalition. In this case, ideas about policy might best explain position taking, especially of smaller coalition parties. Some of these explanations may be more convincing in certain periods than others. Keeping in mind historical fluctuations, I contend that any monocausal account will fall short of explaining the complexity and variability of party position taking. My thesis thus does not advance any single explanation, but seeks to identify which forces are most powerful at a given time. However, I must first justify their usefulness in tracing leftist parties' commitments.

### **Spatial Model of Party Competition**

The literature on spatial party competition in political science is extensive. Though the first applications of a simple one-dimensional spatial model came from economics (Hotelling 1929), and Downs promoted its application to political processes in his 1957 classic, *An Economic Theory of Democracy*. In his treatise, Downs places political actors on a left-right ideological scale in order to make predictions about party position taking on certain left-right issues (Downs 1957). Researchers continue to rely on a one- or two-dimensional spectrum to understand party competition and position taking. However, the versatility of this model derives from its simplicity, which also limits the applicability of the model when it comes to discussing the complex relationships of parties to their systems and thus their positions.

The main assumptions of this type of inquiry are two-fold. First, the spatial model of relies on the assumption that winning elections is the primary motivating force of political parties. Additionally, it assumes party elites can “move” wherever they like in an unconstrained manner. Together these two assumptions lead to the prediction that all party position taking is relative given the competition. Positions are solely instrumental, and are changed in order to capture a larger segment of the electorate. Numerous critiques have been leveled against the real applicability of the model to explain party position taking.

Most important, political scientists have critiqued the presupposition that parties exist in a one-dimensional space (Stokes 1963; Pelizzo 2003). Left-right ideology, even along class lines, is simply not sufficient to explain the competition of political parties in modern democracies. Religious conflict, urban-rural splits, and regional differences are evident in nearly every modern democracy (Rokkan and Lipset 1967). Scholars also dispute other assumptions of the model for oversimplifying the complex interactions between political parties.

Still, the spatial logic of party competition is persuasive and indispensable, even if it cannot explain all party behavior. Within any party system that includes two or more parties, the strategies of other parties will affect the actions of each player in the electoral game. On any individual issue, a party is constrained by the positions staked out by other parties. If an issue is less important for a given party than to other parties, the individual party may have more freedom in expressing its positions. However, as soon as it stakes out a position, it becomes vulnerable to competing positions encroaching on the votes that they hope to receive from their position.

### **Organizational Model of Party Competition**

The second body of theorizing party position taking emphasizes the party's organizational features. In contrast to the flexible view of party position taking emphasized by the spatial approach, this organizational approach understands parties as complex bodies often resistant to rapid transformations. Like most collective actors, parties face organizational constraints that affect the expression of shared beliefs. Who controls the party, who drafts the party's positions, and what factions exist within the party membership affect the outcomes of internal deliberations. Because position taking is thus often highly constrained by internal features.

Many scholars distinguish parties by placing them within neat groups that reflect the core constituents of the party (Lipset and Rokkan 1967; Duverger 1954; Kirchheimer 1966). Differing party motivations as well as different views on the structure of society manifest themselves in unique organizational structures. A focus on a single issue or a single group of voters requires different organization than a mass party. Parties at different points in time may also have different organizational features reflecting the evolution of that party. According to this literature such features are the key to differentiating one type from another.

The attention to the relationship between civil society and the party at large can obfuscate some of the more complex interactions of party organizations. Katz and Mair (1994) attempt to disaggregate organization in terms of the party, "on the ground," "in public office," and "in central office" (Katz and Mair 1994: 4). Party manifestos offer insight into the workings of the "party in central office... which, at least in the traditional mass-party model, organizes and is usually representative of the party on the ground" (Katz and Mair 1994: 4). Harmel and Janda suggest three possible explanations for party

change. According to them, parties change due to “leadership change, a change in the dominant faction of the party, and/or an external stimulus for change” (Harmel and Janda 1994: 1).

### **Ideational Model of Party Competition**

The final family of explanations of party position-taking emphasizes the independent effects of ideas in politics. Here, the broad system of beliefs and ideas that guide party politics constrain possible commitments. Ideology is more than just the actual organizational manifestations of certain ideas within the party itself. While an underlying ideology can have a marked effect on the organization of the party, the work of ideology does not stop here. Ideational theorists (Hall 2003; Berman 1998) stress the independence of ideas from actual political organization, and have formulated ways to discuss ideas as independent variables. Ideology is one of the bases of party formation, and can be a dynamic characteristic of parties that affects both what the party organ can and cannot say about certain topics.

There is a large body of literature concerning ideas but I draw on a few authors to illustrate how I intend to treat the power of ideas. For example, Sheri Berman (1998) views ideas as independent phenomena to be studied separately from parties and their political institutions. In *The Social Democratic Moment: Ideas and Politics in the Making of Interwar Europe* (1998), she studies ideas and politics of Social Democratic parties in the interwar period (1917-1933). For Germany this is one of the most important periods in which a thicket of opposing ideas within parties leads to splits and fragmentation. Consequently, it is challenging to make sense of the political landscape. Berman begins her account in the foundational years of social democracy in 19<sup>th</sup> century Germany to provide historical context for her arguments concerning the party during the Weimar

Republic. She distinguishes between ideology and programmatic beliefs, arguing that the latter, while abstract and systematic, differ from the former in that they do not amount to a “total vision of the world.” The programmatic beliefs provide guidelines for programs of concrete action (Berman 1998: 21). Berman shows how ideas shape the resulting organizational and institutional structures of the social democratic parties in Germany and Sweden.

Berman’s analysis is important for my project, as she explains party position taking with reference to the ideas embedded in party institutions and structure. According to Berman, the ideas of the parties at their beginnings are institutionalized in such a way that they affect both the development of parties internally (i.e. organizationally) and how they respond to challenges such as economic crises and electoral defeats. In tracing how the interests of the SPD in Germany develop, she emphasizes how ideational commitments filter party leaders’ perceptions of both the problems they wish to address and the solutions they propose. If parties are relatively fixed ideologically, they must develop other mechanisms to react to new electoral environments. Ideas concerning the appropriate focus of the party are an example of this type of reactive movement.

### **Research Design and Methods**

As mentioned above, this study seeks to explain the complex history of the SPD by drawing on three broad theories of party position taking: ideational, organizational, and spatial. As I provide a brief overview of these preceding sections I will focus on my use of these theories here. In testing these approaches it is unlikely that any monocausal, “one-size-fits-all” story can account for the complexity and variation of such positions across time. Additionally, these positions are not taken in a vacuum; political-economic context is necessary for any discussion of party action. The electoral competitors within



this context also change over time. Thus, while my *empirical* contribution will rest entirely on my collection and analysis of party documents, my *explanatory* contribution necessarily requires understanding how other major parties position themselves relative to the SPD.

### **Periodization**

Part of my method includes an admittedly German attempt to impose order on the turbulent history of the German nation-state. As such, my periodization is as much a part of my method as the interpretive tools I use to understand the party programs. Since I am concerned with the German Left's position taking on the relationship between capitalism and democracy, I begin with the first calls for democracy by social democrats in the late nineteenth century, and end with the reconciliation of democracy and capitalism at the end of the 1950s.

Given the historical transformations and flux of the German political system from the period of rapid industrialization at the founding of the German Empire in 1871 to the SPD's break with Marxism and publishing of the Godesberg Program in 1959, this study must contend with a series of momentous political shifts. In order to structure the inquiry across time, I focus on three distinct political periods: the Founding period (1871-1914), the Weimar period (1918-1933), and the period of the founding years of the Federal Republic (West Germany from 1945-1959). Since I am studying political parties of the Left, I will not be looking at the period of Nazi dictatorship from 1933-1945, when opposition parties were banned. I am also excluding from consideration the one-party, authoritarian regime in East Germany (1945-1989).

During these periods, parties such as the SPD, which existed in some form under that name during all three periods, faced different constraints on their position taking due

to unique political economic contexts. In each of the periods that I have studied different political rules of the game existed. The national boundaries of Germany were redrawn following both world wars, affecting who voted in elections. Furthermore, suffrage was expanded following the First World War, again affecting who could vote in German federal elections. The electoral system itself changed from one nested in a monarchical system to an expansive democracy during Weimar to a curtailed version of the Weimar system after World War Two. Though German history has been marked by momentous changes in political systems, parties often exhibit surprising continuities over time (Geddes 1995; Grzymala-Busse 2003).

### **The Left**

My focus on the left is a deliberate choice given my interest in party position taking on the tensions between democracy and capitalism. Especially with regard to redistribution, left parties stand to gain more from promoting these types of structural reforms of the political economy. This is in part due to the constituents of left parties (Pontusson and Rueda 2010). Typically, the core bloc of voters for left parties stand to gain more from redistribution due to their position in the lower half of the income distribution (Meltzer and Richards 1981). Furthermore, the European left has strong historical ties to socialism, specifically the type of democratic socialism promoted by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In Marx's view, the material relations of production constituted the base of society. Thus, the various Internationals' commitment to social democratic parties was inherently concerned with the political-economic relations of their respective countries. As a result of a commitment to socialism and redistributive policies in particular, leftist parties have a strategic interest in having the question of capitalism's compatibility with democracy on the table. Additionally, they

should also advocate for definite solutions to these problems, and therefore are an interesting family of parties to examine at in order to analyze political discourse.

In fact, the German left is of particular interest in this manner due to its clear answer to the question of whether to reconcile itself to capitalist democracy expressed in the Bad Godesberg Program of 1959. Up to this time the party had to balance on the tight rope between capitalism and democracy. Following the publication of the Godesberg Program, the question was settled and the party affirmed its support of the system by reorganizing itself as a party “for the people” rather than only the workers (SPD 1959).

### **Evidence**

Evidence of party positions comes from their programs. In Germany, parties have long provided two types of public documents to voters: *Grundsatzprogramme* (basic programs) and *Wahlprogramme* (electoral programs). As the name suggests, the *Grundsatzprogramm* is the document that “sets out the basic values of the party” (Inoguchi and Blondel 2012). Texts of this genre consequently contain a picture of the party’s ideology at the time of publication. The *Wahlprogramme*, by contrast, articulate the commitments parties make during specific electoral contests. Throughout German political history parties have published different *Grundsatzprogramme*, but much less frequently than the number of elections in which they fielded candidates and formulate *Wahlprogramme*.

Different approaches to analyzing political texts exist (Winkler 1982; Budge 2001; Mudde 2002; Laver and Benoit 2006). However, many of these methods are uniquely suited for cross-national studies as they strive to render different parties’ programs directly comparable. As a study of a single country my study requires a more fine-grained analysis than top-level categorizations or coding of parts of the manifestos.

In order to analyze the position taking in light of the theories discussed above, simple word counts or even sentence-level coding is of little use. Instead, I place the manifestos of leftist parties in their respective contexts, both historical and textual, and then discuss the possible explanations for *why* they include certain statements, or at least *what* may have influenced the decision-making process leading to these statements. While these programs constitute my main source of party positions, I also rely on secondary sources to aid in interpretation and contextualization. Thus, my focus rests on qualitative textual analysis methods to discuss “specific content and histories” (Gerring 1998: 288) as a way of understanding the public commitments parties make regarding democracy and capitalism.

For the purposes of my inquiry I look at numerous programs mostly from parties on the Left in Germany. Since the SPD occupies such a prominent position in my research it is also the most heavily represented in terms of manifesto data. The data is primarily gathered from *Grundsatz* programs. The SPD, from 1875-1959, published five basic programs all named after their place of conception: Gotha (1875), Erfurt (1891), Görlitz (1921), Heidelberg (1924) and Bad Godesberg (1959).

In the summer of 2016, thanks in large part to the contributions from the Gerstein Award, I was able to travel to Bonn and visit the party foundations of the SPD and CDU. During my visits I had the opportunity to read through primary documents the party archives, including numerous of the programs mentioned above. In order to substantiate my arguments concerning SPD position taking during Weimar, amidst a proliferation of leftist parties, I look at *Grundsatz* Programs from the Independent Social Democratic Party (USPD) as well as the Communist Party (KPD). Finally, during the post-war period

I also examine *Wahlprogramme* from the SPD and its main electoral competitor, the Christian Democratic Union (CDU). Over this period the German population voted in three federal elections 1949, 1953 and 1957. Thus I assess a total of 6 electoral programs from this period.

### **Summary of Findings**

The thesis follows a chronological structure. I devote a chapter to each of the periods defined above. As I argue, in most cases, two competing explanations are the most likely candidates in accounting for party position taking in a particular period, and so each chapter strives to demonstrate which is the more powerful for that era. Each chapter begins by introducing the political-economic context, then describes the relevant parties' efforts to make public claims about the relationship between the state and capitalism, and closes with an effort to explain party programs.

Chapter 2 covers the founding era (1871-1914), a period of intense industrialization, the expansion of Germany's borders, fledgling working-class organization, and—most important--the great consolidation of power by a central state. Two parties--the ADAV and the SDAP--take center stage. Four years after the unification of the German *Reich*, they came together to form the direct precursor of the SPD, the *Sozialistische Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands* (SAPD). Through a close analysis of the Gotha Program (1875) and the Erfurt Program (1891) I find that an ideational account best explains these programs, which concern the relationship between the state, its citizens, and capitalism. While Gotha functioned as a unifying document, the Erfurt Program clearly outlines the principles of the German Social Democratic Party (SPD).

Chapter 3 tackles the heady, complex, and ultimately tragic Weimar period (1918-1933), from the establishment of parliamentary democracy after the war until Hitler's rise to power. The turbulent period of democratization following the abdication of the Kaiser and establishment of a People's Council tasked with drafting the new German constitution was a time of massive and fast-paced political upheaval. Due to the complexities of the period, I divide it into two sub-periods of party competition. Intense political organizing as well as social and economic instability mark the first five years, from 1918-1923. During this time, the SPD struggled to establish itself in the new republic it demanded in the years preceding the war. Although the party made real gains in terms of worker protections, it faced a challenging electoral context that included numerous competitors opposed to parliamentary democracy. Thus, I examine the position-taking of two new parties, the Communist party (KPD) and the Independent Social Democratic Party (USPD) as well as that of the SPD. I describe the public commitments of these major leftist parties in order to buttress my organizational explanation of SPD statements regarding how democracy and capitalism might be reconciled.

The second sub-period in chapter 3 ranges from 1924-1929. This is a period of relative political and economic stability up until the economic crash of 1929. After attempting to deal with the mounting organizational fissures apparent in party membership during Weimar's first five years, SPD decision-making was dominated by electoral concerns. In competition with the KPD for the left-most voters of the working class, the SPD was forced to reassess its positions taken in the Görlitz Program (1921) and published in the Heidelberg Program in 1924. I argue that SPD's wrestling with

capitalism and democracy is best explained with reference to a spatial analysis of the electoral battle between SPD and KPD.

Just as chapters 2 and 3 are divided by a war, so too are chapters 3 and 4. The Second World War had a devastating effect on Germany. The allied victors, fearful of a resurgence of National Socialism, occupied the German territories from 1945 to 1955. During this time, the Allies in the West helped western Germany reestablish itself as a capitalist democracy. Politicians drafted a new Basic Law meant to protect democracy against the anti-democratic parties that plagued the Weimar Republic's party system. Two major parties competed for office during this time, the SPD and the more conservative Christian Democratic Union. I explain the positions of the SPD in terms of its internal organization. Under the leadership of Kurt Schumacher the party maintained its course of opposition to the capitalist system. After his death it took another seven years for the party to complete its evolution from class-based party to catch-all party.

Chapter 5 provides a brief overview of some of the markers of German social democratic policy following the adoption of the Bad Godesberg Program. The transformative effects of the reconceptualization of party identity manifested in this program, as well as distinctive political-economic features aided the SPD in attaining governmental power. During the 60s the party promoted reforms to the welfare and tax system that increased the material welfare of the German working class. I also provide a summary of my findings as well as some next steps future researchers might take.

## **Chapter 2: The Founding Period (1917-1914)**

The SPD was born in 1875 at a congress in the small town of Gotha in Thuringia. After the unification of the German empire in 1871, the two representatives of working class interests in the, up to this point independent, lands of Germany set aside some of their differences and met to draft their own unifying document, the Gotha program (Potthoff and Miller 2006: 38-41). This chapter discusses the positions of the SPD in the Gotha program as well as those taken in the Erfurt Program of 1891.

I discuss the period's two *Grundsatzprogramme* in chronological sequence. The Gotha Program of 1875 may be regarded as the founding document of the party. Though it was penned by the leading voice of popular Marxism in Europe, Karl Kautsky, it does not yet fully reflect his dominant strain of Marxian ideas. My analysis of the program's language and the inconsistency of the ideas it expresses serves as the basis for my argument that, while organizational pressure drove the party unification process the compromise is based in Marxist propositions concerning the relationship between democracy and capitalism. I argue that the organizational approach to party position taking does help to explain the program's lack of emphasis on these very ideas though they exerted a force evident in the second program of this era, the Erfurt Program.

