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Between class and catch-all: is there an electoral dilemma for social democratic parties in Western Europe?

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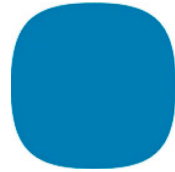
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1 **Between class and catch-all: Is there an electoral dilemma for social democratic parties in Western Europe?**

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Twenty five years ago the German political scientist Otto Kirchheimer published an article which became one of the most valuable and influential pieces in party research for the next quarter of the century. His *The Transformation of the Western European Party System*¹ (Kirchheimer 1966) stimulated controversial and still ongoing debates among scholars in the field of party and party systems research. In particular the concept of «catch-all ‘peoples’ party», or «catch-all party» coined by Kirchheimer, made the article a reference point for both fruitful theoretical debates and empirical studies. Kirchheimer predicted that with the deideologization of the Western societies this new type of party would inevitably become dominant. He argued that, under the emerging conditions of mass consumption, the establishment of the welfare state, the blurring of class lines and the increasing importance of the middle classes, old «mass integration parties» would be under pressure to transform itself into «catch all parties»:

«...the mass integration party, product of an age with harder class lines and more sharply protruding denominational structures, is transforming itself into a catch-all ‘people’s party. Abandoning attempts at the intellectual and moral encadrement of the masses, it is turning more fully to the electoral scene, trying to exchange effectiveness in depth for a wider audience and more immediate electoral success» (Kirchheimer 1966: 184).

This transformation was forced on the old «mass-integration party» by changing social structures and in the last instance by the new rules of competition in the «political marketplace». Seen from such a perspective, Kirchheimers catch-all party comes close to Anthony Downs «multi-policy party» elucidated in his *Economic Theory of Democracy* (1957), since its emergence is primarily a «competitive phenomenon» (1966: 187). The transformation of the old mass integration parties (2) into new catch-all parties involves for the subtype of (socialist/social democratic) class-mass party at least five core changes (Kirchheimer 1966: 190/1):

- drastic reduction of ideological baggage;
- further strengthening of the leadership, which is now judged by its contributions to the society as a whole instead to a particular class or group;
- downgrading the role and importance of the individual member;
- deemphasis of the working class in order to gain votes among the population at large;
- establishing access to and links with a variety of interest groups.

These are ideal-typical changes. And Kirchheimer himself exempted certain parties from the general trend towards catch-all parties. According to him only major parties can transform themselves into successful catch-all parties (1966: 187). Moreover, if larger parties are securely entrenched and able to gain absolute parliamentary majorities, such as the Swedish and Norwegian social democratic parties in the 1950s and 1960s, there are only very limited incentives to change into catch-all parties (ibid. 188). But with the erosion of class voting in these Scandinavian countries during the last decade those parties too had to appeal to a wider interclass electorate (Sainsbury 1984; 1990; 1991).

In reality the actual transformation from mass integration parties into perfect catch-all entrepreneurs has been a long process which stopped half way. Nowhere in Western Europe have perfect catch-all parties come into existence as Downs and to some extent also Kirchheimer predicted in the 1950s and 1960s (Schmidt 1985: 381). This is not to say a general trend towards catch-all parties cannot be observed. But the programmatic profile, the actual policies and the social structures of their electorates still distinguishes the bourgeois from the social democratic type of catch-all parties. Moreover, by no means have all large bourgeois parties and all large social democratic parties changed into «right» or «left» catch-all parties. But what the social democratic parties have in common is the strategic problem of appealing to their core clientele, the working class, and the middle classes simultaneously. However, this difficulty is older than Kirchheimers concept of the catch-all party. At the latest, it came into being during the inter war period when social democratic parties entered governments in many countries for the first time (e.g. Germany, Austria, Great Britain, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, France). But the problem aggravated in the period after 1945. In capitalist societies social democratic parties have to function as parties of government and opposition while pursuing electoral strategies which appealed to the working class in particular and to the population at large in general. These are tasks «hard to perform but still harder to avoid» (Kirchheimer 1966: 189). And it is above all this strategic problem which led Przeworski and Sprague (1986) to state, 20 years after Kirchheimers famous essay, that this problem cannot be successfully solved, since it contains an inherent electoral dilemma which inevitably leads to the irresistible decline of social democracy.

