

Between Marxism and Humanism: The Ethical and Theoretical Foundations of the Post-World War SPD

Dr. Ch. Vamseedhar¹ and Dr. Bassani Manjula²

¹HOD, Department of Philosophy, Osmania University, Hyderabad, Telangana, India.

²Department of Philosophy, Osmania University, Hyderabad, Telangana, India.

Corresponding Author: Dr. Bassani Manjula

Abstract:

This is the concept of Social Democratic Party (SPD) leader Kurt Schumacher's outlines the moral structural, and geopolitical, imperative for reconstructing a democratic socialist Germany after Second World War. Schumacher argues that true democratization must be embedded directly within the party constitutions and daily activities to prevent the rise of different forms of totalitarianism. While rejecting dogmatic ideology, he defends the analytical methods of Marxist as an essential tool for social transformation in a distressed nation. The text addresses the complex reality of denazification, emphasizing strict internal investigating procedures to ensure former party members do not compromise the SPD's anti-totalitarian integrity. Internationally, Schumacher warns against the dangers of rising Neo-nationalism whether originating from conservative elites, ecclesiastical leaders, or the Communist Party and highlights how poverty and cold threaten democratic stability. He rejects collective guilt narratives while acknowledging Germany's historic burden, reminding international delegates of the immense sacrifices made by German Social Democratic resistance fighters inside concentration camps. Schumacher highlights the tragic partition of Germany, noting that the SPD in the West is forced to "Breathe with only one Lung" while opposing forced political unification in the Union of Soviet. Moreover, he asserts that a prosperous European future depends on renovating private industrial monopolies into democratically controlled public resources rather than relying on penal occupation policies. Ultimately, Schumacher appeals to International Socialism for equal constitutional standing and mutual solidarity, insisting that a free, humanistic, and democratic Germany is indispensable for total European recovery and lasting peace.

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Party like the German Social Democratic Party had no a need to arise just because of its own historical tradition. If it did not exist, it would be necessary to create it, theoretically and practically, because of the necessities of national and international politics. The question has arisen for us German Social Democrats whether we have allowed ourselves to be too strongly influenced by tradition. We have answered in the negative. Party determined to allow only those men and women to enter politics who are guided not by the past, but by the needs of the present and the future. New conditions demand new techniques, new aims, and new tactics in politics. And socialism in Germany has moved from the field of theoretical discussion to the stage of practical necessity a practical necessity on both economic and moral grounds. For all forces in Germany who are willing to think and act for a greater common good have rallied round attempts at socialisation. Such a policy of realisation of socialisation, in the industrial ruin of Germany, is also an international necessity. For transcending all attempts to protect the world from any possible aggression from the Central European power-complex is the need to transfer industry from the hands of private capitalism to the hands of the community. This is a greater international necessity than any other measure. It is hard to imagine that an

10.48047/jocaaa.2024.33.07.122

attempt to make a reality of socialism in one part of Europe could succeed if similar attempts were not made in other parts of Europe.

Socialism in European culture is inseparable from democracy. It had been struggled relentlessly for the idea that there is no socialism without humanism, without freedom of conscience, thought, and speech, and without personal rights. For this reason socialism for us is a spiritual and moral ideal and not merely an economic ideal, and it cannot compromise with totalitarianism without going under. We have learnt from the history of the Weimar Republic and know that it is necessary to oppose attempts at dictatorship from the beginning. Today innumerable Germans have to be denazified. We do not want it to come to the position where Germans have to be detotalitarianised, If then we want to make this democracy to live we must do it in the party's constitution, rules and activities. You will say: a party which in effect is democratic will require no monopoly of democracy; it must strive to make other parties in Germany democratic. The SPD recognizes that there are democratic forces in the other parties, but they have not had any effect. This development is regarded with great anxiety. Stability and firmness in democracy has so far not developed to any extent outside the SPD. The other cause for anxiety in Germany is nationalism. Here he should like to say in advance that there is no German nationalism which can threaten anyone by its own strength alone.