The organizational approach focuses on internal party dynamics. These dynamics were certainly important during the time in which the ADAV and the SDAP came together to form a new, unified party. Especially given the differences in the sizes of the two parties' membership base one faction may have had more power in the ratification process of the party program. However, the political economic context following the



unification of the German empire and the dismal electoral results of each party alone in the early elections made the joining of the two parties mutually beneficial. Since the parties were already on the path to merge their organizational structures the content of the program did not necessarily need to appease one side over the other. I therefore argue that the organizational approach is of secondary importance in explaining the position taking in Gotha and especially Erfurt. The positions taken by the SPD in these programs is better explained in ideational terms.

Based on my analysis of the party's second *Grundsatzprogramm*, formulated in Erfurt in 1891 I contend that Marxist ideas concerning the relationship of the worker to the dominant political system do the most work in explaining the positions of the German Left on the issue of the relationship between democracy and capitalism at this early period in the movements political history. Compared to the Gotha Program, the Erfurt Program and subsequent discussions inside the SPD show a marked increase of attention to the relationship between capitalism and democracy as a political issue to be highlighted in programmatic doctrines.

First, I provide a brief overview of the political and economic environment in which the party formed. This allows me to situate the SPD's two major programs of this period in a historical context. Then I introduce the party's predecessors, the *Allgemeiner deutscher Arbeiterverband* (ADAV) and the *Sozialdemokratische Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands* (SDAP), to raise the question of why these two parties, different in their ideas about the state and the role of political parties in the class struggle but similar in their goals, came together to form one of the most successful socialist parties in Europe. Third, I introduce the content of the Gotha program and provide an explanation of the

positions taken in this program. I do the same for the Erfurt program. I conclude that the influence of Marxism tied the two parties together in a way that is evidently expressed in the first program of the party that would become today's German SPD and reinforced after a period of state pressure in the party's 1891 Erfurt Program.

### **Marx and European Socialism**

The worker's movement in Germany prior to unification in 1871 was a diffuse collection of organizations and ideas. Marxism had gradually come into being as a basis for political action. The second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was marked by rapid industrialization and changing class structure, a rise in the power of nationalism, numerous wars, and constantly shifting national borders. In addition to, and partly spurred by, the rapid transformation of the European geo-political landscape, the 1860s was a time of party organization and mass campaigns centered on the working class. The political potential of the working class was already evident to Marx. However, it was unclear how to use this perceived potential to transition from the status quo—industrial capitalism amidst a monarchy with limited political freedoms—to socialism. Though it would not be until after the First World War that Germany truly democratized, the late 1860s brought a wave of popular enfranchisement that bolstered the fledgling social movement into a political force (Eley 2002). Even within the monarchies dominated European political systems, representative bodies for the population existed. In many cases suffrage was restricted to men over a specified age and parties in Germany mostly represented local constituencies or the landed elite. Against this backdrop workers' associations were the first instance of working class organization. Though limited opportunities for attaining actual political power existed, these were mostly symbolic due to the distribution of power between the royal elite and the industrial classes. Within the

monarchical systems in Europe, socialist parties began to provide an alternative to the traditional Liberal and Conservative parties.

Marx's activity in the First International and the ideology he expounded together with Friedrich Engels in the Communist Manifesto set up the theoretical guidelines for the way socialist parties should constitute themselves and operate in political competition. Donald Sassoon (1996) distinguishes three features of 19<sup>th</sup> century European socialism based on Marx's theory. One is the determinacy of the doctrine of historical materialism. According to this view, history moves in stages differentiated by specific economic systems. To each dominant, or current, economic system "corresponds a particular system of power and hence a specific ruling class" (Sassoon 1996: 6).

Furthermore, Marx viewed capitalism, the dominant economic system of his time, as unjust. The formal equalities, of increased suffrage and worker protections that primarily the middle classes benefited from, gained in the revolutions of the late 1840s only functioned to legitimize the inequalities between worker and capitalist (Eley 2002: 47). However, the key for socialist party politics lay not in Marx's critiques but was "the product of the idea and political practice of the leaders of European socialism (especially in Germany)" (Sassoon 1996: 6). These leaders, spurred by the ideas of Marxism, began to define workers as a homogeneous class that must strive towards real equality, which remained obfuscated by capitalism. They saw a democratic system as a fruitful arena for working class liberation given the growing number of working class citizens at the hands of the capitalist system.

Based on these ideas, socialist parties began to spring up all over Europe with the goal of organizing the working class politically in order to propel the inevitable collapse

of capitalism from its own contradictions (Eley 2002; Sasoon 1996). These parties worked towards a transitional state of participatory democracy that Marx believed to be the necessary political halfway house on the road to socialism (Brandt and Lehnert 2013). The German SPD was one of the first socialist parties to espouse a form of Marxist positions and became a model for new socialist parties across Europe to emulate (Sasoon 1996). Prior to the model the SPD provided forms of socialism such as Chartism, Blanquism and utopian socialism had provided an ideological basis for socialist action across the continent (Eley 2002: 21-30).

### **The German Empire**

In 1871, one imperial territory, three free cities, four kingdoms, five duchies, six grand duchies, and 7 principalities were unified into the first German *Reich*. Following the Prussian victory in the Franco-Prussian War, the chancellor of the Northern German Confederation, Otto von Bismarck, proclaimed Wilhelm I of Prussia as Emperor of the German Reich. This event marked the beginning of a new political order in the German territories, which had previously been merely a loose confederation of states. Prussia, the largest duchy in the German Empire occupying much of what is Poland today, remained the most powerful player in the new order, as it controlled both the largest swathes of territory and the largest proportion of the population.

The government of the newly unified German empire was set up as a federal constitutional monarchy. The King of Prussia was the Emperor and selected a *Reichskanzler* (Reich Chancellor) who presided over the upper house of the German imperial government, the *Bundesrat*. State governments sent as many delegates as they were allotted according to the constitution to this chamber. The members of the *Bundesrat* were more often than not civil servants with close alliances to the royal

families of the 25 German territories. The distribution of seats corresponded roughly to the size of the states population. As a result, Prussia dominated the *Bundesrat*, controlling 17 of the 61 seats and effectively constituting nearly one-third of the votes in the chamber.

The *Reichstag*, or lower house, more closely resembled the U.S. House of Representatives. All men over the age of 25 elected their representatives via direct secret ballots in single-member districts under a majority-voting rule. As a result, this chamber included representatives from various political parties. While the *Reichstag* played a role in drafting or proposing legislation, more often than not the *Bundesrat* decided on the legality of certain laws and even played a role in proposing legislation (Orlow 2008). Additionally, the *Reichskanzler* presided over the *Bundesrat* and cast the votes for the entire Prussian bloc. Other voting rules further bolstered the power of the *Bundesrat* to maintain the rule of law in Germany. The privileged position of the Chancellor in the legislature meant that Prussia was the leading kingdom of Germany (Hayes 1916).

Prussia had a history of aristocratic rule rife with conservatism and militarism. Chancellor Bismarck exemplified these characteristics during his tenure from 1871 until Kaiser Wilhelm II released him from the position in 1890. Bismarck was the chief advocate of the new German constitution. This was essentially the same document he had ratified in Prussia during the years prior to unification (Orlow 2008). The constitution maximized his power, tied conservative authoritarianism with liberal economics, and actively curtailed the political power the emergence of new social groups along class or religious lines (Orlow 2008: 14). Though Bismarck presided over an intense economic

depression, for the most part he was heralded as “the great unifier” and credited with many of the successes of the founding period of the German empire (Orlow 2008).

The economic context of the early period of German history provided fertile soil for Marxist ideas to take root. As the economy shifted from agriculture to industry, the relative value of landed to liquid assets also changed (Ziblatt 2008). Job opportunities expanded during this period for almost all sectors of the economy. Nonetheless, the decades after unification were marked by numerous instances of economic turbulence. Already in 1872, immediately after the founding of the Reich, the economy was showing signs of overheating (Orlow 2008: 13-19). An influx of restitution paid by the French in the wake of the Franco-Prussian war had led to an increase in investment, which was followed by a severe depression in 1877/8. After a brief period of recovery, the empire languished in a depressed economic state for nearly the entire decade from 1880-1890 (Orlow 2008: 13-19).

In the face of the rising popularity of the socialist ideology, in 1878 Bismarck enacted a set of laws, referred to as the *Sozialistengesetze* (socialist laws), meant to curtail the power of the organizations that promoted it. After two assassination attempts on Emperor William I spread fear among the German populace, Bismarck stoked that fear in an attempt to snuff out the burgeoning socialist movement. The parliament voted overwhelmingly in support of the laws targeting socialism’s organization and proliferation in the German Empire (Orlow 2008: 29-32). Socialist organizations, associations, meetings, and news organs were banned under the law. The rationale was that the goal of these groups was to overthrow the existing state and therefore dangerous to the nation. The state had almost unlimited power in dealing with proponents of

socialist ideology and could imprison and expel any suspicious persons and indeed they did (Potthoff and Miller 2006: 44). The law was extended three times over the course of the next decade and was only repealed after Bismarck's resignation as chancellor in 1890.

During this time, the state played an increasing role in the daily lives of its subjects. As the government expanded so did its provision of social goods. Unions and trade associations also played a critical role in the lives of the working class and began to regulate the workers (Eley 2002). Additionally, with the rapid processes of industrialization city growth occurred at a steady pace. As workers lived in ever-closer quarters, they began to self-organize in the major urban centers across Europe. In Germany, this urban move towards the organization of the working class occurred at a rate that exceeded many other nations, and eventually led the SPD to become the largest socialist party in Europe by the outbreak of the First World War (Eley 2002).

During this period, too, national governments expanded the franchise throughout the continent. Although in Germany the right to vote applied only in elections for the *Reichstag*, numerous political parties emerged to contest for representation. The ruling government immediately after unification was committed to the free market economy, low taxes and low levels of government regulation (Orlow 2008). The conservative ruling class that controlled the entire *Bundesrat* did not need to worry about losing their seats to new factions as their electorate consisted of the beneficiaries of the capitalist system; and yet, the competition at the party level in the *Reichstag*, while not immediately directly threatening the aristocracy's position of power, sent a signal of the changing political climate after unification. Socialist and catholic parties joined the traditional conservative and liberal parties in Germany, providing new ideologies for voters to coalesce around.

What had been simply a left-right regional split prior to unification now became a multi-faceted political landscape in which urban and rural voters demanded new representative organs.

These new parties slowly eroded the conservative monopoly on the votes from the agriculture, industry, and Prussian citizens. Rural peasants and the clergy left the Conservative party for parties they felt more closely aligned with their own ideas (Orlow 2008). Eventually this shifting political landscape actually led to a split in both the Conservative and the Liberal party (Lehnert and Ebert 2015). In this increasingly fragmented electoral system the Center Party carved out a position as the voice for German Catholics. In this same environment the two major political organizations concerned with the plight of the working class, the *Allgemeiner Deutscher Arbeiter Verein* (ADAV; General German Workers' Association) and the *Sozialdemokratische Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands* (SDAP; Social democratic Workers' Party of Germany), had their own moment of unification. The parties joined in order to strengthen their political position as *the* representatives of Marxist ideas about the economy and, consequently, working class interests (Potthoff and Miller: 40).

In 1875, four years after the unification of the German *Reich*, delegates of the ADAV and SDAP met in Gotha, a small city in the state of Thuringia. At this congress, the parties discussed the future of the political representation of working class interests. Though both parties existed in some form in the 1860s, their political success was limited to isolated campaigns that resulted in little real political power (Eley 2002).

The combination of the ADAV and the SDAP into the SAPD was facilitated by significant overlap among the major projects of the two parties as well as their shared



support for the working class. Although they had previously been in competition, the two parties were able to make the compromises required to join into a single organization (Walter 2009) on the basis of Marxist ideas. In this case, ideational factors outweigh organizational concerns. Though the theoretical foundation of the Gotha Program is rooted in the theory of Karl Marx, it is not until the Erfurt Program that the party adopts an explicitly Marxist preamble.

Year	National Liberals	Left Liberals	Conservatives	Center	Social Dems	Anti-Semites	Other	Participation (%)
1871	30.1	9.3	23.0	18.6	3.2	-	15.8	50.7
1874	29.7	9.0	14.1	27.9	6.8	-	12.4	60.8
1877	27.2	8.5	17.6	24.8	9.1	-	10.1	60.3
1881	14.7	23.1	23.7	23.2	6.1	-	9.1	56.1
1884	17.6	19.3	22.1	22.6	9.7	-	8.7	60.3
1887	22.3	14.1	25.0	20.1	10.1	0.2	8.2	77.2
1890	16.3	18.0	19.1	18.6	19.8	0.7	8.6	71.2
1893	13.0	14.8	19.3	19.1	23.4	3.5	7.7	72.2
1898	12.5	11.1	15.5	18.8	27.2	3.3	10.6	67.7
1903	13.9	9.3	13.5	19.8	31.7	2.6	9.5	75.3
1907	14.5	10.9	13.6	19.4	28.9	3.9	8.8	84.3
1912	13.6	12.3	12.2	16.4	34.8	2.9	7.7	84.5

Table 1: Reichstag Elections 1871-1912

Source: Hohorst, Gerd et al. 1978. *Sozialgeschichtliches Arbeitsbuch: Vol. 2. 1870-1914*. München: Beck. p. 173-176.

### ***Allgemeiner Deutscher Arbeiter Verein (ADAV)***

Ferdinand Lassalle, an active member of the 1848 democratic revolution in Germany, author, and orator was one of the leading figures of working class organization. His devotion to socialist political organization eventually propelled him to the top of the ADAV. Indeed, members of the group were even often referred to as *Lassalleans*. While the ADAV was not strictly Marxist, Lassalle himself was heavily influenced by the writings of Karl Marx. Lassalle remained at the helm of the party until his death in 1864,

but his ideas remained the basis of ADAV dogma until the organization joined the SDAP to form the *Sozialistische Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands* (SAPD), the direct precursor to the SPD, in 1875

Ferdinand Lassalle accepted the position as leader of the first workers' party in Germany in early 1863 and by the end of May that year, the ADAV had formulated a party constitution that prioritized enfranchisement – the universal, equal and direct vote – as its main goal. Lassalle had previously advocated for the need for a political party representing workers' interests. This party had to be independent from the existing liberal parties that had served as the political representatives of working class up to this time. Lassalle and his supporters created the ADAV as the organization for this project.

Lassalle believed in the supremacy of the “Iron Law of Wages” in a capitalist system. Under this law, attributed to the English economist David Ricardo, wages could not over– or undershoot the minimum wage necessary for mere subsistence. The main demands of the ADAV called for reform of the Prussian three-class voting system. This system was fundamentally inegalitarian and designed to ensure that a small class of elite land holders had a far greater political voice than the vastly larger lower classes of society (Ziblatt 2008).

On the question of German unification Lassalle argued for a *großdeutsch* (greater German) solution that would have united all of the German speaking countries under one central ruler. Furthermore, after the voting system was overhauled and democracy implemented, a critical role of the democratic state would be the protection and promotion of labor associations and unions. Lassalle viewed the party as in opposition to Liberalism in every form (Brandt and Lehnert, 2013). The ADAV and through its actions

were built around Lassalle and his position as unquestioned leader of the party, whose organization consequently reflected his dogma and persona at all levels. (Brandt and Lehnert 2013; Potthoff and Miller 2006: 28). After Lassalle's death (during a duel over a love affair), under the new leader Johann Baptist von Schweitzer the party shifted slightly from the hardline policies and centralized structure of the Lassallean era. Von Schweitzer's retirement as the head of the party removed one of the only remaining obstacles to party consolidation (Potthoff and Miller 2006: 38).

### ***Sozialdemokratische Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands (SDAP)***

Both of the leaders of the SDAP, Wilhelm Liebknecht and August Bebel had been a part of Lassalle's ADAV. They each developed an affinity for the socialist cause in Germany during their tenure in the ADAV (Lehnert and Ebert 2015). Eventually, however, both men left the organization in order to form their own party, first the *Sächsische Volkspartei* and later the SDAP. Prior to unification in 1871, both Liebknecht and Bebel were elected as representatives to the North German Reichstag. Since the constitution of the North German Confederation was the basis of the German *Reich's* constitution the same unequal divisions of power existed between the upper and lower houses of the legislature.