Przeworski's and Sprague's hypothesis of social democracy's electoral dilemma

articles (Przeworski/Sprague 1986; Przeworski 1985; 1989) Przeworski and Sprague stated that social democracy as a «historical phenomenon» (Przeworski 1985: 7) has not simply failed due to deviations from a supposedly «correct line» or the betrayals of its leaders. It has rather been doomed because of the rational strategic choices that leaders were forced to make when faced with the specific «dilemma of electoral socialism» (Przeworski/Sprague 1986: 55). When it appeared that workers would never become a numerical majority in any society, it became clear that the mandate for the social democratic project –the emancipation of workers– could not be achieved on the basis of workers votes alone. Leaders of social democratic parties/socialist parties must seek support elsewhere in society, that is, they must continuously decide «whether or not to seek electoral success at the cost, or at least at the risk, of diluting class lines and consequently diminishing the salience of class as a motive for the political behavior of workers themselves» (ibid.: 6). This is the dilemma. To be electorally successful, social democratic parties cannot appeal to workers alone; they have to assume a «supraclass posture». In so doing they dilute their capacity to win workers as a class. Therefore, social democratic and socialist leaders are confronted with a persistent trade-off dilemma. They are condemned to minority status when they pursue class only strategies, and they lose votes among the working class when they follow supraclass electoral strategies appealing also to the middle class. «Unable to win either way» is the quintessence of the electoral dilemma of democratic socialism (ibid.: p. 3; 55-56, 58; Przeworski 1985: 104; Przeworski 1989: p. 78-122).

«The electoral dilemma». A theoretical critique

The four basic axiomatic suppositions and definitions that are the basis for Przeworski's and Sprague's thesis of an electoral dilemma are insufficiently substantiated and empirically doubtful (cf. Sainsbury 1990: 29 spp.; King/Wickham-Jones 1990):

1. Przeworski and Sprague apply a very strict definition of «working class»: «Workers include manual wage earners in mining, manufacturing, construction, transport and agriculture as well as their inactive adult household members» (1986: 34/5). Workers and employees in the lower levels of the private and public service sectors are excluded by this narrow definition. In fact the two American Political Scientists explicitly take as their reference point class-definitions of the late 19th century, such as that of Engels 1888 in an English reprint of the Communist Manifesto and Karl Kautsky in his comment on the Erfurt Programm (ibid.: 33). This

sort of class-distinction whose only criterion is the position of the wage earners in the production process may have been plausible at that time but for the period after the Second World War this can not be grounded in differences in income, status, socio-cultural milieu or lifestyles nor differences in material interests (Merkel 1992: 24).

But the strict definition of class is of immense meaning for Przeworski's and Sprague's thesis of an electoral dilemma. Because it enables them to affirm their thesis historically: According to their thesis the working class was on the one hand expected to «carry socialism to its electoral majority» but on the other maintain that «this proletariat was not and would never become a majority of any society» (ibid.: 34). This narrow definition lays one of the basic premises for the following thesis of an electoral dilemma.

Simultaneously, for the first time, a certain inconsequence becomes obvious in the way Przeworski and Sprague use the concept «class». Surprisingly the two «rational-choice» theorists base their above mentioned use of the concept «class» on a structural class concept. Class is simply defined here in terms of the position of the individual in the relations of production. It is thus defined in terms of «class structure» and not of «class formation». On the other hand Przeworski in particular refuses -with good arguments- to consider class support for social democratic parties simply an epiphenomenon of social structure. Przeworski contrasts the concept «class structure» (cf. Przeworski 1985: 64 sqq.). Thereby he emphasizes the influence that class organizations and class struggles have on the collective identity, political engagement and electoral preferences of the working class.

From this action-theory oriented perspective «class» appears as the product of strategic actions of working class organizations. Nevertheless Przeworski's emphatically action-theory oriented credo does not prevent him or his co-author Sprague from oscillating between structural and action-oriented perspective in their analysis. Indeed they ascribe to both models a specific time-bound meaning in the history of «electoral socialism» since the introduction of general and equal elections: «Party strategies», they write, «dominate the dynamic of the vote during the first period; transformations of class structure mold the path of socialist vote in the longer run of electoral experience» Przeworski/Sprague 1986: 90). While in the early years of the socialist parties strategy was decisive for electoral success, this degenerates in «late socialism» to a dependend residual variable of the evolution of social structure. In fact both authors interpret the different electoral successes for socialist parties not so much in terms of different electoral strategies but rather quite plausibly in terms of other factors such as the degree of unionisation or the existence of communist and leftist socialist rivals within the party system (ibid. 70-78).