German nationalism would only be a danger to the world in the hands of the one great power against the other great powers, and that is what we want to avoid in all circumstances. We are fully aware that it was the nationalism of the Third Reich and the stages leading to the development of this idea which called forth a nationalist reaction in other countries. We know from our own experience that the real crime against humanity, racism, with its bloody and brutal destruction of values, which caused the extermination of the Jews, is embodied in nihilism, which prevents any kind of reconstruction in Europe. The nationalist forces, the old nationalism in all kinds of disguises, as well as the traditions of recently destroyed Nazism, are now used as a class weapon by the big propertyowners against the aspirations of the working class. And what is still more dangerous, the neo-nationalism of the Communist Party is the same language as that of the Nazis. It is no exaggeration to say that the only black-white-red (Imperialist) party in Germany today is the Communist Party. Then there is the nationalism of the churches, especially of the leading Catholic dignitaries, such as Faulhaber and the Archbishop of Trier. In many of these the nationalist tradition has risen again. The same circles oppose the economic claims of the workers with a separatist policy; but ever in this, their nationalist jargon breaks through. A comparison may be drawn with Bavaria before 1933, where separatism was widespread, but where at the same time centralised imperialism was triumphant so that it became the cradle of Nazism.

Is there nationalism in the SPD? You may smile. The numerical superiority of the SPD is not reflected in social superiority. The bourgeois parties, and in the Russian Zone the Communist Party, have more magnetism for careerists. We too are threatened with the danger of attracting careerists, but it is much less with us than with any other party. With us democratic control is much stricter and on quite a different level. Then the SPD has to solve the great problem of former Nazis. This is as follows: the Nazis who really were Nazis because of some inner compulsion that is the desire to be somebody and to live well without working-fall into two classes. Those who possess something are in the CDU; those who possess nothing are in the C.P. But there are also other classes of Nazis: those who hated and cursed the Third Reich but for the sake of themselves and their families came to a modus vivendi with it, and those who were deluded. In 1933 knew idealistic students and workers who were

10.48047/jocaaa.2024.33.07.122

convinced that Nazism would bring about the over-throw of capitalism. We must not allow those who were deluded to desert us now. In briefly describe the method we use to protect ourselves against Nazis who think they can find a refuge among us. First, we tried not to have to decide the admission of former Nazis. It was a year before a single former Nazi was admitted by a local organisation. In addition such a Nazi must produce two witnesses belonging to the SPD who will testify to his conduct during the Hitler regime. And thirdly, a man who behaved well during those twelve years can only be admitted by the lowest level of the party, that is, by those people who can watch his conduct. There is not a single case in the whole party in which a higher party level has caused a lower level to admit a former Nazi. Friendship and relationship play no part the party's constitution is the Magna Carta of acceptability. We must remember that such a party constitution determines what is living in democracy in Germany far more than one thinks. It must also pointed out that a party's constitution also in the last resort determines national policy.

After a certain period of penetration of political life by the spirit of the party the foreign policy of a country is also so determined. Whoever does not believe this can find proof of it in the history of all dictatorial parties. The Russian Zone is not included; we are, as it were, breathing with only one lung. We do not deceive ourselves when we say that today we are almost at the 800,000 mark. Yet our centres of industry and our big towns are bombed and destroyed. This and the existence of the refugees makes comparison with past figures impossible. In the three western zones we have over 8,000 local organisations compared with 5,000 in 1933. The most elementary practical aids for our work are lacking and we are much hampered in this respect. The great number of evacuees and refugees, who could pursue a special policy of their own, might be very dangerous. We have tried to put as many refugees as possible into positions in which they feel that their new existence is also a lasting existence. We have always regarded the industrial working-class as the core of our organisation. If any other party has made gains at the expense of the SPD it was not by taking away our members but by reviving the political interest of those who were persecuted, or of indifferent people.

In the German people there is only one nationalist danger-the nationalism of hunger and cold. There is bitterness about avoidable things, which we warned against beforehand, and anger that avoidable things have happened through apathy and in-difference. We would not take it badly if any one of the victorious powers reduced its staff, but it should choose them of the highest quality and with sympathy to understand the destiny of another people. We are very touchy in one respect we do not want organised charity for Germany, but organised common-sense whose implementation would not be for the benefit of one country alone. That is not easy in the present excited atmosphere in which the power-politics of all countries collide with the vanished power-politics of the Third Reich. We shall devote all our strength to transferring politics from the realm of power-politics to the economic and moral field. We must try to pre-vent our present activities from sinking to the level of the period of the Weimar Republic. At the same time we must be scrupulous; we have the bounden duty to be tolerant towards the tolerant and intolerant towards the intolerant. The German people must gradually come to realise that the only way of ensuring the fundamental necessities of life is through the SPD. How far the German people sees the SPD in this light cannot be measured in figures. But one thing is certain: the SPD is to the people the best expression of co-operation. That does not signify a lack of criticism. If we give up the right of criticism then we denounce the policy of co-operation to the politically uneducated masses of the German people.