Already in his early years as a member of the ADAV August Bebel critiqued the organizational structure of the party as underestimating and, in fact, inhibiting the self-sufficiency he saw as an essential part of the working class. His preferred version of socialism saw labor unions as fertile ground for the propagation and promotion of the movement's core ideals. This conceptualization of the socialist movement starting from the bottom up stood in direct opposition to Lassalle's call for a new socialist party. Still, Bebel, too, recognized the need for political power as a precondition for the eventual

liberation of labor. Together with Wilhelm Liebknecht, in 1866 Bebel founded the *Sächsische Volkspartei* (SV) which won 3 seats in parliament in the North German elections of 1867. Both Bebel and Liebknecht, who entered the parliament following these electoral results, contended that the social and political emancipation of the laboring class were inextricably linked. Therefore, they demanded a free political state as the necessary pre-condition to economic freedom. At this point the SV had no desire to form an alliance with any other party, due to their fundamental differences (Lehnert and Brandt 2013). Similar to the ADAV, the party attempted to establish itself as *the* alternative to the liberal democratic parties that had controlled much of the working class vote in previous elections.

At Eisenach, in 1869, Bebel and Liebknecht renamed the party the *Sozialdemokratische Arbeiterpartei* (SDAP), which included numerous union organizations as well as a large membership base of previous SV members and even a number of ADAV repudiators. The party drafted the *Eisenacher Programm* at this party congress. In the document the authors included numerous demands, based on Marxist theory, to go along with the call to establish the free democratic state. The SDAP distinguished itself from the ADAV in a few distinct ways. First, their conceptualization of the unified German state was not *Großdeutsch*. Instead they advocated for a *Kleindeutsch* solution that only unified the northern states. Additionally, the party favored a federalist structure as opposed to the centralist system of government that the ADAV promoted. The idea of self-governance was further reinforced by the SDAP's strong commitment to the growing union movement. In contrast, the ADAV did not

believe in the necessity of unions in order to promote socialist ideals in everyday life. Instead the ADAV promoted unionism mostly on an industry scale.

Even with such opposing views of the structure of the new state, the common adherence to the basic ideas of Marx provided a sufficient foundation for the ADAV and SDAP to combine their organizations into the *Sozialistische Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands* (SAPD; Socialist Worker's Party of Germany), the precursor of the SPD.

***Sozialistische Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands (SAPD):***

At the 1875 party congress in Gotha, members of the ADAV and SDAP joined together to establish the basic principles of the SAPD. Although both parties were proponents of socialist politics, their principles differed on numerous points. Still, the parties were unified in their commitments to the plight of the working class based in Marxist teachings as well as the advocacy for a democratic state.

Following the proclamation of the German *Reich* and establishment of the popularly elected *Reichstag* for all of Germany in 1871, the two parties found themselves in a new political arena. The southern states were much more liberal than the northern confederation, which was dominated by conservative Prussia (Orlow 2008). In part fueled by this heterogeneity, the Reichstag contained over a dozen different parties after the first elections. In 1871, standing separately for election, the two Social Democratic parties combined only garnered 3.2 percent of the vote. Increased success in the 1874 elections, especially in urban socialist centers such as Berlin, sent a signal to the leadership of the parties that they could carve out a space in this new political environment. Additionally, punitive measures taken by the state against socialist politicians did not appear to discriminate between the two organizations, promoting a sense of solidarity and an argument for strength in numbers to counter such measures.

Once they had established themselves as opposed to the ruling authoritarian state, both the ADAV and SDAP were able to function as opposition parties in the *Reichstag*. As a result of the parties' open disdain for the existing order, the ruling elite attempted to curtail socialist freedoms by imprisoning leaders and eventually drafting actual legislation in an attempt to stymie the rise of socialist ideology. Nonetheless, growing support for socialist ideas bolstered the confidence of Bebel and Liebknecht (Brandt and Lehnert 2015).

Though unique ideas are foundational for both the ADAV and the SDAP and the future of the unified SAPD, the Gotha program could be read as a doctrine of organizational unity rather than any concrete set of theoretical ideas: all things being equal, one might hold that the organizational imperative of unification drove the formulation of specific ideas in the program. Following Lipset and Rokkan, for example, it would seem apparent that the formation of socialist parties during the 19<sup>th</sup> century reflect a new and growing cleavage between labor and capital (Stein and Rokkan 1967). Although they focus on twentieth century political history their insights lend themselves to a discussion of party formation in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as well. The emergence of two separate representative parties for the emerging working class suggest that the cleavage based approach to party formation is particularly pertinent in this case. On the other hand, Rokkan and Lipset assume a democratic playing field in their explanation of party formation that is not yet established in late 19<sup>th</sup> century Germany. This aspect limits the explanatory power of their organizational approach for my case study.

At this early point in the political history of the SPD, strength required numbers. Consequently, unification of the two parties became a political imperative, this required

compromise. Wilhelm Liebknecht, leader of the party in Eisenach, a small town in Thuringia, and tasked with drafting the SAPD's program, was motivated by a conviction that compromise was necessary on programmatic beliefs. However, Marx and other scholars have pointed out that unification was much more beneficial to the ADAV, and the SDAP consequently would have had greater leverage (Marx 1875; Walter 2009). This further suggests that at this early stage organizational interests outweighed the influence of ideas as an independent cause of the formulation of certain programmatic beliefs.

The final program of the Gotha gathering contained Lassallean principles within a framework of Marxist ideas about the political economy. Critics such as Marx himself have referred to the congress at Gotha as the *Kompromißkongreß* (Congress of Compromise), and compromise there was. This is based in the belief that Liebknecht and his colleagues appeased the Lassallean delegation too much even though they held the upper hand in negotiations. Furthermore, Marx argues that this compromise came at too high of a cost to the Eisenacher delegates, his preferred branch of German socialist politics (Marx 1875). However, the program established at Eisenach directly constrained the bargaining power of the SDAP at Gotha. Their fifth commitment includes a statement concerning the necessity of a unified worker's movement in order to accomplish their goal of establishing a free people's state (Eisenach 1869). As a result of this statement the party organization had little power to curtail the demands of party members.

Because the SAPD formed in response to a particular institutional context the ideas in the program do not amount to a clear and full-fledged ideology. It would appear, then, that ideas follow organization here: This program serves the purpose of unifying the ideas of the party in the same way as the organization was unified. Two groups of people

sharing a common class interest were propelled by this class identity to join together. In the process, their ideas about the role of the state were of secondary importance relative to the organizational imperatives at hand. As long as the major tenets of socialism were preserved, the particular ideas and the concrete pathways for their implementation were of reduced importance to the movement. In his critique Marx rightly points out that, as the first program of the unified worker's movement, the ideas put forth in this manifesto would provide the benchmark by which one "measures the level of the Party movement" (Marx 1875).

Internal strife in the ADAV had left the party vulnerable, but the Lassallean delegation used its experience with political negotiation to extract concessions from Liebknecht and his comrades from Eisenach. Marx points out in his critique that the program is rife with Lassallean language. In order to explain why a program written up by one of Marx and Engels' closest allies in the promotion of German socialism included so many aspects of the competing Lassallean ideology, which Marx himself likened to a religion (*Heiligschriften*), we certainly need to understand the importance Liebknecht placed on uniting the party at the time of writing (Potthoff and Miller 2006: 36). While this again speaks to the organizational imperative, a close look at key sections, some highlighted by Marx, clearly shows the effect *competition between ideas* from both sides of the movement had in the foundational document of the Social Democratic Party in Germany. I provide this close analysis in the next section.

Despite the manifest organizational imperatives, the formulation of Marxist ideas carried significant weight in its own right, and we should read the Erfurt program, in particular, as a document driven by the need to spell out those ideas. To be sure, the



authors had a relatively high level of freedom in deciding what to include given that, “the mere fact of unification [was] satisfying to the workers” (Marx 1875: 138). However, the Marxist influence that was merely underlying the Gotha Program is clearly expressed in the very first lines of the Erfurt Program. “The economic development of bourgeois civil society leads with natural necessity to the demise of small business, which is based on the worker’s private ownership of his means of production” (SPD 1891: 81). The clear expression of these ideas about the working class, obscured in the language of the Gotha Program, can only be explained by the power of Marxist ideas about capitalist political economy.

Those ideas had driven both of the original socialist parties’ programmatic platforms, and they now needed to be funneled into a unified document. The authors of the Gotha Program had a broad range of options in drafting the theoretical basis of the unified worker’s movement (Potthoff and Miller 2006: 40). However, the program itself shows a strategic element based in a belief that the future of socialist politics in the German Empire was contingent on compromise between the Eisenacher and Lassallean programs. Though von Schweitzer was Lassalle’s heir as the head of the ADAV, it was Wilhelm Liebknecht who penned most of the finalized Gotha Program (Lehnert and Ebert 2015).

Whatever we consider the primary explanation for the adoption of specific programmatic language, this explanation often functions in conjunction with one or both of the other families I have identified. Thus, though I argue that the language of the *Gothaer Programm* is best explained by the power of ideas, an organizational approach certainly offers some explanatory power. However, once the Marxist ideas were ratified,

the socialist movement in German society had a theoretical foothold. The subsequent evolution of programmatic language from the Gotha Program to the Erfurt program, together with the success of socialist societal organization and political representation in Germany in the face of state repression, suggest that Marxist ideas concerning the evolution of economic systems, the constitution of the working class and the need for a socialist political party replace organizational explanations as the primary approach to understanding the party membership's position taking on democracy and capitalism.

### **Gotha Program**

Ideas regarding the relationship between democracy, socialism and capitalism best explain the evolution of positions from Gotha to Erfurt. The demands of the two programs are almost identical. They both desire democratization of the German state, a voice for its people. The two actionable proposals find their basis in a theoretical section that precedes them. In analyzing ideas this theoretical section provides a picture of the SAPD's positions on the issue of how democracy and capitalism are intertwined, or fundamentally opposed. In order to explain these positions a look at the ideas driving the theory is necessary.

The theoretical portion of the Gotha Program is split into two separate sections. The first outlines the party's view of contemporary German society whereas the second deals more closely with the goals of the party. The SAPD views the current state of society as deeply unjust. "In today's society the means of production are monopolized by the capitalist class; as a result the dependence of the working class is the cause of misery and the subjugation in all its forms" (SPD 1875: 86). The SAPD sees the capitalist class

as the causing the “misery and subjugation” of the working classes. However, it does not put forth a critique of capitalism at large.

The method to allay these injustices, according to the Gotha Program, remains the socialization of the means of production as well as “the cooperative regulation” of production (SPD 1875: 86). Already within this first section capitalism, socialism and democracy are placed into conversation with each other. Based in the interplay between these three political-economic systems the SAPD elucidates its goals in section two of the Gotha Program. Within this section we see the hierarchy between the three aforementioned systems.

The Lassalleans and Eisenachers, in the years prior to their unification, had differed on questions of state support in the transformation from capitalism to socialism. Whereas the SDAP favored a more revolutionary tack of transformation the ADAV saw the democratic state as the precondition for socialism. As a party purportedly concerned with working class interests, the SAPD at Gotha seemed far more interested in reforming the existing political order than in eliminating the current *class* rule and mode of production. The program of the SDAP at Eisenach included mentions of the *Klassenkampf* (class struggle) that are notably absent from the Gotha Program. This difference can be traced back to Lassallean ideas about the role of the state in liberating the proletariat and organizing socialist society (Walter 2009).

Another major difference between the program of the ADAV and the SDAP was the emphasis on the role of trade unions in the class struggle. Trade unions provided the arena for self-advocacy favored by Bebel and Liebknecht, but they were not necessary to the Lassallean vision of socialism.

In the Gotha Program, Lassallean ideas about the primary role of the state in the transition from capitalism to socialism overshadowed a more radical revolution of society. In fact, the program expressed the idea that state aid is necessary to solve the so-called social problem. “The Socialist Worker Party of Germany demands, in order to initiate the solution of the social question, the erection of socialist productive association with help of the state under the democratic control of the working peoples” (SPD 1875: 87). At the core of this statement is the idea that democracy *must* precede socialism. Instead of revolutionary upheaval of the current system this type of approach grants the state a role in the regulation of the working class. Lassalle’s ideas about the benefits of democracy, even nested in the unjust system of capitalism, supersede a social movement of the working class even while admitting that the “The liberation of labor must be the work of the working class” (SPD 1875: 87).

These ideas, while highly theoretical, provide the basis for the practical demands of the party. Democracy remains the goal of the working class movement, and with good reason, if the party leadership held the idea that strength lay in numbers. The party in the Gotha Program expresses a view of capitalism as resilient against these numbers without political power. However, the processes of achieving this power are not naturally determined as in Marx, rather they require work from within the system in order to transform it. Still the demands for democracy resonated with a many members of the working class who felt they finally had a unified party to represent their interests at the national level of governance.

## **Post Gotha**

The electoral success of the SAPD and its representatives in the 1870's affirms that unification was necessary for the success of socialist ideas in the German Empire. In the elections following the Gotha congress, the social democratic share of the vote rose to 9.1 percent – a full 3 percent increase over the previous elections (Horhorst 1978). In the wake of these electoral successes Bismarck passed the aforementioned *Sozialistengesetze*. Though these laws were enacted to curtail the power of the socialist movement they did little in the way of defeating the emerging German socialist ideology and party.

Although the law constrained the organization of socialist parties during its time in effect, it was unable to compete with the ideas that had taken hold of a large class of laboring Germans. Even in the face of misinformation about socialist involvement in the assassination attempts, the SAPD was able to win more votes than prior to Gotha. The only recourse available to the socialist movement was election to the *Reichstag* and state level *Landestage*. Indeed, numerous socialist thinkers and politicians, Bebel and Liebknecht among them, were elected to these governmental bodies as independent candidates. The speech of elected officials was protected and so the ideas of social democracy could be spread, even without formal organizational structures, as reprints of congressional debates show (Brandt and Lehnert 2015). As the hysteria following the assassination attempts of the Kaiser disappeared from voters' memories, the electoral support for socialist ideas began to grow once more. In the final election before Bismarck's resignation in 1890, social democrats won nearly twenty percent of the vote putting them on par in terms of representation with Bismarck's conservative party.

Even while he was pressured by mounting electoral support for the social democrats and used the Socialist Laws as strategic moves to dampen the party's

successes, Bismarck advocated for socialist policies in the form of his welfare state legislation (Orlow 2008). Bismarck oversaw the implementation of a welfare state some of whose features are still in place in Germany today. Welfare policy included legislation on medical and accident insurance, state-supported pensions and disability protections. One common interpretation of this expansion argues that Bismarck attempted to encroach on the social democrats' positions on social policy (Lehnert and Ebert 2015). However, their continued success before, during, and especially after the implementation of these policies shows that the party's success was not merely based on their stance on such issues but in fact on the ideas that underlay these positions and motivated the party and its members.

### **Erfurt**

The anti-socialist laws only reinforced the belief of many socialists that the state was primarily a means of oppression (Potthoff and Miller: Ch. III). This idea is manifested in the Erfurt program of 1891. On the heels of its largest electoral success, the party met for the first time since Gotha to reformulate its basic program and reflect the ideas of the party in its current form. One of Marx's major critiques of the Gotha Program had been that it came at too high a cost to the socialist (Marxist?) movement. Specifically, he believed that a theoretical section was unnecessary for the goal of uniting the two parties. Marx argued that a program of principles should not have been drawn up at such an early period. The party would be better situated to make such doctrinal decisions after some time as a unified organization. The maturity and conformity of the ideas expressed in the Erfurt Program vindicate his argument. Indeed, this Program is much more the basis of SPD ideology. State repression and financial crises set the stage for a radically different program in 1891 than in 1875. Marxist ideas of the role of the

working class and the organization of society are at the heart of both documents but expressed clearly for the first time in the Erfurt program.

Though deeply influenced by the Marxist tradition as promoted by Kautsky, and although it certainly idealized a socialist order, the Erfurt Program is still very much concerned with the issues of political rights, and in this regard it also picks up themes from the Gotha Program. Both platforms include numerous nearly identical demands. Richard Hall in his article concerning the role of ideas in politics offers a discussion of what he terms “policy paradigms.” Following his argument, what parties believe sets the bounds for what actions they can take (Hall 1993). Since the actionable proposals of both the Gotha and Erfurt programs are so similar a case can be made that they both exist within the same policy paradigm. The theoretical portions of the two programs are the main sections of difference. If the ideas remain the same throughout the programs then the organizational pressure to unite the two workers’ parties must explain the overall direction of the Gotha Program. For its lack of pressure cannot adequately explain the change in the theoretical portion of the Erfurt Program. Instead we must look to the ideas that Kautsky included in Erfurt to explain the renewed emphasis on the connections between inequality and socialism.

One of the major projects of the Gotha Program was to highlight the role of the working class in its own liberation. New ideas about the role of the state in transforming capitalism were included in the new Program. In order to promote the self-sufficiency of the working class the SAPD attempted to institutionalize class-consciousness in the form of a political party. This required forming a coalition around the ideas describing what was in the interest of this class. When the anti-socialist laws lapsed in 1890, the number

of self-aware members of the working class had grown to a size that made the precursor to the SPD a viable contender in parliamentary elections. Bolstered by this show of popular support, in 1891, Karl Kautsky drafted the Erfurt Program in an effort to clearly delineate the theoretical positions that had been missing from the Gotha Program.