2. Przeworski and Sprague perceive class interests of the workers as clearly distinct from the interests of other social classes and levels. By this they deny the possibility to pursue the interests of different classes in a single synthetic political strategy. Przeworski argues here that strategies aiming at groups outside the working class necessarily sacrifice the interests of the working class. By supra-class-strategies workers can no longer be mobilized as such but only as individuals, tax-payers, consumers, parents, poor, «the people», etc. (Przeworski 1985: 27). Thus social democratic parties lose their class appeal and the spiral of decline begins. Because, according to Przeworski and Sprague, «whenever leftist parties are successful in mobilizing large electoral support from anyone else they suffer a loss of opportunities among narrowly defined workers» (Przeworski/Sprague 1986: 60).

Przeworski and Sprague avoid making clearer the distinction between class interests of workers and their interests as citizens, consumers, tax-payers, etc.; this distinction is analytically logical but in reality nonetheless artificial. It would be difficult after all to elucidate exclusive class interests of the workers that have been so for decades. If one outlines, for example, the main aims of class-organisations such as trade unions in the period after the Second World War, such as full employment, wage increases, or the different forms of codetermination, one can hardly speak of exclusive class interests in terms of the narrow definition of Przeworski and Sprague. These claims are potentially in the interest of all wage earners and not just in that of the working class. Under the aspect of macroeconomic management and industrial policy, even the nationalization of the means of production, which was disputed under social democrats, in the first two decades of our century, does not necessarily have to be considered pure class interest.

But even assuming that exclusive working-class-interests in modern industrial and service societies do exist, and even if one accepts the thesis of watering down class policy by supra-class-strategies, the construction of the «electoral trade-off» between worker -and non-worker-votes remains doubtful. Diane Sainsbury is quite right in calling it «more or less axiomatic» (Sainsbury 1990: 32). Przeworski and Sprague are not offering any convincing or sufficient explanation. That workers are not as attracted to more moderate supra-class-strategies as they are to radical class policies can only appear plausible on the premise that workers perceive their interests as being best represented by a radical class policy, and that this «rational choice» is then the determining motive for their electoral preferences. Desmond King and Mark Wickham-Jones quite rightly point out that while Przeworski and Sprague are primarily analyzing the strategies of parties rather than considering the electoral motives of lower-and middle-class-voters in «Paperstones», their thesis

of an «electoral trade-off» is based on assumptions of electoral motivations of the voters (King/Wickham-Jones 1990: 391). Using the example of the British Labour Party through the last 40 years, the two English authors also show that it was hardly the moderation of Labour's strategy that led to the loss of voters among workers because they disapproved of this moderate «supra-class-strategy». When Labour's policy became more moderate in the 50s and 60s the party did in fact lose votes among the workers, but these votes went to the Conservative and Liberal Parties. When Labour became radicalized again in the 70s and 80s, it continued to lose working-class-votes to the Conservatives, the Liberals, and the Social Democrats. «There is little evidence», conclude King and Wickham-Jones, «that the party was too moderate, too respectable or too middle class. They abandoned it for other reasons. The British case, at any rate, does not substantiate 'Paperstones'» (ibid.: 393/4).

A look at the statistic basis of this theorem strengthens the suspicion of a statistic artefact. The national statistics used don't give any information about the share of social-democratic votes among workers and non-workers respectively. Diane Sainsbury is right in critically remarking that these important values, central to the «trade-off»-thesis, are unknown and are only constructed by the authors' statistical estimation methods (Sainsbury 1990: 34). This suspicion is hardened by a scrupulous examination of the «trade-off»-calculations. This was performed by Sainsbury for Denmark, Norway and Sweden. According to her «trade-off»-quotas, calculated on the basis of Przeworski's and Sprague's assumptions, it is doubtful whether Social Democrats in Scandinavia are threatened by an electoral dilemma at all. Norway's Labour Party would have to face the loss of 1 worker-vote opposed to the gain of 1000 nonworkers («allies»). The Danish Social Democrats would have to cope with a proportion of 2 to 100, and the Swedish SAP with a proportion of 6 to 100. Not only the national differences seem arbitrary here. The cases of Norway and Denmark (and basically Sweden as well) contradict Przeworski's and Sprague's own thesis that there is an unavoidable electoral «trade-off» between the two target groups at all (ibid.: 35). The predicted «irreversible decline» would no longer be worrying at least for Scandinavia's Social Democrats.