10.48047/jocaaa.2024.33.07.122

Here is Europe, battered, mutilated and bleeding from a thousand wounds. In the middle is a people of 70 million which through the Third Reich has brought on itself, and rightly so, the hatred and contempt of the world. The question for the world is, shall these 70 million die? If the world says yes, then the right time for that was in 1945. But it is now 1947, and Germany's poverty is a part of the poverty and economic backwardness of Europe. The question for the Socialists of the world is: do they want a free anti-totalitarian Socialism to live or do they want to leave us alone?

When a part of a people, as the Social consequences. No one can free himself from the bond of belonging to a class or nation. It is like an inheritance one takes over the debts as well as the assets. We want to come to terms with our creditors in the human society. But it is not good for creditors to pursue a policy which will lead to bankruptcy because of lack of means. What can be saved for the future? The position is not so full of doubt. Even if one recognises that in other countries there are different power-political situations, the community of those of honourable and decent mind should still be realised, without reservation, within International Socialism. Democratic Party is of the German people, that involves.

The Dutch delegate rightly asks the interesting question, "Why did we not choose a new name? Why a new party with an old name?" You must see that it was necessary to reassemble what forces were available and for this purpose the power of attraction of an old banner is stronger than any new organisation. Just one personal observation. He always belonged to the rebels in the old party, but to deny the old party on that account we will never do. The party made mistakes now and again, also tactical errors, but it was the party which strove for great principles which are today still demanded by the world and you should not make our failure your standard of judgment in all things. It is not always the better man who wins. Comrades, there is much argument about Marxism. There is no doubt that the great modern Labour Parties will only make progress and become true parties of the people when they do not rely on dogmatic teachings, but Marxism as a method seems to me to be unassailable. If we had given up the name of our party in this unhappy world, where voices argue one with another, then Marxism as a method not as a slogan or formula would perhaps have fallen by the wayside, and we did not want that to happen. A Labour movement in Germany is impossible without the support of the Marxist method.

As regards the guilt of the German people. It is not self-justification if said that, measured against the guilt of other forces which were much stronger than ourselves, the guilt of the Social Democrats was, on the strictest interpretation, very small. It not believable that a party or a man can escape historical events. That is Marxism of the people. He would just like to ask all comrades from other nations to examine then-selves, to imagine how they themselves might have reacted in the German situation, the frightful culmination of 300 years of development.

The Swiss delegate asked whether disagreement with the Communists means a similar attitude towards Russia. The Communists of all countries submit to a particular intellectual and organisational principle. It is totalitarianism and is wedded to the idea of leadership over others, and we in Germany have since 1918 experienced how a large Communist Party can affect the working class movement. But I am very careful not to confuse the Communist Party in one country with the great reality of the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union is a reality with which we must come to the modus vivendi. If we do not express it any stronger than that you must remember that we are conquered and destroyed, and there is a colossus of 200

10.48047/jocaaa.2024.33.07.122

million people conscious of its strength. It is an illusion to believe that under these circumstances diplomatic conversations are possible. The diplomacy of the stronger conditions the form and content of the defence of the weaker. It holds the view, and so does the entire S.D.P., that agreement is possible between Russia and Europe. In the great conflict which is not insoluble as so many people maintain, the question really is: two great powers must come to some new agreement, the U.S.A. must realise that Europe can only exist as an economic whole in the form of democratically controlled Socialism, and the Russians must realise that Europe must be democratic. When we make this demand we do not take a stand against either the industrial organisation of the Soviet Union or its constitutional structure. Whichever of the great powers first understands this necessity will have made great progress. Collaboration with the Communists let us have no illusions about it. In practice we work together in all the provincial governments of the Western Zone wherever they are strong enough to take part in the government. Theoretically we cannot give the Communists any privileges against the other parties which have been democratically established, and it cannot be held against us. Think of our comrades in the Eastern Zone who are objects of persecution by the Unity Party. The fusion there was carried out by denunciatory methods. If the war was fought for democracy, then the 17 million Germans in the East should also be allowed to live democratically.