The Erfurt Program includes a detailed “mission statement” that defined what the SAPD, now renamed the SPD, believed to be the inevitable march towards socialism. The descriptions of the contemporary state of society in Gotha are replaced by the underlying evolutionary processes of economics in forming the unjust relations of bourgeois civil society. “The economic development of bourgeois civil society leads with *natural necessity* to the demise of small business, which is based on the workers’ private ownership of his means of production” [emphasis mine] (SPD 1891: 81). As opposed to the Gotha Program, which says little about the development of bourgeois civil society, the Erfurt program clearly outlines a view of societal reform as the necessary precondition for worker liberation in the form of socialism.

The opposing classes in the Erfurt Program are explicitly defined as the owners of property on the one hand, and the landless proletariat on the other (SPD 1891: 81). As the “capitalists and large land owners” consolidate the ownership of the means of production (SPD 1891: 82), the mass of landless proletariats grows. “Ever larger becomes the number of the proletarians, evermore massive the army of excess laborers, ever sharper the opposition between exploiters and exploited, evermore intense the class struggle between Bourgeoisie and Proletariat, that divides modern society” (SPD 1891: 82). As this class grows it not only becomes more of a political threat but also grows in class-consciousness. As the victims of exploitation, members of the working class are uniquely



positioned to be the vanguard of the revolution (SPD 1891: 82). According to the Erfurt Program, social inequality is necessary for the move from capitalism to socialism. Because the working class is the “loser” of the current system of production, it, and it alone, can organize to alleviate this inequality. While political power is necessary for the eventual development of new *economic* organization, the SPD argues in Erfurt that this must be a social fight first and foremost.

This program represents a departure from the mixed messages of the Gotha program. Gone are all the Lassallean notions of the role of the state in leading this emancipatory charge. The program focuses on inequalities of ownership in order to build the rest of its argument for the progression of German society. “This societal transformation means the liberation, not only of the Proletariat, but of the entire Human Race that suffers under the contemporary conditions” (Erfurt 1891). The very economic inequality that the party disdains becomes the basis of class organization. As the movement grows and succeeds, the goal of equality under socialism becomes more attainable. Through the social ownership of the means of production the entire output of society returns to and benefits all of its members. Though this process benefits all, it is the working class that stands to gain from these types of revolutionary shifts within the current state of society. The commitments made in the Erfurt Program are more concerned with the liberalization and democratization of German *society* rather than German *politics* in order to allow the SPD to come to political power. Since this was the precondition of the transition from capitalism to socialism, little is proposed in the way of legislating against the gulf between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Instead this idea is captured in the theoretical basis of the party’s ideology.

## **Conclusion**

From a fragmented movement to a unified organization, the positions of the representatives of working class politics in Germany during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century are best explained by ideas concerning the role of the state in transitioning to socialism. The Marxist teachings so prevalent in the Erfurt Program show the importance of his economic theory to how the party understood the environment it operated in. Because of the comprehensiveness and foundational nature of their programmatic beliefs, the other parts of the document can only be explained in relation to them. Although Gotha was first and foremost a document meant to appease two separate parties, the ideas that influenced it are also important to understand the languages used. Liebknecht's own belief that the Lassallean delegation required appeasement on these theoretical issues meant that many of Lassalle's own interpretations of the economic sphere were included. These ideas placed a premium on the role of the state in liberating the working class, as opposed to some of the more revolutionary aspects of pure Marxist doctrine.

After a period of persecution and economic uncertainty, the identity of the working class solidified over the course of the Foundational Period. As a result of increased class-consciousness the Social Democratic Party survived a time where mass organization was all but impossible. In fact, the lived experiences of the members of the party led to the unanimous acceptance, nearly word for word, of language from Marx's own work to lay the theoretical foundation of the party. The role of the working class in its own liberation is underscored in the Erfurt Program. No longer does it require state aid to achieve its goals but the working class can achieve those goals on its own and in the process wrest political power away from the bourgeois elite. The social theories explicated in the Erfurt Program would remain the bedrock of the socialist movement in

Germany for the next 30 years. As the leadership shifted, so too began a shift away from the primacy of ideas to the reformism that defined much of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century electoral history of the SPD. This strategy manifested itself most noticeably in the party's support of the First World War and forced the leadership to reimagine the party organization in the wake of the Great War.

### **Chapter 3: The Weimar Republic (1919-1933)**

The German Left faced a new social and political order following the German defeat in World War One. Their prominent role in parliament leading up to the outbreak of war placed them at the forefront of the construction of this new state. This chapter looks at how the German Left negotiated the new and changing complexities of Weimar. In historians' imaginations, Weimar is a single period. Some see it as a period of cultural proliferation worth studying on its own merits or in reference to the preceding *Kaiserreich* (Peukert 1993; Weitz 2013). Some are more interested in the relationship between Weimar and the rise of National Socialism (Mommsen 1998; Winkler 2005).

For my purposes, the period is better illuminated by splitting it in two parts: 1918-1923 and 1923-1929. The first period (1918-1923) was marked by revolution, democratization and hyperinflation. In contrast, the second period (1923-1929) was relatively stable. During this time the KPD and SPD both produced new programs reflecting the new societal conditions. Additionally, this period of Germany's first democracy, post-war reconstruction and rapid modernization occurred in an incredibly complex manner. Consequently, one single line of argument may not yield a sufficient understanding of the party positions concerning the relationship between capitalism and socialism. Thus, here I attempt to compare the usefulness of organizational, spatial and ideational accounts in explaining the programmatic language of the parties on the Left.

For the first period, organizational features and pressures, such as changes in party leadership and competition between internal factions, best explain the language used by leftist parties. I will base this conclusion on my reading of programs of the KPD

(1919), SPD (1921), and USPD (1919). As Germany's political system changed its economy and society experienced great turbulence. We would expect a resulting shift in both the electoral salience of economics as well as the claims staked out concerning the issue of the interplay between democracy and capitalism.

After the revolutionary beginnings of the new republic by 1923, a semblance of order had emerged. Devastating hyperinflation slowed through a combination of renegotiated terms of reparation payments and the introduction of the *Reichsmark* (Evans 2004). In this second period of stability (1923-1929), the parties had time to reassess their programs. Changes in positions on democracy and capitalism and increased competition between leftist parties led to a set of programs distinctly different from those they offered in the immediate post-war years.

Both the Social Democrats and the Communists produced new programs during this period. The KPD offered its Action Program to the voters in April 1924 prior to the first of two elections in that year. Following this new program, the KPD achieved major gains in parliamentary elections. In 1925, after elections in December of the previous year, the SPD published the Heidelberg Program. Due to the dissolution of the USPD, I focus on programs by the SPD and KPD to provide evidence for my argument. I contend that electoral competition between these two parties can aid us in understanding the positions taken on bourgeois democracy that they offer in their revised party programs.

As the political economic context changed, the parties' positions changed, too. In order to answer the question of why the programmatic language of the parties on the left concerning capitalism and democracy changed so rapidly and drastically requires an analysis of the programs and the history referenced above. I begin with an overview of

the Weimar Republic's political and economic landscape to provide a context for this analysis. Next I turn to the first batch of programs. Starting with the KPD's Spartacus Program (1919) I provide a brief introduction of the party, an interpretation of their document and a discussion of the implications for my argument that at this early stage of democratization (1919-1923) questions of party organization matter more than the ideas of the past and the pressures of other parties electoral positions. I do the same for the USPD's program of 1919 and the SPD's Görlitz Program (1921).

After a discussion of the relationships between the programs I turn to the next period of Weimar (1923-1929), an era of stability (Fullbrook 2004: Ch. 6). Increased polarization between anti-system (non-democratic) parties and supporters of the political system of the Republic marked this period politically. The KPD and SPD, though both on the left, found themselves on opposite poles of this spectrum. Following the same structure of the previous section I compare positions of the KPD and SPD programs, from 1924 and 1925 respectively, to their prior programs as well as to each other in order to substantiate my argument. At this point of relatively well functioning parliamentary democracy, competition over policy positions between the two parties best explains their positions on their own relationship to both bourgeois democracy and capitalism and the transformation to socialism. Since no major party on the left offered a drastically reformulated program in the final years of the republic, I end this chapter with a description of the rise of the NSDAP, their appropriation of leftist language and the end of the first era of democracy in Germany. However, first, I describe Germany's new polity, defined by new rules of the game inscribed in the Weimar constitution as well as redrawn borders in accordance with post war treaties.

### **The Weimar Republic (1919-1933)**

The Weimar Republic began its life as a democracy after World War I at the call of prominent Social Democratic political leaders in November 1918. Friedrich Ebert, the leader of the SPD, accepted the Reich chancellor Prince Max von Baden's appointment to be the next "Imperial Chancellor" (Fullbrook 2004: 159). The SPD formed the first provisional government of the German Republic together with the Independent Socialist party (USPD). The German population, however, was not as amenable to agreement as the leadership of the USPD and SPD. Massive polarization over political issues as well as the legacy of the war and the revolutionary uprising of workers and soldiers that had ended the war led to civil unrest (Orlow 2008). Revolutionary troops and partisan militias fought each other in the streets of Berlin, Munich and other cities. Amidst this disorder, the constitutional assembly retreated to the town of Weimar, 60 miles south of Berlin (Evans 2004).

The Weimar constitution authored by the assembly departed from the Reich's constitution in a number of ways. A new Reich president replaced the Kaiser as the head of the state. The authors of the constitution retained the bicameral division of parliament from the founding constitution, but expanded suffrage to all male and female citizens above the age of 20 (Fullbrook, 2004). The proportional representational electoral system also ensured that single states could no longer dominate the political agenda, as Prussia had been able to. While a short period of stability occurred from 1924-1929, overall the period of Weimar democracy remained unstable politically, both due to institutional failures of the final constitution and as a result of economic turbulence culminating in the devastation of the Great Depression (Evans 2004). The proletarianization predicted by Marx did not happen to the scale he envisioned. In fact, the proportion of workers in the

electorate shrunk during the period of Weimar (Przeworski and Sprague 1986: 39).

Together with diminishing public belief that the current political system could ensure their material well being, this environment set the stage for Hitler's rise to power and the end of German democracy for a period of nearly fifteen years. I have chosen to end the period of Weimar with the end of parliamentary democracy in 1933 (Conradt 1996).

The internal rift between the reformist and revolutionary factions that had plagued the SPD throughout its time in the turned into an even wider chasm over support of the war. The sections of the SPD that had advocated for the war did so strategically. In fact, they expected, and eventually received, massive democratic gains in the form of universal suffrage and parliamentary democracy as well as social and worker protections (Eley 2002). In 1914, the entire SPD Reichstag delegation voted in favor for the German War Credits, signaling a shift in the party's direction (Potthoff and Miller 2006: 70). The moderate, pragmatic members of the party, such as Friedrich Ebert, became its face. They advocated for a national conceptualization of social democracy at odds with the matter of international worker solidarity with the commitment to internationalism evident in the Erfurt Program. Moderate Social Democrats bargained that war support would yield expanded social reforms after the war (Eley 2002).

Following the proclamation of the Weimar Republic in 1918, the number of parties in German elections grew. Two factors contribute to this proliferation. First, the fall of the empire rendered numerous old regime parties obsolete (Orlow 2008: 114). Second, the establishment of a parliamentary democracy with expanded suffrage created new classes of voters over which parties competed for. As a result of this new system, the SPD had to reformulate its programmatic language to appeal to a broader base of voters.



The SPD attempted to change its appeal in the Görlitz Program, but the change did not have the desired effect. Internal obstacles and disagreement prevented the party from reshaping its identity at the beginning of a new political system, my first sub-period, when it may have had a chance to do so. In the second sub-period after failing to overcome its organizational roadblocks, positional pressure put on the SPD by the Communist Party can better explain the changes in programmatic language.

### First Programs (1919-1923)

	1919	1920	1924a
Participation	83.0	79.2	77.4
KPD	X	2.1	12.6
USPD	7.6	17.6	0.8
SPD	37.9	21.9	20.5
DDP	18.6	8.3	5.7
Zentrum	15.9	13.6	13.4
BVP	3.8	4.4	3.2
DVP	4.4	13.9	9.2
DNVP	10.3	15.1	19.5
NSDAP	X	X	6.5
Other	1.6	3.3	8.6

Table 2: Reichstag Election 1919-May 1924

Source: Jürgen Falter et al., *Wahlen und Abstimmungen in der Weimarer Republik*, München 1986  
X= did not compete as a party in these elections

The successes of the USPD and the KPD at the beginning of the Weimar Republic restructured the competition between parties on Left. All Leftist parties in Germany during this time faced the same task of formulating a program reflecting the seismic shifts in society during this new era of popular, parliamentary democracy. Additionally, they all desired the same end goal: the abolition of the capitalist state and the eventual transition to socialism. In terms of economic rhetoric, the transition to socialism would level the playing field for all workers, male and female. The basic tenets of socialism are apparent in any reading of the three parties' early Weimar programs. Indeed, the very way in which the parties discuss the relationship between laborer and capitalist is almost

identical. However, the strategies they promote to secure the social, political and economic freedom of the working class differs. The role of the state ranges from counterproductive to necessary as we move from KPD to SPD. Each party also describes itself as the educators and organizers of the working class. The difference between these parties at this early stage in their modern development remains in their organization. The SPD attempted a top-down transformation of the party into a mass party. In contrast, both USPD and KPD remained committed to a system of *Räte* (Councils), as the major organizational body of the mass of workers in the republic, a commitment that constricted their ability to produce radically different programs.

### **Why Not Ideas**

In the interwar years, vestigial ideas from the Wilhelmine Era constrained the possible positions that the SPD could take on issues surrounding whether and how to approach the transformation of capitalism to socialism. These ideas help explain *how* the party was constrained but are less powerful as an explanation of *why* the positions the party staked out within this context manifested themselves in the party's programs. The Erfurt program was the point of departure for any updates to the SPD's programmatic beliefs. As we have seen, a deep commitment to orthodox Marxism and an emphasis on the natural necessity (*Naturnotwendigkeit*) of socialism's victory stood at the center of the program. This determinism deemphasized the party's own role in the liberation of the working class at the very same time as it provided the framework for their political action (Berman 1998). Consequently, the SPD was stuck in a space between enacting reform work within the very system they blamed for blocking necessary economic transformations. Additionally, the Erfurt Program retained the "us versus them" mentality of the class struggle. All other classes "stand on the ground of the private ownership of

the means of production and have as their common goal the preservation of the foundations of contemporary society” (SPD 1891: 82). This conceptualization of all classes, other than the skilled and unskilled laborer, as uninterested in transforming the capitalist system precluded the coalition building efforts of Weimar’s SPD in its quest to control political power in the new republic. Combined with the exit threat provided by a viable Communist party, this stance resulted in the party only serving in eight of twenty cabinets during the 15-year life of the republic (Evans, 2004). The SPD needed coalition partners, but the size of working class voters never rose to be a majority of the electorate as Marx predicted and the party expected. Even if we include the communist party in our calculations the Left in Germany never achieved over 50 percent of the vote (Przeworski and Sprague 1986: 25-29).

As the ideas of the party at the beginning of the Weimar Republic provided boundaries for possible position taking they also functioned to create a distinct constituency of voters that the party could appeal to. Operating within a fledgling republic that was proclaimed as “the most democratic democracy in the world” (Fowkes 2014: 36), the SPD had to reaffirm its position as *the* party of the working class or expand their voter base to include allies. An organizational line of argument might explain the language of the SPD’s Weimar programs as the result of such an expansion. As the electorate swelled and it became clear that the working class vote alone could not provide the party with the mandate of a majority of votes, the party had to include new sections of society into its apparatus. Often these sectors were ones the SPD had previously proclaimed to be complicit in the dire situation of the working class. And indeed the first

program of the Weimar SPD does appeal to a broader voting base than previous iterations of party policy.

This shift signals a problem with a purely ideational analysis of the party language. The Marxist underpinnings of the Erfurt Program had excluded a number of social groups in its language. As the following analysis shows, the reorganization of the SPD failed as new political organizations on the left sprung up. That these organizations were based in an opposition to the party's attempts to operate within the existing state may redeem some aspects of the ideational analysis in explaining the positions taken by these offshoots of the SPD. And it is true that in some cases it is difficult to distinguish between the effect of ideas on organizations and the role established organizations play in shaping their future. In this case an organizational explanation explains the positions taken on capitalism and democracy for the Left in Germany only for the first period. The ideas of the socialist movement were already manifested in the institutions of the party at this time (Berman 1998). This fact made it difficult for the SPD to change its positions on major issues. The emergence of two new political organizations, to reflect a competing strain in socialist tradition, only supports the idea that these institutions were "sticky". As the SPD organized against the threats of the KPD and USPD the party was forced to express their positions in a pro-democratic way and enacted reforms that were supposed to increase welfare and prevent these competing organizations from organizing more militant leftist workers. The SPD's Görlitz Program was an attempt by the leadership to move the party to where it thought it "should" be in order to maximize its votes. However, the failure of this program to deliver on these expectations and the reassessment of party positions only three years later show that the organization of the

party made new ideas difficult to implement in a politically effective way. The positions of the Heidelberg Program reflect an acquiescence by the SPD leadership to the electoral threat of the KPD. Instead of attempting to radically change its positions the party chose to compete with the now established party to its left. Thus, the organizational explanation only explains the first positions taken by the SPD, USPD and KPD in Weimar.