Przeworski's and Sprague's calculations of the «carrying capacities» (percentage of votes achievable and retainable if a party's strategy is optimal) of the Scandinavian Left also seem unrealistic. According to this calculation, at the beginning of the 70s the left parties could have achieved 65.3% in Norway, 59.1% in Denmark, but only 41.4% in Sweden. The Norwegian Social Democrats alone would have had the fabulous «carrying capacity» of 62.8%, the Swedish only 40.2% (Przeworski/Sprague 1986: 95). Compared to the real results for the

Norwegian DNA in the 60s (45.5%) and 70s (38.6%) and for the Swedish SAP in the same period of time (48.4%; 43.7%) (cf. Sainsbury 1990: 36) this would mean that, with Przeworski and Sprague, strategic genius can be attested for Sweden's social democratic party leaders, and the strategic incompetence of Norway's social democratic party leaders is confirmed.

3. Also to be disputed in this context is the axiomatic reduction of the complex strategic problems of party leaders whether the party should pursue a class-strategy or a supraclass-strategy. Parties do not only wish to maximize votes at any price, but, except for programmatic duties, they must also formulate a coherent administrative policy taking into consideration certain institutional and political problems. Again the ideal-typical distinction between «class-» and «supraclass-strategy» is hardly adequate for advanced post-industrial societies.

The assumption as well that the manifold political aims of parties could be subsumed under one of the two strategies by a consensually or autocratically decision-making elite, for the sole purpose of vote maximization, reveals a simplifying view of decision-making in political parties. Parties are in no way monolithic actors but rather «stratarchies» (Eldersveld 1964) in which complex conflicts are fought and compromises made (Beyme 1984: 187 p.) between various factions on various levels (Sartori 1976; Raschke 1977). There may even be a coexistence between vertical and horizontal parts of the party pursuing contrary goals or different electoral strategies. The SPD in the 70s (Müller-Rommel 1982), the French Socialists after the 1945 (Bell/Cridle 1989), and the Italian Socialists before 1980 (Merkel 1987) may be quoted as paradigmatic. But if one reduces complex party strategies to the simple dichotomy of «class» or «supraclass» for the sake of statistic and empirical research, a statistic artefact may be the predictable result.

4. Furthermore it is doubtful whether socialist or social democratic parties only apply «supraclass»-strategies if they can rely on «sufficient» support from the working class (Przeworski/Sprague 1986: 88). This theorem is neither logically nor is it empirically proved or even plausible. For after all it is rational for the party strategists to concentrate on the middle-classes, and this means applying a supraclass-strategy, if it becomes clear to the party leadership that their core clientele, the working class, is declining in post-industrial societies or is bound to strong communist parties. The decline of the working class in advanced capitalist societies was one of the main reasons for the Godesberg Programm of 1959 when the SPD was aiming to escape from the «30%-tower». The threat that working class votes may be absorbed by communist parties led to successful supraclass-strategies of the social democratic parties in

France, Portugal, Spain, and Greece (Merkel 1992: 74 p.).

According to Przeworski and Sprague the strategic dilemma was especially enforced by the post-industrial changes that accelerated the secular decline of social democracy. According to their thesis the decrease in the number of industrial workers set a limit to the strategic potential of social democratic parties to achieve a maximum gain of votes outside the working class votes at the same time (Przeworski/Sprague 1986: 88). This was not only due to the decrease in the number of workers but it was of importance as well that social democratic parties were less able and willing to gain new groups of voters because they had less workers among their voters (ibid.: 83/4). But if they did, they would become victims of an iron «electoral trade off»: The more votes they win among the middle classes, the more they lose among the workers. Nevertheless, and this is what Przeworski and Sprague don't deny, the electoral opportunity-costs of such a strategy would depend on the strength of the trade unions, the existence of neo-corporatist arrangements, and the strength of communist or leftist socialist rivals in the search of working class votes. But these factors would merely have a gradual effect for a short period of time. They would not change anything about the fact that the logic of the dilemma is unavoidable in the long run, as well as the conclusion to be drawn from it: «the era of electoral socialism may be over» (ibid.: 185). This is to be understood in a double sense: This logic on the one hand seals the decline of Social Democracy at the polls and on the other hand the rationally deciding elites of social democracy are forced by the change of the social structure of society to abolish traditional aims and policies to avoid programming their own decline by making policies for a continuously shrinking class.