The sentence "we must be tolerant towards the tolerant and intolerant towards the intolerant," has nothing to do with foreign policy but concerns internal policy. Since the collapse in 1945 all politicians outside the S.D.P. have been racking their brains to discover who should be the leaders of the Social Democrats. We have no need to be led. The membership of the S.D.P. itself decides by democratic procedure who should be the leader of the S.D.P. That is the only possibility. We cannot return to the position before 1933. Then one of the main reasons for our collapse was that we felt ourselves responsible for the re-public and sacrificed ourselves for it while all the others attacked us until we weakened. That is past. We must not allow ourselves to be attacked again. The S.D.P. of 1945 is different from the S.D.P. which in 1933 had to abdicate along with all the other parties.

It is not our duty to prevent the anti-Soviet propaganda of the other parties. It is the task of the Communists to pursue such a policy in Germany that this kind of propaganda does not arise. We are not anti-Russian but pro-German and Inter-national. The policy of speculating on the differences between the occupied powers and seeing in these possibilities for Germany is not the policy of the S.D.P. In thousands of speeches by our party leaders the following sentence is never omitted: "It is a crime to speculate on possible differences between the allies." In any case, such differences would not give Germany any kind of freedom but the opposite.

The Polish delegate has raised the question about the Oder-Neisse line. It cannot be answered merely with the phrase, "war or peace." The question contains many different economic and political elements. The unification of the working class movement is pursued by us with all possible means. It is not too bold a diagnosis to say that if the Communists in Germany did not cling to the political structure of one of the victorious powers then we should already have a united working class movement, except for a small fraction, within the framework of the S.D.P. Some questions put to us go beyond the time limits. We are unjustifiably asked about things for which we are theoretically not really responsible. We are not a party which can speak within the framework of a united Germany. When it was asked "the term" "What do you do to make the people understand?" its reply, "They do everything that parties in other countries allow to do." That is one of the reasons why they stand here. When you ask, "What

10.48047/jocaaa.2024.33.07.122

is your main enemy?" they reply, remnants of German Capitalism and International Capitalism." But when other enemies with totalitarian intentions press upon us you will not ask us to commit suicide because we are afraid. There is only one democracy and we will make it our aim and our strength.

It has been asked why they carried out no resistance. They were alone for six years before anyone else joined us in the concentration camps. It will not be parade the death sentences and the prison sentences, will just give you one small example. On the 6th of May 1945, had a small meeting in Hanover, without the knowledge of the British and Americans. In the small group there were about a hundred men from the resistance movement. To that gathering we gave a paper and those present were asked to write down how long they had been imprisoned by the Third Reich. He looked around the gathering and more than a thousand years of prison stared back at me. Do not talk to me of resistance. No one can say anything about it who does not know Nazism; how it penetrated everywhere, even into the most private family relationships, so that the most unimaginable of all things happened mothers denounced their sons and sent them to concentration camps. Anyone who has not experienced that cannot imagine it, and this happened in the country where the struggle against it did not have the stimulus of the fight for national freedom, as happened later in the occupied countries.

The Norwegian delegate asked what would happen if there were no S.D.P. in Germany. Yes, how would it be for Germany and Europe and the International working class movement? for we have as a branch of International Socialism maintained our position during these last two years and also gained new ground. It is not my intention to present you with a plan for Europe "made in Germany." No such illusions; have nowishes or intentions of that kind; but will tell you the truth-the progress of German Social Democrats depends on you. Their international spirit remains the same under all circumstances; but do not do one thing: do not apply two kinds of justice or impose a delay for investigation or anything of that kind. They are ready to stand back so as not to injure your co-operation. Knowing that there are so many forces in this conference who want to work with us, that effective co-operation may be possible. If you say yes, you do a great and good thing; if you say no, then you deal us, and perhaps also yourselves, a blow, but we shall survive it. Do not pursue a policy of unequal justice. In that, the speaker is addressing Socialist morality. Either we are together as International Socialists with equal constitutional rights, or we are not together at all. Hopefully, we are together.

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