### **USPD**

The *Unabhängige Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (Independent Social Democratic Party; USPD) formed in 1917 as an alternative to the SPD. In an internal debate over the SPD positions on the support of World War One, members of the SPD began voting against the party line of support. The party leadership expelled these dissidents from its faction in the *Reichstag* and in April 1917 these former members established the USPD (Walter 2009: 46) This move was a detriment to the SPD's electoral prospects but also gave the moderate leaders of the party control of a majority of the remaining membership. The leaders of the SPD therefore had more freedom in pushing the organization in their desired direction. Members of the USPD coalesced around a shared commitment to the left-wing points of the social democratic program. Initially, the leadership of the USPD organized themselves within the parliamentary group of the SPD. In 1914 the entire parliamentary group voted for the German war credits. However, already in 1915 Karl Liebknecht, Wilhelm Liebknecht's son, broke ranks and voted against the credits. By 1916 a 20-member minority of the party group voted against the proposed renewal of the war-credits bill. Spurred by a commitment to internationalism they felt was impossible to justify in relation to a war of expansion, and a belief that the role of the socialist party in parliament was to act in opposition to the

government, these dissidents formed the Social Democratic Working Group (Potthoff and Miller 2006).

In 1917 this collection of politicians formed the Independent Social Democratic Party in Gotha. Though the party emerged as a result of the actions taken by the SPD leadership during World War One, it quickly became an arena for radical working class people to gather (Walter 2009). The very fabric of the party was woven around the condemnation of their bourgeois counterparts. The members of the USPD viewed the SPD with contempt given its cooperation with these parties. Particularly young, left-wing SPD members switched to the USPD in an attempt to differentiate themselves from the pro-war stance of the organization, while still maintaining their ties to the worker's movement and the history of the party (Walter 2009: 48-49).

Just as the KPD would later define itself in relation to the *Unabhängige*, the USPD fashioned itself as the more radical alternative to the SPD. Many of the overarching similarities between the socialist parties—such as a belief in the inevitable victory of socialism over capitalism—are also evident in the USPD program. As I give these themes more extensive coverage in the section on the KPD I will not reiterate them here. However, these similarities can be interpreted as a concession to the organizational power of the SPD. Since the SPD still controlled the expansive organizations of social democracy in Germany, the other parties could not stray too far from the basic principles of the “mother” party. Instead, the USPD forged a middle ground to the left of the SPD but not quite so radical in its demands as the KPD.

In the 1919 election the USPD garnered 7.1 percent of the vote while the SPD achieved the highest vote total of the elections at 37.9 percent. Already by the next

election the USPD began to pose a real electoral threat to the SPD. In 1920 the USPD saw the largest increase in electoral support of any party in the election with 17.9 percent of the vote while the SPD support decreased by roughly 16 percent (Falter 1986). The demise of the SPD was in part caused by their inability to follow through on many of their promises concerning large-scale socialization (Pothhoff and Miller 2006). Both the USPD and KPD recognized and highlighted inherent contradictions within the theory and praxis of the SPD at the beginning of the Weimar republic and seized on the organizational fragmentation of the SPD to reorganize voters to the left of the party.

### ***USPD Leipzig Program (1919)***

The USPD action program agreed upon in Leipzig in 1919 began with a decomposition of the proletarian revolution into two distinct “eras.” The first was the fight for control of political power, the second the “maintenance of that power for the period of transition from capitalism to socialism” (USPD 1919: 339). While this appears to be a statement that the party is willing to work within democracy, the point of difference with the SPD was the emphasis on how the fight for political power should go. The SPD was happy to work for the electoral support of the working classes to legitimize its political power. In contrast, the USPD sided more with the Communists relying on a bottom up fight for political power. The USPD sought to “extend the organization of councils as the organ of the proletarian struggle for socialism, to integrate together within the councils all workers by hand and brain and to train them to exercise the dictatorship of the proletariat” (USPD 1919: 340). This position on the transformation of society reflects the party’s desire to join the Communist International (as opposed to the Second International) (Fowkes 2014: 342). The emphasis on the *Rätesystem*, the system of workers’ councils, was an attempt to appease the left-most members of the USPD. They

viewed the Räte and unions as arenas for educating the working class in order to groom them for the dictatorship of the proletariat (USPD 1919). Contrary to the SPD the USPD did not fashion itself as the organization of the working class. Instead the USPD viewed its task as “giv[ing] the working-class movement a content, a direction and an objective, and to lead the revolutionary proletariat in its struggle for socialism...” (USPD 1919: 342). The party hoped that these forms of self-governance would eventually undermine the existing administrative apparatus.

Though it too was an anti-parliamentary party, that it is it advocated for the replacement of the bourgeois parliament by the “revolutionary Congress of Councils” (USPD 1919: 340), the USPD did affirm the short-term benefits of parliamentary democracy. In order to achieve the goal of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat and thereby the destruction of the “economic anarchy of capitalism” (USPD 1919: 340) the party “makes use of all political, parliamentary and economic means of struggle...together with the revolutionary trade unions and the proletarian council organization” (USPD 1919: 342). Still, and fundamentally, the party reaffirmed that “[t]he decisive means of struggle is the action of the masses” (USPD 1919: 342). The positions of the USPD were steeped in the theoretical anti-parliamentarianism of the KPD while appealing to the reform minded SPD membership. As a result of this political maneuvering the USPD was able to capture a portion of the vote from both sides of the ideological space. However, the KPD and SPD were able to successfully squeeze out the USPD from that space and by 1921 most of the party membership had joined one or the other party.

## **KPD**

The *Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands* (KPD) finds its origins as an offshoot of the USPD. Once more, Karl Liebknecht proved a decisive figure in the establishment



of a political organization around communist ideas. Along with Rosa Luxemburg, Liebknecht was one of the major opponents of the German war efforts. During the parliamentary votes on the war credits, he had been the first to oppose the party line. While many members of the SPD's parliamentary group followed suit, their motivations differed (Potthoff and Miller 2006). The KPD distinguished itself from the USPD by its members' firm commitment to the revolutionary course of direct action. The revolution of the economy could "only be accomplished as a process borne along by proletarian mass action" (KPD 1919: 282). This statement interpreted alone appears to be compatible with the USPD's emphasis on the dictatorship of the proletariat but read in the anti-establishment context of the rest of the program a different picture of the role of the KPD organization forms.

After the murder of Luxemburg and Liebknecht on January 15, 1919, the KPD was forced to reorganize itself in order to remain politically viable. Seeing the necessity of participating in the new parliamentary democracy in order to guide the socialist movement, the party stood for parliamentary elections for the first time in 1920. However the party's goal was never to rule, in fact it saw its goal not as electoral victories but rather the complete transformation of bourgeois society (Fowkes 2014). The party's first attempt at electoral competition only garnered 2 percent of the vote, infighting within the USPD eventually led to defections to the KPD. This influx of membership strengthened the KPD's organization so much that by 1924, the party grew more than any other party relative to the last elections, receiving an impressive 12 percent of the vote.

Ideologically, the KPD is the left most party of the three working-class parties in Weimar. Agitating as the representatives of Bolshevist communism in Germany, the

KPD was a revolutionary party at its core. Its aims were never to govern over the long term a democratic system that its leaders viewed as the expression of bourgeois power (KPD 1919). Instead, the party wanted to enact socialism immediately through the work of the working class, it was both the starting point of the party and the end it strived towards (Fowkes 2014: 274). In fact, the program was expressly formulated in opposition to the SPD's Erfurt Program. Rosa Luxemburg, while presenting the program at the founding congress in 1918, described her task as "sketch[ing] and formulat[ing] the broad principles which distinguish our program from what has hitherto been the so-called official program of German Social Democracy" (Luxemburg 1918). Although this may seem to be a manageable task, the actual content of the 1918 Program is very similar to the language used by the majority Social Democrats in the early years of Weimar.

***KPD Spartakus Program (1918)***

The major difference between the KPD and SPD programs does not concern the theoretical underpinnings of the actionable proposals but the method by which these are to be accomplished. Both the 1919 Spartacus Program of the KPD and the 1921 Görlitz Program of the SPD share the assumption that a small class of capitalists is exploiting a massive class of workers. Furthermore, the program states "socialism is now the sole salvation of society" (KPD 1919: 281). It qualifies this statement with a line that can only be interpreted as a direct critique of the methods of the SPD: "This transformation cannot be decreed by an official body, commission or parliament" (KPD 1919: 282). In order to underline the KPDs opposition to the methods of the SPD it included a conviction that "the [KPD] will refuse to come to power...simply because the Scheidemanns and Eberts have become bankrupt...by cooperating with them" (KPD 1919: 284). The only way that the KPD would take over the government was "through the clear unambiguous will of the

great majority of the proletarian mass in Germany” (KPD 1919: 284). Even this end goal of attaining governmental posts did not necessarily reflect the same type of success sought after in USPDs or SPDs conceptualization of political power within parliament.

The KPD viewed itself as a party uninterested in parliamentary power and does not see its goal as organizing the working class as the USPD does. Instead, the KPD “is simply the section of the proletariat which is most conscious of its goal” (KPD 1919: 284). That goal was the transition from capitalism to socialism and, consequently, the end of bourgeois exploitation and class rule. “The economic transformation too can only be accomplished as a process borne along by proletarian mass action” (KPD 1919: 284). According to the KPD, the transition to socialism required the “dictatorship of the proletariat” (KPD 1919: 283). As a result, the party did not see itself as a separate organization from the working class. Instead, the party sought to function more as a guide and advocate for the interests of the working class (KPD 1919: 284).

The revolution of society as it existed at that point, namely a capitalist society, was not possible at the behest of any authority other than the will and action of the people themselves. “The Proletarian mass must replace the outmoded organs of Bourgeois class rule with their own class organs: The workers’ and soldiers’ councils” (KPD 1919: 283). The worker’s themselves must create the revolutionary processes of socialism through collective action such as strikes and the creation of workers’ and soldiers’ councils from the bottom up. The KPD did not see the SPD’s top-down reformism as a viable way of organizing the working class. Instead, the party advocated for a dictatorship of the proletariat. “The dictatorship of the proletariat is a way of arming the compact mass of the working people with the whole of political power for the task of revolution, and it is

therefore true democracy” (KPD 1919: 283). The party claimed that the current project of democracy was merely a veiled attempt of the bourgeoisie to maintain control of political, and consequently, social power. “It is an insane delusion to believe that the capitalists would obligingly submit to the socialist verdict of a parliament” (KPD 1919: 283). The democratic equality that the SPD claimed as a hard fought success of previous socialists was merely a fiction. Only reorganization of society in the form of councils could liberate the working class, the KPD itself did not conceptualize its role in this fight as a separate organization but rather as the only political place holders and advocates for socialist policies.

### **SPD**

As the party that attracted the most voters during the first elections of the Weimar Republic, the SPD, together with the Christian Democratic Centre Party (Zentrum) and the social liberal Democratic Party, formed the governing Weimar coalition together from 1919-1922 (Evans 2004). In 1921, the SPD met at Görlitz to modernize its party program from Erfurt. The Erfurt Program had been the basis of SPD politics for the last 30 years, and had survived as the guiding principles of social democracy through the First World War. Still, many in the party considered it outdated (Fowkes 2014: 217-18). The Görlitz Program remained theoretically akin to a prewar self-understanding of social democracy and Marxism. However, the perceived capitalist oppression had worsened as a result of the nascent economic crisis and therefore occupied a new space, unlike in the prewar programs.

Due to successes of the KPD and USPD in organizing voters that had voted for the SPD in previous elections, the SPD was forced to rework the language of its program to reflect its new organizational anchor points. Based on the USPD’s and KPD’s strong

statements on how to institute socialism in capitalist society a growing number of the militant left wing voters, as well as new voters that had been enfranchised following the end of the war, voted for the splinter parties (Brandt and Lehnert 2013: 126). The goal of changing the program was to block the expansion of the KPD and USPD above what they had already achieved. The establishment of these parties from within the SPD organizations also led to a realignment within the party leadership that is reflected in the language of the Görlitz Program (1921).

Even in a period of mass defections from the party, the SPD remained a major player in Weimar politics throughout the early years. The distinctive feature of the SPD in contrast to its left-wing compatriots was the choice that the leadership made to join a government and to embrace parliamentary democracy. The SPD “saw the democratic republic as the, through the evolution of history, irreversibly given form of government, and every attack against her as an attempt on the right to exist of the people” (SPD 1921: 1). As the USPD took the more radical members of the SPD, the majority party’s leadership was able to move the party closer to the center of the political spectrum (Potthoff and Miller 2006). This shift certainly affected the expression of the moderate positions on the institutions of bourgeois democracy in the Görlitz Program.

### ***SPD Görlitz Program (1921)***

As the political and economic context of the Weimar Republic changed, the SPD was faced with new opportunities and obstacles to address. An organizational approach to understanding the differences in the programs of the German Empire and Weimar best explains the shifts in programmatic language of the SPD as a move from a class-based party to a modern mass party (as defined by Kirchheimer 1966). As the internal divisions between reformists and revolutionaries changed, due to the credible exit threat of both

USPD and KPD, so too did the positions of the party at large as expressed its updated program.

The fact that the party was granted control of the government both by the final decree of Prince Max von Baden as well as the favorable results of the first parliamentary elections in 1919 (they garnered 37 percent of the vote) only further committed the party to a course of democratic mass party rather than revolutionary class party. The positions on the benefits of democracy for socialism's future that the SPD expresses in their Görlitz program reflect these organizational shifts. The SPD's policies further show a determination to assuage the gains of working class militancy. Social reforms such as the eight-hour workday, social insurance, and universal, equal, secret, and direct suffrage that had been the goals of the SPD under the monarchy now seemed easily attainable. These reforms would address some of the very same issues that working class militants fought for. Additionally, Ebert acting in his role as *Reichskanzler* allied the government with the military in the fight against "Bolshevism" a movement closely associated with the KPD. However, most notably, and in a strong move against the success of the Council System favored by the KPD and USPD, the SPD engineered a compromise between unions and employers (Eley 2002: 166-68).

Electorally these actions did not succeed in eliminating the threat of the opposition parties. The KPD and USPD had more success in channeling popular support for socialization of government in the form of council systems (Eley 2002: 168). The USPD and KPD seized on the shortcomings of the SPD and as a result the SPD was forced to attempt a programmatic change. The Görlitz program failed to mitigate the impact of the party's failure to prevent the other parties from emerging. In fact, shortly

after the publication of the program the SPD began negotiations with the USPD to increase the party's electoral chances against the growing KPD (Potthoff and Miller 2006).

The Program is full of examples of a broadening of language to be as inclusive as possible. The “working class” became the “laboring people,” and the “class struggle” was no longer central to the theoretical underpinnings of the program (Winkler 1982). However, Winkler never goes into the details of *why* the party sought to increase its electoral support. The main explanation he provides is that the party leadership wanted to promote the image of the SPD as a viable member of a government in a parliamentary democracy to their faithful voters as well as German society as a whole.

The pressure to expand the electoral support of the SPD is evident in the very first lines of the 1921 Görlitz Program. In order to appeal to the larger electorate of the Weimar Republic—and one in which viable parties stood to their left—the SPD began the program with a description of *whom* the Party was for. Gone are the Marxist tones of historical materialism, “the view that economic development takes place with the inevitability of a law of nature and determines the changes in people's social ideas and institutions” (Kautsky 1921: 291). Instead the program states in its very first line that the “SPD is the party of working people in town and country,” and that “it strives for the gathering together of all material and intellectual producers, who are dependent on the product of their own labour...” (SPD 1921: 288).

The SPD blames the war for widening the gulf between wealth and poverty. As the bourgeoisie increased its wealth through the consolidation of industry during wartime all other strata of society sunk lower down the economic ladder. “Capitalism has

increased economic inequality and created the contrast between a small minority living in luxury and the broad strata of people eking out their existence in need and poverty” (SPD 1921: 289). The successes of the bourgeoisie came at the cost of social groups that earlier party programs had not yet addressed: “Small and medium-sized property owners, industrialists, intellectual workers, civil servants, writers, teachers, members of all kinds of freelance professions” (SPD 1921: 289) were brought to proletarian living standards. By constructing the opposition as a small bourgeois segment of society the SPD simultaneously constructs the rest of society as oppressed. The program is clear in whom the SPD sees as constituting the working class, and thus who must be organized in order to successfully bring about socialism.