In Przeworski's and Sprague's theses a strange paradox is to be found. On the one hand there is the epistemological elegance of the rational-choice-theory, which is based on methodical individualism. On the other hand the rational-choice-theorem is no defense against the authors becoming victims of some sort of crude sociological determinism, which drives them to contradict their own theory by putting «class structure» in the place of «class formation». The authors predict that in the long run «electoral socialism» is irreversibly bound to decline, due to the iron electoral dilemma, which is enforced by the post-industrial changes, although, so they admit, institutions, strategies, and policies could have their effect on the success of social democratic parties. «Ultimately», so they argue, «it probably mattered relatively little whether socialist leaders did everything they could to win elections. Their choices were limited» (ibid.: 126). Przeworski and Sprague do see the opportunity of parties exerting influence on public opinion and creating collective identifications as well as political ties, but this has

no effect whatsoever upon their final conclusion, which is deterministic.

Determinism and the universal claim to validity are built in to the construction of the theorem. The paradigm of methodological individualism as well as socio-cultural determinism tends to neglect the different political institutions, socio-economic structures and nationally varying «opportunity costs» for choices concerning electoral strategies or policies. This leads almost automatically to conclusions and predictions that claim to be universally applicable and are not within their necessary context anymore.

The «Electoral dilemma». An empirical test

After the theoretical critique of Przeworski and Spragues concept of the irreversible decline of electoral socialism I will test their hypotheses within a wider empirical context. I will attempt to provide empirical answers to the following questions:

1. Which socialist parties attracted a high, and which a low share of working class votes in the mid-seventies?

How can these different electoral performances be explained?

Which socialist parties lost working class votes up until the end of the 1980s?

2. Can the potential losses of working class votes to be traced back to the numerical decline of workers in the post-industrial society or are these losses the result of an increasing class dealignment of the worker from social democratic and socialist parties?

3. Do the social democratic parties particularly lose votes from the working class, when their share of middle class votes increases?

To answer these questions empirically I employ data compiled in the Eurobarometer-surveys. Regarding the electoral behaviour since 1974, Eurobarometer has regularly conducted bi-annual surveys. Included in the survey is a question for the vote intention of the population twice a year. Since 1975 Eurobarometer has also gathered data on the occupational structure of the population within the EC-countries. Crosstabulating both variables we can determine the occupational structure of the electorate in general and of the social democratic parties in particular. The N-number of the respondents declaring a social democratic vote intention -varied from country to country and from survey to survey. In order to obtain a sufficiently large sample, I cumulated the surveys of 1957a, 1975b, 1976a, 1976b and compared them with the cumulated data of the surveys of 1989a, 1989b and 1990a.

The resulting calculations are significant up to a possible deviation

of 5%. A comparison between 1975/76 and 1989/90 will reveal the sociostructural change within the social democratic electorate during this period. Since I am using a single common data base with identical survey questions and identical occupational categories, a true cross-national comparison can be made. Other comparative analyses which are based on different national surveys and statistics, or ex post estimates of the occupational structure may be as statistically sophisticated as those of Przeworski and Sprague but tend to be more problematic. To my knowledge, a simulary based cross-national comparison of social democratic electorates has not yet been conducted.

The share of Working Class Votes Within Social Democratic Electorates

Table 1 shows substantial differences concerning the share of working class votes among the social democratic parties of the EC-countries. Dividing the parties into parties with a high (above 60%), medium (40%-60%) and a low share of working class votes (below 40%) within their party electorate yields the following results for the mid-seventies: only the Labour Parties of Ireland and Great Britain obtained very high proportions of working class votes. Most of the social democratic parties belong to the middle group (40%-60%): i.e. those of Belgium, Netherlands, West Germany, Denmark, Spain, Portugal. The three socialist parties of France, Greece, Italy display only a low share (below 40%) of working class votes.

The decisive dividing line ran between the established social democratic parties of Northern- and Middle Europe and the socialist «latecomers» of Southern Europe. The low share of working class votes for these socialist parties can be partially explained by the specific competitive structure of Southern Europe party systems. The political left in Southern Europe is fragmented and the socialist parties have to compete with strong or at least relevant Communist parties for blue collar vote. In parliamentary elections the communist parties polled in Greece 10.9% (1981), 21.4% in France (1973) and even 34.4% in Italy (1976). With regard to the socio-professional structures the communist parties had to be considered as the working class parties of these countries. (Table 2).

Italy, where socialist and social democratic parties displayed the lowest share of worker votes among all European socialist parties, has not only the largest communist party of the western world, but also a large catch-all Christian Democracy. This party is able to attract a considerable number of working class votes through the «catholic social-doctrine» and the strong christian democratic trade union -the Confederazione Italiana

Sindacati Lavoratori, CISL (Caciagli 1990). If one turns this explanation around, the high percentage share of working class votes among the electorate of the British Labour Party can be explained as well. The Labour Party is confronted neither with a relevant party competitor to the left, nor an interclassist christian democracy, but only with a conservative party which lacks any influence in the trade union movement. This does not mean that working class conservatism is unknown in Great Britain. But during the 1970s the British conservatives were not able to attract as many votes from the workers as the Christian Democrats in Italy or even in Germany.