In terms of the party’s position on the dominant democratic system, driven by their role in government and the organizational restructuring resulting from KPD and USPD growth, the SPD takes a positive view of the system. Whereas in previous programs the party had called for a political transformation of the repressive monarchical system at this period of German history “political transformations have given the masses the democratic rights they need for their social ascent” (SPD 1921: 289). Democracy is once more the necessary precondition for the liberation of social and economic inequalities. The party reaffirms its commitment to the dominant system by tying democracy to the historical processes described by Marx that were so central to the Erfurt program. “The democratic republic [is] the form of state irrevocably brought into existence historical development” (SPD 1921: 289). The party no longer viewed democracy as an arena for capitalism to reproduce its unequal results but rather as a system for working-class liberation. The party distinguished itself from the KPD and



USPD in the affirmation of *constitutional* democracy as the form of democracy necessary for socialism to operate as opposed to a form of direct democracy such as the council systems. The program actually moves the party to the right which is not what we would expect using a positional approach.

### Second Weimar Era: An Era of Stability (1924-1933)

	1924b	1928	1930	1932a	1932b	1933
Participation	78.8	75.6	82.0	84.1	80.6	88.7
KPD	8.9	10.6	13.1	14.6	16.9	12.3
USPD	0.3	0.1	X	X	X	X
SPD	26.0	29.8	24.5	21.6	20.4	18.3
DDP	6.3	4.9	3.8	1.0	1.0	0.9
Zentrum	13.6	12.1	11.8	12.4	11.9	11.3
BVP	3.7	3.1	3.0	3.3	3.1	2.7
DVP	10.1	8.7	4.8	1.2	1.9	1.1
DNVP	20.5	14.3	7.0	5.9	8.7	8.0
NSDAP	3.0	2.6	18.3	37.4	33.1	43.9
Other	7.5	13.9	13.8	2.0	2.6	1.6

Table 3: Election Results Weimar (Dec. 1924-1933)

Source: Jürgen Falter et al., *Wahlen und Abstimmungen in der Weimarer Republik*, München 1986

Two arenas for spatial pressure as an explanatory variable stand out for the SPD during Weimar: the electoral and the coalitional arena. During the Weimar elections the SPD no longer existed as the sole party on the left of the ideological spectrum. The USPD and KPD each emerged in the years immediately after the end of the war to lay claim to issues and voters that had typically been the distinguishing positions for the SPD. The effect of this reality was that the SPD could not freely move to the center on many issues without being ridiculed by the parties to its left. Not only did the USPD and KPD cause trouble for the SPD, but they also provided long time SPD voters with a credible exit threat, should they feel that their interests were no longer aligned with the SPD. Under the new system of parliamentary democracy and without a clear majority the

SPD also had to make decisions about governing. While the SPD ideology included a commitment to opposing the ruling order, party leaders found it prudent to obtain a position at the head of the state. While this caused problems for some of the more militant members of the party, and aided the foundation of the USPD, it also necessitated a coalition agreement with parties in proximate ideological space. Since the left-wing of the party identified with the oppositional tactics of earlier iterations of the party the SPD was forced to approach parties to its right. The pull from both sides further constrained an already slim area of policy to which the SPD could commit itself. Over time the positional pull from the left and from the right varied in intensity but created a set of preferences expressed in the party's programs that highlights why these were stances taken in a more complete way than either organizational or ideational explanations alone.

### **KPD**

Already in 1919 the KPD explicitly outlined its governing strategy. Though the party was ardently opposed to the system of bourgeois democracy that the SPD and other center parties were hard at work to establish, they left their own role in government open. Accordingly the leadership wrote in the Spartacus Program that the KPD, "will never take over the government in any other way than through the clear, unambiguous will of the great majority of the proletarian mass in Germany" (KPD 1919: 284). By 1924 the KPD was on an electoral upswing, making the likelihood of their role in government higher. Still the communist commitment to opposition made this theoretically impossible. Instead the KPD continued to promote its role as the promoters of proletarian liberation. In fact, the party condemns "the Deutsch volkische, the capitalists and the reformists" for the diminishing economic position of the proletariat during the early years of the Republic. While the Deutsch völkische and capitalists are also in the crosshairs of the

other parties on the Left, the KPD explicitly attacks its rival party on the Left. The “reformists” referred to the SPD and their methods of using the democratic system in order to relieve the plight of the working class.

The KPD remains committed to a revolution of the proletariat in their 1924 Action Program. However, the militant notions of class warfare are less evident in this document. Instead the party seeks to “animate the broadest masses of the working population” (KPD 1924: 291). As opposed to the Spartacus program where the role of the party was to educate and guide the KPD now takes some agency in the organization of these masses. “The task of the Communist Party is to prepare and organize the struggle for the dictatorship of the proletariat” (KPD 1924: 292). Their methods, however, remain similar. “. . .the organs of the united front must be formed from below and associated together for struggle” (KPD 1924: 291).

The KPD’s position to the left of the SPD provided an exit threat for all members of the USPD including the moderate wing. Once it became clear that the USPD and SPD were not sustainable as separate parties in the face of increased support for the extreme right parties the USPD members were forced to choose between SPD and KPD representation (Winkler 1982). Following the dissolution of the USPD over 300,000 of the party’s membership left to join the KPD (Potthoff and Miller 2006: 109). The fact that the KPD existed forced the SPD to shift left in order to capture at least the moderates of the USPD. This pressure was exerted electorally as well. The KPD only received 2 percent of the vote in their first elections in 1920. These elections preceded the drafting of the Görlitz Program and a lack of revolutionary language correlates with the perceived threat of the KPD to the SPD. The Weimar Republic voted in two elections in 1924, in

both the KPD markedly improved on its result in 1920. In 1925, the SPD published its Heidelberg Program. Winkler (1982) classifies the program as a new period in party organization, as it officially unified the SPD with the right-wing of the USPD. He continues however, that the ideological positions contained within the theoretical part of the program were a “return to the positions of the pre war period” (Winkler 1982: 31). The question remains, why the SPD returned to these positions after the merger in 1922? An organizational explanation can only help us to understand the greater effects that interparty competition had on the language of the Heidelberg Program.

### **SPD**

“When a socialist party meets communist competition, the opportunity cost of following supraclass strategies is high because workers can change their voting behavior without changing ideologies” (Przeworski and Sprague 1986: 61). The communist party in Weimar had this effect on the German SPD. If, with the Görlitz Program, the SPD attempted to speak to a broader coalition of voters, the Heidelberg Program was a stark departure from this electoral strategy. Given the split between SPD and USPD the revisionist core of the SPD formed the majority of the party in 1921. However, after 1922, when the more moderate wing of the USPD linked back up with the SPD the revisionist core’s power within the party dwindled (Winkler 1982). While the internal reorganization of the SPD certainly led to the inclusion of more revolutionary language in the Heidelberg Program, the existence of the Communist party may better explain *why* the party’s program changed so drastically.

As parliamentary democracy became the most prominent electoral regime in Europe, socialist parties emerged as the biggest winners of the new system (Eley 2002; Sassoon 1996). Socialist agitation relied on a belief that socialism was inevitable due to

the process of capitalism, and a belief that capitalism contained the seeds of its own destruction. These processes would lead to a growing population of subjugated workers. This population would grow so large that it could successfully overthrow the current order and form a new society. As a result, the socialist movement believed that “their strength was in numbers” (Przeworski and Sprague 1986: 25). If the working classes formed the large majority of society, then universal suffrage was akin to assuring that socialists could wrest political power from the bourgeoisie. The political power of socialist parties in the interwar period also lent credence to this assumption. In Germany, the SPD was the largest party, but were unable to secure a majority of votes in any election. This can be attributed in part to ideologically proximate parties such as the USPD and KPD. Even still, in Germany the average share of the total left from 1917-43 was far below 50 percent though still respectable at 36.4 percent (Bartolini 1979). Socialism’s dependence preempted the possibility of socialist parties receiving a majority of the vote. Nowhere in Europe did the working class, however conceptualized, constitute fifty percent of the population (Przeworski and Sprague 1986). In the face of this dilemma, socialist parties had to expand their voter base if they hoped to gain complete political power, the necessary precondition of solving the social problem according to their prewar programs (SPD 1891).

Expansion of the SPD’s voter base came at a cost. “Whenever a party succeeds in winning the vote of one non-worker in the current election, it suffers the loss of...votes of workers it would have recruited during the next election” (Przeworski and Sprague 1986: 66). Przeworski and Sprague (1986) find that the cost of courting so-called “allies” by a major socialist party was in Europe was highest in Germany. They attribute this to the

“ideological and organizational transformations which continues to waken the salience of class identification among workers” (Przeworski and Sprague 1986: 67). While the trade off was high for the SPD in the first years of the Weimar republic due to its organizational restructuring, once the communist party grew large enough to pose not just an organizational threat but an electoral one, the trade-off grew even steeper. Pressured by the KPD the SPD had to return from its supraclass strategy to a narrower class based strategy (Przeworski and Sprague 1986: 69). Thus a spatial approach is better suited to explain the SPD’s positions in the second period of Weimar, when the KPD established itself as a credible electoral threat, as opposed to simply an organizational threat.

The evolution of the language concerning the party’s role in transforming the capitalist democracy to socialist system of governance from the Görlitz Program to the Heidelberg Program is evident in the semantic valences of the word *Klassenkampf* (class struggle). Following Marx’s definition, class struggle is the fight of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie for sole control over society (Marx 1888: 1). The content of this word did not change much in either program, even in the Görlitz program. Part of this can be explained by the context. Since the Görlitz Program addressed the segments of voters to the right of the typical social democratic voter, what constituted the proletariat mattered more. The emphasis is on the negative effects of a capitalist economy that brought together all classes of oppressed producers rather than economic developments that lead to a proletarianization of large numbers of society. The Program does not treat the *Klassenkampf* as a historical necessity for the benefit of the oppressed but an aspirational goal for all members of society not part of the large-propertied class. The Heidelberg Program, on the other hand, essentializes the perpetrators of the *Klassenkampf*; once

more historical materialism is expressed as the cause of the need for the class struggle. “The number of proletarians becomes ever larger...and the class struggle between the capitalist rulers of the economy and those under their domination becomes ever more bitter” (SPD 1925: 295). According to the Heidelberg Program, this war can only be fought by the working class which grows as capitalism advances. Interestingly to note, and contributing to the constrained use of the phrase, by 1925 due to the KPDs emphasis on the class struggle the word was tied to ideas about “Bolshevist methods and ‘Russian conditions’” (Winkler 1982; 33). The SPD failed to reclaim the term for social democracy and consequently was unable to maintain its relationships with the middle class voters as well as capture votes from the KPD. This phenomenon reversed the usual dynamic in which the larger, more established party coopts the issues of the fringe party in order to demobilize the latter (Rosenstone et al. 1996).

### **Fall of the Republic (1929-1933)**

Over the course of the Weimar period the SPD competed in a constantly shifting electoral arena. Granted power in the immediate aftermath of the war and succeeding in pushing a number of policies in the interest of the working class, the party was committed to the democratic republic from the beginning. Its electoral fortunes fluctuated over the course of the 15-year span of the republic. From the first free democratic elections in 1919 to the first round of elections in 1924 the party’s share of the vote decreased from 37.9 to 20.5 percent. During this time, new, leftist parties emerged as organs of working class representation. The efforts of the SPD to curb the growth of these parties, in the form of policy and programmatic revisions, ultimately failed. In its 1924 Heidelberg Program the party reaffirmed its commitment to the class struggle in an attempt to appeal to the leftmost section of the electorate that was voting for the KPD. While the party

gained votes in the next two elections it never again reached the dominant position it held in the first elections. The tensions expressed in the two very different programs of the SPD prevented the party from creating any large gains in the electorate to its right *or* left. The Görlitz Program in conjunction with the active policies against the growth of rival leftist organizations was a failed attempt to court the voters of the left. Ultimately, the party was unable to seize on the militant sentiment of the working class in the first period of Weimar Democracy. By the time it reformulated its program in Heidelberg, it was too late. The positions staked out by the KPD had been so explicit that the SPD could only hope to play catch-up. The economic disaster of 1929 only further weakened the working class movement's belief in the SPD's course of democratic socialism and in Germany had devastating political consequences for democracy at large (Eley 2002: 260).

The crisis of 1929 threw an already troubled society into complete disarray. As the German experiment with democracy progressed it lost favorability among large swathes of the population. Electoral results for anti democratic parties such as the KPD and fatally, the NSDAP led to governmental instability. In an effort to reset the course of the republic the SPD joined the government once more in 1928 after nearly six years in opposition. However, the government's response to the economic crisis did not appease the majority of the electorate and as a result in 1930 the final coalition government of Germany was dissolved. Though free elections were held, the governments leading up to Hitler's seizure of political power in 1933 shifted the power from the parliamentary groups to the *Reichspräsident*. The appeal of the NSDAP was partly based in their social policies (Berman 2017: 3). In opposition to the austerity promoted by the conservative governments in the immediate aftermath of the economic collapse the Nazi party



promoted social welfare as a means of fighting the depression. Over the course of the next decade the Nazi controlled government “was controlling decisions about economic production, investment, wages and prices” (Berman 2017: 3). While the economy remained capitalist, the state’s role in controlling the crisis of capital was increased to levels never before experienced in Germany. These benefits of course did not come without great cost to those sections of the population not considered deserving.

## **Chapter 4: The Federal Republic (1945-1959)**

As the German citizenry attempted to rebuild following the end of the war, the parties of the *Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Federal Republic of Germany; FRG) also once more faced a period of restructuring in what was a new polity. This thesis has traced the evolution of the German left's positions on the system of capitalism from its origins during the period of imperial rule through the democratic experiment of the Weimar Republic. This chapter focuses on the first fifteen years of the Federal Republic, ten of which occurred under the watchful eyes of the occupying powers. After 1959, the German Left continued to compete with the CDU for the majority share of the German electorate. Though the party was never able to reach the high results of the CDU during the first elections of the FRG they eventually gained real political power as the majority partner in a coalition with the free democrats. Still, the period from 1945 to 1959 marks a unique period in the history of the German Left. In this chapter I try to explain the final attempt of the SPD to navigate the tensions between working in the system of democracy and the economic liberation of the working class through socialism.

The parties of this period (1945-1959) established the basic structure of the modern German party system. Until 1956, when the major parties voted to ban the Communist Party, the KPD anchored the left-most position on the (one-dimensional) ideological spectrum. The SPD began its move away from its Marxist commitments towards the broad appeal of a true *Volkspartei* (Otto Kirchheimer 1966) during this time. Following the German defeat in World War Two the political circumstances for the

Social Democratic Party's electoral fortunes drastically changed. Driven by a desire to remain electorally viable in a much-changed political environment, the SPD staked out positions on the relationship between capitalism and democracy increasingly similar to those of the other major mass party, the interdenominational *Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands* (Christian Democratic Union: CDU). As in the last chapter, organizational development preceded electoral considerations. I argue that from 1945 to 1952, the SPD's position-taking on the country's political-economic future is best explained by organizational forces, not by the spatial imperatives of Downsianism. In particular, the chaotic circumstances in which party (re-)building occurred in devastated, occupied western Germany eventually produced a party dominated by a single figure from the Weimar period, Kurt Schumacher. Schumacher's own normative commitments and views about German democracy pushed the SPD in the direction of class dominated politics in order to establish a new order rather than a reconstruction of prewar Germany (Brandt and Lehnert 2013: 166). After Schumacher's death, the SPD, even while thriving in some ways, continued to stumble through the postwar period. In this period (1952-59), the party's position taking reflected a clear Downsian logic, culminating in its eventual transformation from Marxist to *Volkspartei*. The organizational constraints of the first period ended with Schumacher's death and a new generation of social democrats took over the party leadership. The 1959 Bad Godesberg Program officially broke with the Marxist tradition of social democracy in Germany and highlights the transformation of the party into the modern SPD.

I begin the chapter with an overview of the new German polity, marked by a new constitution, new electorate and redrawn national borders controlled at first by foreign

powers. New circumstances affected the organization of the party at the national level in West Germany. Next, I turn to the emergence of the CDU as the strongest party in this new polity, and the reemergence of the SPD in this new political economic context. The evidence for my argument is drawn from *Wahlprogramme* (electoral programs) from both the SPD and CDU in the elections of 1949, 1953 and 1957, leading up to the revised *Grundsatzprogramm* (Basic Program) ratified at the SPD party congress at Bad Godesberg in 1959. I analyze the positions taken in these programs to support my arguments concerning the primary explanations in each of the two periods from 1945-1952 and 1952-1959.

### **The Federal Republic of Germany: 1949-1959**

The jump in time from the last chapter to this one is not accidental. During the years of Nazi dictatorship, by definition no opposition parties competed in elections. Still, the period from 1933-1945 had a profound effect on the landscape of political competition in postwar Germany. In part driven by the desire to prevent further German aggression, the allied powers occupied the “new” Germany (Fullbrook 2004). After the war, Germany’s borders excluded numerous of the territories held by the Nazis and some that had been part of the nation prior to the establishment of the Third Reich. The allies split the territories contained within these new borders into four zones of occupation. Britain, France and the United States controlled the western territories while Russia ruled alone in the Eastern territories.