Which Socialist Parties Lost Working Class Votes and Why Did they Lose?

Fifteen years later, at the end of the 1980s, the proportion of votes coming from the working class had declined considerably in all social democratic parties. Only the small Irish Labour Party still received more than 60% of its votes from the working class. In the middle group (40%-60%) place the social democratic/socialist parties of Denmark, Great Britain, Belgium and Spain. Now most of the social democratic parties had received less than 40% of their votes from the working class: those of West Germany, Portugal, Netherlands, France, Italy, and Greece. These results clearly demonstrate that the share of votes coming from the middle class increased in nearly all social democratic electorates from 1975 to 1990. The sole exception are the Danish social democrats (DS). The share of middle class votes decreased during the last fifteen years. Together with the Irish Labour Party the DS is the sole party, which attracts still more votes from the workers than from the middle classes. The three Southern European Socialist parties of Greece, France and Italy on the other hand -together with the Dutch Partij van de Arbeid (PvdA)- are still those socialist or social democratic parties which attract the fewest votes from the workers.

The declining blue collar vote within the social democratic electorates does not necessarily mean that social democratic parties lost their ability to attract votes from the working class overproportionally. The decline may simply be due to the socio-structural change in society. Indeed and not very surprisingly, the percentage of blue collar workers in the total electorate decreased considerably in all countries as Table 3 shows.

Moreover, the figures of Table 3 reveal that the decline of blue collar workers is indeed an essential problem for «electoral socialism» since its electoral strength of the past was despite the growing catch-all tendencies essentially based on their disproportional high electoral share they drew

from the blue collar workers. This is in particular true for the established social democracy of Northern and continental Europe but to a much lesser degree for Southern European Socialism. With the exception of the socialist parties in Greece, France, Italy and Portugal where the percentage of blue collar votes equals roughly the proportion of blue collar workers of the total electorate, all other European social democratic and socialist parties still gain a disproportionately high percentage of votes from the working class. However, this favourable disproportion is shrinking, though to a varying degree, in all socialist parties. All social democratic and socialist parties are still moving, into the direction of a catch-all party at least as far as the ongoing «equalization» of their blue collar votes and the increasing gains from the middle strata are concerned. From the socio-structural point of view it seems that the Southern European socialist parties are not only the parties which are closest to the catch-all type, but reflect more than their sister parties of the North the occupational structure of the emerging postindustrial society. However, this does not mean that their electoral success in the future can already be taken for granted. Since the alignment of the unionized blue collar workers to the established social democracy in most countries of Northern Europe (Armingeon 1989).

But to check more precisely whether this change is due to socio-structural change in the postindustrializing societies or due to an electoral dealignment of the workers from social democracy I constructed a «worker-representation-index». This index compares the share of working class votes for the social democratic parties with the share of working class votes within the total electorate in the years 1975 and 1990. The arithmetic formula is: (blue collar votes for soc. parties: total soc. votes): (total blue collar votes: total votes). An index-value of 1 signals, that blue collar votes within the social democratic electorates are exactly proportionally represented to their share within the total electorate. A value above 1 signifies an over- and below 1 an underrepresentation of blue collar workers.

The indices of Table 4 show only for the Danish social democrats a slight increase in class alignment. All the other 10 parties suffered from a minimal, respectively moderate class dealignment. The dealignment appears significantly only for the Belgian social democrats and the British Labour Party. In the British case it was partially caused by the authoritarian-populist tendencies of Thatcherism, which turned out to be attractive for certain parts of the working class (Hall 1986: 99 p.; Butler/Kavanagh 1984: 296 p.). But it has also to be traced back to the split of the Social Democrats from the Labour Party, when particularly highly qualified workers deserted from the Labour electorate (Padget/Paterson 1991: 117/8).

Regarding the European social democratic parties in general the class dealignment turned out to be only minimal. His impact on the overall decline of the share of blue collar votes within the social democratic electorates was by far smaller than the effects of the numerical decline of workers in the society as a whole.

Does Social Democracy Face an Electoral Trade-Off?

Do social democratic parties lose votes among the working class, when they gain votes from the middle classes? If this general hypothesis of Przeworski and Sprague is right for the seventies and eighties, the «workers-representation-index» should have decreased particularly in those parties, where the «middle class-representation-index» visibly increased. See Table 5.