The allies’ decision to split the German territories had a twofold effect on the electoral strategies of parties. Operating within a new polity, the parties faced new rules and a new electorate and some the occupying powers, at least up to 1955, were not quite

as passive in forming the political direction of postwar Germany as others (Pulzer 1995: 50). While universal suffrage had already been a feature of the Weimar Constitution, the electorate was split along the east-west lines. Only those residing in the Western zones could vote for Western parties. Some of the electoral strongholds of the Left during the Weimar Republic were now under Russian control (Lehnert and Ebert 2013). In the West, the British were the first to give the Germans some leeway in rebuilding their society (Orlow 2008: 250). With this freedom, the Parties started to reorganize themselves with one clear restriction: no Nazi or similar parties were allowed to form. In an effort to avoid the fragmented party system that plagued Weimar the allies, prior to the ratification of the Basic Law, only allowed a four-party system to exist. The first instances of party competition in this new system were at the state level of *Länder* elections. The parties had an opportunity to operate above these local levels for the first time in 1947, following the establishment of an economic council to oversee the combined British and American zones (Pothoff and Miller, 2006). The Western allies continued to cooperate and support the political reconstitution of West Germany; in 1949, the West German states ratified the new *Grundgesetz* (Basic Law) and the FRG was born.

### **New Rules of the Game**

The Nazi dictatorship left an imprint on German politics that was institutionalized in the country's provisional constitution, the *Grundgesetz* (Basic Law) of 1949. A parliamentary council consisting of representatives from the German *Länder* in proportion to their electoral success, was tasked with drafting the new rules of the game. The SDP and CDU each received 27 seats under these distributive rules (Pulzer 1995: 45). Additionally the emphasis on the representation of *Länder* already demonstrated their importance in postwar German politics (Pulzer 1995: 46). The western Allies blamed

Hitler's rise in part on the Prussian tradition of a highly powerful, centralized state and thus preferred decentralization (Judt 2005: 265). Additionally the process of electing the *Bundesrat*, the upper house of parliament, for the first relied on the votes of the people rather than the appointment of royalists during the Empire and state parliaments during Weimar.

It is often argued that the Weimar constitution allowed the Nazis to rise to power (Orlow 2008; Pulzer 1995). The extremely proportional system of distributing seats in parliament gave fringe parties easy entrance into the national assembly combined with outsize role of the *Reichspräsident*, especially in a state of emergency, certainly contributed to the Nazi's seizure of political power. In order to prevent a repeat of the failures of the Weimar Constitution, certain provisions were put in place to negate the possibility of a highly fragmented political system and the misuse of emergency powers. One of the most obvious differences with the Weimar constitution was that the power of the president was greatly weakened. As opposed to the Weimar president, the new *Bundespräsident* did not have emergency powers granted to him as in article 48 of the Weimar constitution (Orlow 2008: 262). Hitler had used these emergency powers to silence political opponents when he became chancellor.

In order to make it more difficult for splinter parties to attain seats in parliament, five percent of the national vote was required to receive any seats. This so-called *fünf Prozent Hürde* (five percent hurdle) was instituted in reaction to Weimar's political landscape, in which small parties such as the Nazis were able to gain representation, and thus a foothold, in parliament. Furthermore, the Basic Law included a "constructive vote

of no confidence” in order to reduce the likelihood of cabinet crises that allowed parties like the Nazis to overthrow governments with ease (Orlow 2008: 263).

### **The New Electorate**

In addition to the new rules inscribed in the Basic Law, the electorate for which the parties competed was fundamentally different than that of the Weimar Republic. Though the population of the Western zones was only slightly less than the population of the Weimar Republic, its composition and geographical location was drastically different. Millions of Germans, particularly male, lost their lives during the Second World War, which skewed the population of potential voters. The division of the German territories also impacted the SPD’s electoral potential. Industrial strongholds East of the Oder that had been in the hands of social democrats before the war were now in the Soviet Zone (Judt 2005: 267). The electorate that existed within the Western Zones included a large number of conservative voters. These especially coalesced around the Christian Social Union in the southern state of Bavaria. In fact, more than half of western Germany was Catholic and the Christian Democratic Union appealed to these voters more than the anti-clerical SPD (Judt 2005: 267). These demographic realities coupled with the growing left-right polarization during the beginnings of the Cold War meant that by 1949 the German electorate was far less willing to listen to leftist solutions to economic problems.

### **The Economic Miracle (1949-1960)**

In the aftermath of the Second World War the German Government, with the help of the occupying powers instituted numerous policy measures to reconstruct the German Economy. The first step taken to bolster the economy was a currency reform that took the old *Reichsmark* out of circulation and replaced it with the *Deutsche Mark*. The second major benefit to the economy was the support granted through the Marshal Plan.

Together with Ludwig Erhardt's economic policy, these two factors aided the German economy in making a striking recovery through the 1950s. The economy grew and even surpassed the growth rates of many of the advanced economies in Europe. The high unemployment due to an influx of labor from refugees and former prisoners of war in the mid- to late 1940s turned into a labor shortage by the end of the 1950s (Fullbrook, 2004).

The CDU presided over this period of economic productivity referred to as the *Wirtschaftswunder* (Economic Miracle). The Minister of the Economy, Ludwig Erhardt, played a major role in promoting the so-called *Soziale Marktwirtschaft* (social market economy). This model was based in "Ordo-liberal" notions of the relationship between the state and the market. Ordo-liberalism was conceived in the waning years of the Nazi regime and, as opposed to classical liberalism, promoted an aggressive involvement of the state in securing the efficiency of markets (Starbatty 1988; Grosskettler 1994). This was translated into CDU policies such as substantial socialization of the economy. Notably, almost half of all production of coal and iron and a majority of German banks were owned or controlled by the state (Judt 2005: 266). Additionally, a policy of *Mitbestimmung* (Co-Determination) required large firms to include workers as real players in their governance. The social aspect of the social market economy was a commitment to protecting the lower classes of society. As opposed to the Marxist theory espoused by the SPD to appeal to the exploited classes, in the hands of the CDU this commitment was rooted in the ideals of Christian morality (Kalyvas 1996: 2). Taken together these reforms undermined the support for Marxist solutions to economic issues as they led to economic growth that benefited all sections of the income distribution.



### **CDU Success and SPD Response**

In 1955, the occupation statutes lapsed and Germany became a self-sufficient democracy. In 1957 in the first elections following the de-occupation of West Germany the CDU won an absolute majority of the votes, a feat that has not been repeated by any party since (Fullbrook 2004: 213). The electoral support for the CDU came in part from its appeal to the large proportion of German Catholics residing in the western Zones as well as their success with rural, small town voters and employers. Allied trust in church institution further favored the CDU in federal elections (Pulzer 1995: 52). Though the SPD gained a respectable 31.8 percent of the vote, their highest totals of the postwar elections, the leadership recognized the success of the CDU as a defeat of the SPD as it existed at that time. At the federal level the SPD became “the chief victims of the CDU’s success” (Judt 2005: 267).

The Christian Democratic Union (CDU), formed as a new conservative party with anti-Nazi roots. Although the party occupied the ideological space taken up by the Weimar Zentrum Party—the representative organ of the conservative Catholics—it wanted to reestablish itself as an interdenominational party rather than solely appealing to German Catholics (Fullbrook 2004: 209). In the West, the head of this party was Konrad Adenauer, “der Alte,” mayor of Cologne. Adenauer was an established conservative who was also an ardent antifascist. He had the support of the allied powers due to his positions on German integration into Western Europe and anti-communist stances (Pulzer 1995: 56) He became the first chancellor of the FRG, having already played a major role in the drafting of the Basic Law.

The electoral success of the CDU came as a blow to the postwar social democracy in Germany. “No party had emerged with greater hopes from the ashes of the Third Reich

than the Social Democrats” (Pulzer 1995: 51). The SPD hoped to cash in on an anti Nazi track record dating back to the final elections of the Weimar Republic. Furthermore, the war and its destructive effects on the German economy erased much of the wealth held by German citizens. However, neither of these realities translated into the successes the SPD hoped for. Instead the German population equated the SPD with the failures of the parliamentary democracy during the Weimar Republic and believed in an upward trajectory of their economic misfortunes (Pulzer 1995: 52). Especially the postwar leader of the SPD, Kurt Schumacher, remained convinced that greatest chances for German resurgence remained in the socialism.

Schumacher’s credentials as successor to the chancellorship rivaled those of Konrad Adenauer. Schumacher, who had fought in World War One and served as a member of the *Reichstag*, where he openly opposed the National Socialist program, was part of the next generation of social democrats after the Ebert generation (Walter 2009: 123). Schumacher was elected leader of the SPD in West Germany in part thanks to this record; many in his party considered him a heroic figure (Judt 2005: 269). He was one of the few prominent members of the SPD that had remained in Germany during the War though for nearly ten years he was interned in concentration camps. All this gave him enormous prestige with the voters, independent of his political views (Walter 2009: 125). Schumacher began reorganizing the SPD as early as 1945 and organized a congress of SPD representatives from each of the Western Zones where he was elected party leader (Ebert and Lehnert 2013: 165).

Schumacher’s leadership of the SPD has been likened to the authoritarian leadership of Ferdinand Lassalle during his tenure as head of the ADAV (Ebert and

Lehnert 2013; Walter 2009). Schumacher was granted a relatively large amount of leeway by other party leaders and especially by the almost “cultish” following he controlled in the party membership (Walter 2009: 123). As a result, Schumacher’s own beliefs became the core of SPD positions during his time at in control of the party. Importantly he believed that the reunification of Germany was closer at hand than may have been suggested. As a result he opposed the integration of West Germany into both Western Europe as well as the international community (Pulzer 1995:56). These positions placed the SPD in direct opposition to the positions of the CDU and contributed to the allies’ mistrust of him. In other words, Schumacher was more willing than others to accept a smaller probability of electoral victory in exchange for the ability to build party positions consistent with his own beliefs. His strong hold on the party direction during his time as leader, forced the organization “almost completely to the fringes” of the German Federal Republic (Walter 2009: 126).

### **1949 Elections**

Schumacher’s positions on the economy and prospects of socialism are reflected in the SPD’s 1949 electoral program. This program was still very much rooted in the Marxism that guided the language of the party’s Weimar Programs. Economic Planning was the central economic policy promoted by the party (SPD 1949). The program included calls to “nationalize large industries, credit institutions as well as insurance companies” (SPD 1949: 2). The party justifies these demands by stating, that “Socialization is the best protection of freedom and democracy” (SPD 1949: 2). These demands reflected those of a radical Marxist party that is concerned more with appealing to an already social democratic section of the population than with electoral victory. Indeed they were more than that, they reflected the beliefs of Schumacher and his

positions on the necessity of socialist political action to ensure the future of the German state. He was uncompromising in the face of CDU policy proposals viewing socialism as the only solution to the reestablishment of Germany (Walter 2009: 126). However, and problematically for the SPD's electoral fortunes, the SPD "had nothing practical to offer" in the place of the CDU's policies. Schumacher guided the party back to its "traditional socialist program of nationalizations and social guarantees" (Judt 2005: 268).

### **1953 Elections**

The relative electoral salience of traditional socialist positions on democracy and capitalism, at least for the Social Democrats, seems to have waned between the 1949 and 1953 elections. This can be attributed in part to Schumacher's death in 1952. Still, the SPD's 1953 party continued to affirm its Marxist positions. The party viewed democracy in the hands of the Christian Democrats with skepticism. "Together with political democracy, must come the democratization of the economy, which we understand as the right to co-determination by the workforce in the economy" (SPD 1953: 6). Additionally, the role of social policy must be transformative of all of society, and thereby preventative, as opposed to providing piecemeal support for individual members of society. It "should not only clean up after the grossest damages of the ruling system; it requires a foundational change of this system itself" (SPD 1953: 7). These statements show a party still mistrustful of the processes of modern German democracy. Even after Schumacher's death his beliefs in the need for complete power of the SPD in order to ensure social equality remained entrenched in the party's positions. This was due to the actions of his immediate successor, Erich Ollenhauer, who "eschewed every deviation from the line of his predecessor" (Walter 2009: 128).

Following the successes of the CDU in 1949, the SPD discussed the issue of the economy in terms of the dominant system, the social market economy. Many of the basic principles of the social market economy dealt with the very issues that the SPD stood for. In fact, the social market economy allowed for “planned influencing of the economy by the organic means of economic policy” (CDU 1949: 61). While, the CDU was encroaching on the SPD positions of state control of the economy, at least to an extent organizational fetters kept the SPD from making strategic moves to counter these positions. The program qualified the social market economy as the “so-called social market economy” (SPD 1953: 7). Even while this system of economic governance was helping those members of society that the SPD should have cared the most about, the working-classes, the party firmly held to an oppositional course of action promoted by Schumacher.

### **1957 Elections**

It is important to note, here, that Communist Parties were banned in the Federal Republic between the 1953 and 1957 elections. The KPD did exist as the representatives of communism in the FRG and in the first elections won over five percent of the vote, securing them 15 seats in the Reichstag. However, the party’s electoral successes dwindled due to internal struggles and their support of the Soviet Blockade of West Berlin (Orlow 2008). In the 1953 elections, the party failed to clear the five percent hurdle and was not represented in the parliament. The government dissolved the Communist party in 1956, appealing to the language of the Basic Law that outlawed the anti-system parties that had plagued the party system of the Weimar Republic. As a result, the leftward pressure that a strong Communist party placed on the SPD during

Weimar did not apply to the party in the Federal Republic. Consequently, the SPD had more space to maneuver and establish itself as a reformist mass party without fear of losing their more militant voters. However, the electoral program of 1957 and the electoral results of this election do not support a view of a party keen on changing its positions in order to capture the newly unrepresented voters.

Even by 1957, five years after Schumacher's death, the SPD continued on the course set by its charismatic leader to its electoral demise. Large organizations such as political parties take time to change and it took a decade of increasingly devastating electoral losses for the party to finally reassess the positions taken in its Basic Program. From the outset the SPD's 1957 electoral program committed itself to Schumacher's naïve view that unification was imminent. It blames Adenauer and the CDU for failing in the project of reunification (SPD 1957: 148). Furthermore, the party expressly condemns the "economic miracle" for providing a "small stratum with large fortunes" (SPD 1957: 149). Still, in its economic section the party approaches a desire to act within the existing system rather than abolishing it.

The Marxist positions of Schumacher and his generation began to dissolve into pragmatic proposals of restructuring the German economy for the benefit of the working class. The SPD methods for promoting social equality were regulations of prices and taxes. Already the favorable view of economic planning that permeated the first post-war SPD programs had been eradicated from the 1957 document. The party stated, that "wealth and income accumulation must be formed more equally" (SPD 1957: 149). This language does not sound like the Marxist party of the pre-war period that demanded the expropriation of large fortunes and the destruction of the capitalist mode of production

(SPD 1925). Ultimately, these hesitant moves towards a more lenient view of capitalist democracy were not enough to increase the SPD's electoral appeal. Instead, the party lost to the CDU by the largest margin thus far, nearly 20 percent (Walter 2009: 136). This electoral defeat would motivate the new leadership to measure the party's success by electoral results rather than its firm commitment to prewar principles.

### **The Road to Bad Godesberg**

The second half of the 1950s was a period of rapidly changing political context across Europe. The Cold War started to have a greater impact on German foreign policy, marked by their entrance into NATO in 1955 and growing support for European integration resulting in the FRG joining the European Economic Community (EEC) as a founding member. Schumacher had opposed both of these foreign policy positions to the detriment of the party's popularity (Judt 2005: 268). Additionally, the prospects for unification in the near term seemed far lower than Schumacher had hoped. The CDU government had also banned the KPD in 1955, which sent a clear message to the SPD leadership that any flirtations with communism would come at a detriment to the party's political success. With his passing in 1952 his firm positions on these issues as expressed in electoral program slowly receded. "A new generation of German Socialists" emerged to take control of the party (Judt 2005: 268). This generation included more pragmatic leaders of local sections of the party. They had their formative experiences with social democracy in Scandinavia, England and the US during the War (Pulzer 1995: 70). Some, such as Willy Brandt, had also held mayoral positions during the years of Schumacher's rule as opposed to national roles where they would have had to act closer to the party line. The benefits of the Social Market Economy also had an effect on the potential electorate of the SPD.

The 1957 election results showed the power of Adenauer and the CDU as the party and its chancellor achieved an unheard absolute majority in parliament. The SPD was forced to reassess its positions following this massive electoral defeat (Sassoon 1996: 241). The new generation of SPD leaders “reformulated the party’s principles in a way that increasingly corresponded with its practice” at the level of the *Länder* (Pulzer 1995: 70). The revisions to party doctrine were an attempt to strengthen the party’s chances of surviving in the new electoral circumstances. The leadership expected that it “would be more than amply compensated” by making these changes. A break with its Marxist theoretical underpinnings would enable the party to exhibit more strategic flexibility, and increase the party’s electoral appeal and ability to find political allies” (Sassoon 1996: 242).

### **The Bad Godesberg Program**

*“This is the contradiction of our time...that humanity developed the productive forces to the utmost, accumulated colossal riches, without providing everyone an equal portion of this collective accomplishment”*

The Bad Godesberg Program (1959)

The notion of an unequal distribution of riches features as a central concern of the Godesberg Program. In fact, the above quote is the second sentence of the program.<sup>1</sup> We have seen the issue of economic inequality occupy various levels of saliency in the basic programs of the SPD. However, in no other program does the party take such a broad stance on the issue. Whereas previously the inequalities existed between the exploiter and the exploited, the capitalist or landowner and the worker, this quote is not explicitly about a struggle between two opposing economic camps. Instead, it appeals to a broad audience with words such as “humanity” and “everyone” taking the place of the class-specific

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<sup>1</sup> The first sentence concerns the proliferation of the atomic bomb.



language so central to previous programs. In fact, this quote does not even mention capitalism as a cause of these inequalities; instead “humanity” has “accumulated colossal riches” and has not provided for everyone. The SPD no longer needs to advocate for the democratization of the economy as democracy alone can now provide for the proper governance of humanity at large. The tensions between democracy and social equality have all but disappeared.

The Godesberg Program represents a culmination of an evolution of the social democratic party from 1875-1959. What was once a party solely concerned with the liberation of a class of society brought together by purely material interests now conceptualizes itself as “the party of freedom of thought. It is a community of men holding different beliefs and ideas” (SPD 1953: 1). Ideological diversity replaces the earlier dogmatism of Marxism. This ideological openness allows the party to reformulate its relationship to both democracy and capitalism. While the tensions between the two systems occupied much of the SPDs previous programmatic documents the Bad Godesberg program no longer places this as a central tenet of democratic socialism. In fact, the first tenet of this program is about international relations not economic justice, which is of secondary importance and is approached as a problem of “equal opportunity.” This commitment forms the basis of the party’s economic policy the goal of which is “the constant growth of prosperity and a just share for all in the national product” (SPD 1959: 8). In order to accomplish this “the SPD affirms its adherence to democracy” (SPD 1959: 4). No longer do tensions between the economic system and democracy exist in this program.

As recently as in the party's 1946 statement on the Political Principles of the Social Democratic Party, democracy is "constantly under threat in a capitalist system" (SPD 1946: 3). In 1959 the party has completely accepted the processes of capitalism as beneficial to the large mass of society. "The Second Industrial Revolution makes possible a rise in the general standard of living greater than ever before and the elimination of poverty and misery still suffered by large numbers of people" (SPD 1959: 8). The economic policies, to which the party commits itself, no longer, require the expropriation of large landowners or even the owners of the means of production. In fact, the program goes so far as to say, that "private ownership of the means of production can claim protection by society as long as it does not hinder the establishment of social justice" (SPD 1959: 9). Far from a tension between economic or social justice and the process of capitalism the party believes that the two can coexist.

A complete repudiation of the party ideology as inscribed in the Heidelberg Program 34 years earlier would have lost the party any credibility with the voters. The party justifies its programmatic changes with a historical section to end the program. It recounts the massive victories that the labor movement has made for the working class. "The proletarian who was once without protection and rights, who had to work sixteen hours a day for a starvation wage, achieved the eight-hour day, protection at work, insurance against unemployment, sickness, disability and destitution in old age" (SPD 1959: 19). These gains are the basis for the party's belief that "Once a mere object of exploitation, the worker now occupies the position of a citizen in the state with equal rights and obligations" (SPD 1959: 19). Since the longtime sole object of the party, the laborer, is now in an equal position with other citizens, the party can move from class

based policies to proposals that benefit all of society. The party that blamed the processes of capitalism for the “increase in the insecurity of [the proletariat’s] existence, of misery, of pressure, of oppression, of degradation, of exploitation” (SPD 1891: 81) has, 68 years later, reconciled the tensions between that system and their role within it as a democratic political party.

This chapter only spanned 15 years yet the positions of the SPD changed so much as to lead to a reconceptualization of the party as a fully evolved catch-all party. The organizational changes established at the Godesberg Congress, set parameters for the party competition in until reunification in 1989 and beyond. The organizational approach carries real explanatory weight during this period. Kurt Schumacher’s role, as leader of the party, in this process cannot be understated. His normative ideas of what social democracy *should* look like and how it *should* act were expressed in the positions of the party’s electoral programs during the period from 1945-1959. Even after his death his firm beliefs about the role of internationalism and opposition took external shocks to revise. Schumacher’s strategies did not pay off electorally; the SPD was crushed in the 1957 elections and faced a crisis of survival. The new generation of SPD leaders that took control of the party in the years immediately after the 1957 elections had had different experiences with socialism within capitalism than Schumacher and his cohort. The resulting shifts in organizational leadership are reflected in the Godesberg Program. Electoral pragmatism took precedence over principled opposition. The question of how to reconcile socialism to modern democracy within a capitalist system, and whether such a reconciliation was even possible, was finally answered for the SPD in 1959.

## **Chapter 5: Conclusion**

*“The 1960s brought generations of young people with different needs and desires, constructing their own understandings of personhood citizenship and the future... Their new personal and material circumstances coincided with capitalist restructuring and long range social changes during the last third of the twentieth century, and this new conjuncture destroyed the environment the socialist tradition had need in order to grow.”*  
–Eley 2002

The Godesberg Program marked a decisive moment in the evolution of SDP positions on the tensions between capitalism and democracy. During the 30 years from the publication of the Godesberg Program to the reunification of East and West Germany into unified Germany in 1989, the German political system established itself as a modern parliamentary democracy. During this period of democracy, the longest in German history, the importance and stability of traditional ideologies of left right slowly moved to the background of electoral politics (Sasoon 1996; Eley 2002; Walter 2009). The period of expansive growth following the restructuring of German society after the end of the Second World War allowed citizens to feel relatively materially secure. Consequently, citizens’ values shifted from a material emphasis, such as class based values, to a post-materialist view. Post-materialism finds value outside of physical and economic safety; instead values such as self-expression and quality of life are paramount (Inglehart 1981). The clearest expression of this value-shift can be found in the 1968 movements across Europe.

Where the 1950s showed a movement away from a socialist ideology opposed to capitalism as evidenced by the Godesberg Program, the 1960s were a period of increased anti-establishment culture (Sasoon 1996). Simultaneously, the old Marxism that had been the guiding theory for social democracy in Germany up to 1959 fell out of favor for a

new intellectual form of Marxism stemming from contemporary French and German interpretations of Marx's theory. It was in this new political climate that the SPD played a part in German government for the first time since the end of the Second World War. In 1966 the CDU/CSU and FDP government fell apart over economic issues. In the wake of the dissolution of government the SPD and CDU/CSU came together to form the first "Grand Coalition" of the Federal Republic (Ebert and Lehnert 2013: 194). The parties ruled together until 1969 when the SPD formed its first government as senior partner together with the FDP. Under the leadership of Willy Brandt, the charismatic mayor of Berlin, the party was able to remain in power for three election cycles until 1982. During this time foreign policy in the form of Brandt's *Ostpolitik* (Eastern Policy) took the center stage of the SPD's role as governing party (Pothoff and Miller 2006: 231). However, his tenure as *Bundeskanzler* was not merely marked by his foreign policy. Domestically he increased social services such as social insurance as well as unemployment benefits (Pothoff and Miller 2006: 265).

The efforts of the SPD to stabilize the relationship between East and West Germany helped move the country toward reunification. Throughout the 1980s as the Soviet Union relaxed its authoritarian policies numerous occupied countries began to clamor for independence. Following, the breakdown of borders between occupied and unoccupied zones East German citizens began a mass exodus to the West. After weeks of civil unrest and numerous protests in major East German cities, on the 9<sup>th</sup> of November 1989 after a press conference broadcasted to the East German population the government of East Germany declared that the borders between East and West would be opened. In the following months the government of East and West Germany came together to work

on the constitution of a reunited Germany (Orlow 2008: Ch. 10). The Basic Law of West Germany became the constitution of the reunited German Republic. This new nation established the fourth German polity since unification in 1871.

This thesis has discussed party position taking in three separate polities, each marked by a distinct form of government and economic contexts. Two World Wars separate the polities taken under consideration. In each period distinct features of the political and social systems interacted to create an environment where unique explanations provided a basis for understanding the position taking of German parties of the Left on the issue of economic inequality. The constant measure of German leftist political success remains the Social Democratic Party. As a party founded in the Marxist tradition of Karl Kautsky and August Bebel the ideational explanation that underlies the first two SPD programs, more evident in the Erfurt Program than the Gotha Program, is the strongest way of understanding the parties evolution over its long and fragmented history. Once the unification of German socialist parties was accomplished, the ideas that would provide the benchmark for party position taking became paramount.

The ideational tensions between revisionism and militancy manifested themselves during the Weimar Republic and led to the eventual organization of opposition parties on the Left. During this time of burgeoning democracy, all political parties were facing a brand new environment of electoral competition. Economic crises as well as social unrest spurred the parties to stake out positions on issues other than simply working-class politics. As Anti-democratic parties emerged on all sides of the ideological spectrum, including the left, the SPD organized to slow the growth of these parties. This organization led to positions of apparent reconciliation between capitalism's production

of unequal circumstances and democracies attempts to fix these. However, the positions of the Communist Party of Germany (KPD) to the left of the SPD, in particular proved to place the greatest electoral pressure on the SPD. Consequently, the SPD was forced to shift its positions on capitalism and democracy, not due to organizational restructuring as was the case in the early years of the Weimar Republic but due to the exit opportunities provided to left-wing voters of the SPD by the KPD. The fight between proponents and opponents of democracy destabilized this fledgling republic and led to the complete collapse of democracy into dictatorship in the early 1930s.

Following the period of Nazi dictatorship both the SPD and KPD returned to German politics and attempted to establish themselves as the voice of the Left. However, the strength of the conservative CDU/CSU and general anti-communist sentiment forced the SPD once more to reconsider its ideological legacy. The autocratic leadership of Kurt Schumacher kept the party from reacting to the new political context. In 1959 the party published its Godesberg Program, signaling a shift from the Marxist orthodoxy that had provided the foundation for German Leftist politics since 1871.

### **Party Evolution**

Who belonged to the working class and how they could be organized into a political force were at the center of socialist politics in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In Germany two parties the ADAV and SAPD formed with the intention of addressing these questions. The result of this two party approach was a division in the working class vote between the two parties. Consequently neither party proved to be a significant threat to the established parties in the German Empire. The restrictive system of a parliamentary monarchy further weakened the political power of the working class. In order to address some of these problems the two parties merged. The compromise for this merger was

based in the contemporary interpretations of Marx's political theory. The Erfurt program (1891) exemplified the tensions between theory and practice in this tradition.

Theoretically based in a deterministic view of the progress of society the Erfurt Program evinced a belief in the victory of socialism over capitalism. Practically, it promoted policies to reform the system of government. Democracy was the necessary political system to liberate the working class. Only in democracy, with universal enfranchisement, could the ever growing proletariat gain the necessary political power to overthrow the capitalist system. Since this system was built on inequality equality in any form, social or economic, were only possible in the aftermath. However, already at this point the program called for reforms in the realm of social welfare and a fair distribution of the tax burden.

As Germany transitioned from a monarchy to a democracy following the First World War, the German Left gained new opportunities to advocate for their conceptualization of a just and equal society. However, economic crisis, revolutionary upheaval and organizational strife restricted the extent to which socialism in the form established in the pre war Programs was able to achieve its goals. As a sign of the complex political environment that existed during the Weimar Republic, the SPD published to fundamentally different party programs within a five-year span. As the franchise was expanded and new voters became politicized across the ideological spectrum. Simultaneously, new parties emerged to compete for the votes of the German population. On the left the Communist party proved to be the most relevant newcomer. The KPD established itself to the left of the SPD in its Spartacus Program (1918). As an anti-democratic party it forced the SPD to pay attention to the most left-leaning of its



constituents while still advocating for a democratic state as the basis of socialism. The first SPD program reflected both the leadership's as well as the core membership's shift towards the center as the left wing members founded and joined new organizations to the left of the SPD. This internal shift was addressed by the absorption of the USPD into the SPD. Following this reunification the revitalized SPD turned its eye once more towards the threat of the KPD. As a result, in its 1925 Heidelberg Program the SPD was forced to change some of its stances on the solution to economic inequality it had staked out only four years earlier in the Görlitz Program. However, even this updated program was not enough to unite the working class under the SPD banner. Growing anti-democratic sentiment pushed many potential SPD voters to cast their ballots for the KPD and eventually the NSDAP. By the last years of the Weimar Republic no parties in the Bundestag could form a majority pro-democratic coalition thus creating the space for the Nazi Party to seize power and eventually for Hitler to proclaim himself dictator.

Though the Nazi dictatorship had a profound effect on the world at Large, its effect on German politics following the end of World War Two was enshrined in the resulting party system. The provisions in the constitution to counter a repeated rise of anti-system and fringe parties promoted a two party system with a smaller third party often holding the balance of power. The SPD struggled during the early years of the Federal Republic never quite reaching the electoral success of the Christian Democratic party. The party's positions mirrored those of its leader Kurt Schumacher and his ties to the Weimar SPD. Schumacher's mistrust of capitalist democracy and false predictions about the future of the German state led to positions that resulted in devastating electoral defeat. Still even after Schumacher's death in 1952 the party stayed the course of

opposition he had set. It took another seven years, during which time the government's ban on communist parties in West Germany in 1956 unfettered the SPD from the left pressure of the KPD, as well as definite evidence of capitalism's ability to produce a better standard of living for all of German society, to complete the process of revising the SPD party Program. The SPD began to shift its long held positions on democracy and capitalism towards the center, and called on new values other than Marxism to appeal to a broader basis of the electorate. The Bad Godesberg Program (1959) is the culmination of these shifts and the official break of the German left with the theories of Marxism and the resulting belief in the inherent inequalities of capitalism. Instead the party focused on alleviating the plight of the working class through the tools of the capitalist economy in the form of a mixed economy rather than total nationalization. Thus 1959 marks the end of the final period of this thesis.

The processes of party change are worth studying. In order to understand the direction of government and with it a fundamental part of the history of Germany we must understand what collective actors such as parties express as their goals. Party programs, as the expression of party self-identification, provide the ideal starting point. Still, they are merely the top most level of the expression of a myriad of underlying and shifting circumstances. A closer look at the organizational structures of the SPD and the processes of ratifying a program fell outside of the scope of this project. Additionally, there are numerous themes that are merely touched upon in the course of this thesis that warrant further exploration. The distinct role played by party theorists throughout the periods appears to change from nearly complete control over the party doctrine in the beginnings to a more intellectual analytic role in the Federal Republic. Looking at the

individual interaction between party theorists and party programs could shed more light on the explanations of the content of these programs. In the organizational realm a deeper interrogation of party structure at certain points in time could provide insight into the processes inhibiting certain ideas to enter the final editions of party literature.

Current research on manifesto data exists in a much more comparative space where motivation is less important than expression. However, as this thesis has shown it is not enough to simply take the programs at face value or an expression of what the party views as the problems of the time. The way that parties discuss issues such as economic inequality is not simply the effect of an unequal society. Though the issue may become more salient during a period of extreme inequality, the way in which it is discussed depends on a myriad of interacting contexts. I have made a case for certain readings of the programmatic literature provided by the Left. In weighing the *ideational*, *organizational* and *positional* explanations of the language surrounding the issue of economic inequality I hope to contribute to a debate about political parties both in their role as constructors of the political space and their interaction with the space they see as existing.

The evolution of Social Democratic party positions on the tensions between democracy and capitalism as described here are specific to the German SPD. However, we can learn some things for further investigation into party position taking. The approaches taken here may not work well in explaining right wing tensions, in part because the issues at hand would not play such a major role in the programmatic language of these parties as they may be more inclined to accept the processes of capitalism as just. Even the routes towards reconciling capitalism and democracy across

the European left are not so analogous. Germany is a particular case that experienced major shifts in their political economic context that provided unique contexts for the social democratic politics to evolve. Still, as we have seen the approaches used in this thesis can shed light on the party position taking in other polities. An organizational explanation often had primary explanatory power in immediate postwar contexts, where the political system had to be rebuilt. In both Weimar and the Federal Republic this explanation was followed by a spatial explanation. This two-pronged approach could work for parties generally. Given the leveling effects of war and a fresh political environment to compete in, parties must first and foremost be concerned with their internal organization before they are able to worry about their electoral fortunes. After the organization is in place they can turn their focus to positional competition with other parties.

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