Przeworski and Sprague's trade off hypothesis between working class and middle class votes can be confirmed by my own computation only significantly for the three social democratic parties of Belgium, West Germany, and Great Britain. None of the cases openly contradict the trade-off hypothesis openly. Most of the trade offs remain within insignificant limits. However, from these minimal electoral trade offs the electoral decline of social democratic parties cannot be derived at any rate. Since the decline of the average «worker-representation-index» had been compensated by the increase of the «middle class index». This is therefore very important for the future development of social democratic parties, since whereas the number of workers is decreasing the numerical significance and socio-economic importance of the middle classes is still increasing. The figures clearly demonstrate that the social democratic parties succeeded to exploit the reservoir of middle class voters without suffering heavy losses among the blue collar electorate.

The Coming of the Postindustrial Society and the Electoral Performance of social democratic parties

West European societies are undergoing a fundamental change of their occupational structure. Except for the economic latecomers Greece, Portugal and Ireland in all these societies the share of workers in the industrial sector has decreased in the course of the last twenty years. Which impact did this have on the electoral performance of social democracy?

Table 6 reveals there is no significant nexus between the numerical decline of industrial workers and the electoral performance. Only for a

few cases, as for Great Britain (strong), Italy, Norway and Austria, there are weak statistical correlations. Moreover, during the eighties most of the significant correlations between the size of the industrial labour force and the percentage of votes for social democratic parties have vanished. Whereas in West Germany and Austria these correlations still can be observed, they disappeared in Sweden, Norway and the Netherlands during the 1980s. In France, Greece, Portugal and Spain they never existed. Francis Castles strongly nomthetical hypothesis, that the larger the industrial sector, the better social democracys electoral performance has to be revised against the background of the development during the last fifteen years (Castles 1983: 299/300). What was valid for the so called «golden age» of social democracy (1945-1973) has lost its relevance for the «post golden age».

In particular the social democratic and socialist parties of Scandinavia and Southern Europe clearly contradict Przeworski and Spragues hypothesis that social democratic parties tend to retreat from supra-class strategies when they begin to lose votes among the working class. On the base of the data explicated above an supposedly «iron» electoral dilemma, which prevents social democratic parties transforming themselves from class parties to «leftist catch-all parties» has to be falsified. Certainly the social democratic parties have lost working class votes in absolute and relative terms. These losses have been overwhelmingly caused by the numerical decline of workers within the post-industrial societies of Western Europe. Only to a minor extent they can be traced back to very moderate class dealignments. However, these losses of blue collar votes did not take the effect of an overall decline of the social democratic voters, since they have been largely compensated by the increase of votes from the middle classes.

Although the social democratic electorates display a moderate overrepresentation of workers and underrepresentation of farmers, professionals and entrepreneurs at the beginning of the 1990s, their socio-structural changes of the last fifteen years resembles more and more the socio-structural changes of the West European societies as a whole. This strengthens my main objection to Przeworski and Spragues hypoohthesis of an inescapable electoral dilemma. On the contray social democratic parties have not simply been victims of social changes, they rather turned out to be -though with considerable national differences- actors which are able to adapt to or even to influence the mode and rate of these social changes. This will change social democracy politics and policies as it was already the case during the twentieth century, but it does not program social democracy's irressistible decline for the future.

Table 1

The occupational structure of social democratic and socialist electorates in Western Europe (in %)

	workers		lower employees		higher employees		others	
	1975	1990	1975	1990	1975	1990	1975	1990
Belgium	58.7	42.6	24.8	39.7	10.0	6.3	9.3	18.7
FRG	52.7	34.4	35.9	34.0	4.4	24.1	13.5	24.7
Denmark	52.5	49.8	41.4	36.8	0.6	0.8	14.2	20.2
France	32.9	27.1	44.8	41.9	8.0	22.5	23.0	29.2
Great Britain	70.8	44.0	23.0	30.4	2.5	14.6	8.8	15.5
Greece	33.2	19.4	23.7	22.0	1.0	4.6	41.6	42.9
Ireland	68.3	64.6	17.1	26.7	3.7	8.1	13.4	14.0
Italy	27.5	23.8	44.3	42.0	6.5	7.4	35.6	36.2
Netherlands	58.0	30.9	20.5	42.1	15.9	21.6	7.9	21.4
Portugal	47.7	33.3	33.3	27.0	0.6	10.5	21.6	29.2
Spain	49.5	41.7	27.2	23.7	2.4	12.7	22.3	21.9

Source: Note: Only the actual employed of the EC countries had been taken into account (and not the total electorate). «1975» includes five surveys conducted between 1975 and 1977; «1990» includes five surveys between 1987 and 1990.

worker: skilled and unskilled manual workers;

lower employees: lower office employees, lower service sector (shop-assistants), supervisors;

higher employees: employed professionals (employed lawyers, practitioners, accountants), middle and general management;

others: farmer, fishermen; professionals, entrepreneurs.

Table 2

Electoral results of socialist and communist parties in Southern Europe during the 1970s and 1980s (in %)

	1970 - 1979		1980 - 1989	
	SP's	CP's	SP's	CP's
France	22.1	21.0	34.7 (+12.6)	11.3 (-9.7)
Greece	19.5	9.5	43.4 (+23.9)	11.2 (+1.7)
Italy	13.8	30.1	16.4 (+ 2.6)	28.2 (-1.9)
Portugal	35.2	16.1	27.2 (- 7.0)	16.0 (-0.1)
Spain	30.4	10.1	45.4 (+15.0)	6.1 (-4.0)

Source: Mackie/Rose 1982; several issues of «Electoral Studies».

Table 3

Occupational structure of the total electorate in the EC-countrie (in %) *

	workers		lower employees		higher employees		others	
	1975	1990	1975	1990	1975	1990	1975	1990
Belgium	39.4	33.7	28.4	36.3	15.2	11.7	17.1	18.3
FRG	41.8	29.7	36.6	32.4	6.3	26.0	15.3	11.8
Denmark	37.6	33.4	42.1	40.1	3.8	14.5	16.4	12.0
France	29.4	25.7	40.1	38.4	8.5	19.7	21.9	16.1
Great Britain	54.2	38.1	30.3	32.1	6.5	15.0	9.0	14.8
Greece	30.2	18.7	24.8	23.5	1.0	6.6	44.0	51.2
Ireland	42.1	33.9	20.6	25.6	5.2	9.9	32.1	30.6
Italy	29.5	25.9	37.1	39.0	7.2	6.4	26.1	28.7
Netherlands	39.7	22.0	23.8	42.9	21.1	24.6	15.4	10.5
Portugal	43.2	32.2	35.2	28.9	0.5	9.2	21.1	29.8
Spain	39.4	33.4	29.3	27.2	2.3	13.6	29.0	25.3
Average	38.8	29.7	31.7	33.3	7.1	14.3	22.5	22.6

* notes see Table 1.

Table 4

«Worker-Representation-Index» of social democratic electorates

	1975	1990	Diff.
Belgium	1.49	1.27	- 0.22
FRG	1.26	1.16	- 0.10
Denmark	1.40	1.49	+ 0.09
France	1.12	1.05	- 0.07
Great Britain	1.31	1.15	- 0.16
Greece	1.10	1.04	- 0.06
Ireland	1.62	1.61	- 0.01
Italy	0.93	0.92	- 0.01
Netherlands	1.46	1.41	- 0.05
Portugal	1.10	1.03	- 0.07
Spain	1.26	1.25	- 0.01
Average	1.28	1.22	- 0.06

Source: calculated by Eurobarometer data

Table 5
«Middle Class-Representation-Index» of social democratic electorates *

	1975	1990	middle class differ.	worker differ.
Belgium	0.80	1.02	+0.22	-0.22
BRD	0.94	0.99	+0.06	-0.10
Denmark	0.91	0.86	-0.04	+0.09
France	1.09	1.11	+0.02	-0.07
Great Britain	0.70	0.95	+0.26	-0.16
Greece	0.95	0.88	-0.07	-0.06
Ireland	0.80	0.98	+0.18	-0.01
Italy	1.15	1.09	-0.06	-0.01
Netherlands	0.81	0.94	+0.13	-0.05
Portugal	0.95	0.99	+0.04	-0.07
Spain	0.93	0.88	-0.05	-0.01
Average	0.91	0.97	+0.06	-0.06

* «middle class» includes lower and higher employees

Source: calculated by Eurobarometer data.

Table 6
Employment in industry as a percentage of civilian employment
and electoral performance (in %)

	employment in the II sector			social democratic voters		
	60-73	80-89	Diff.	60-73	80-89	Diff.
Belgium	43.9	30.8	-13.1	30.0	28.0	- 2.0
FRG	7.8	41.3	- 6.7	41.0	39.4	- 1.6
Finnland	33.7	32.6	- 1.1	24.0	25.4	+ 1.4
France	38.9	32.7	- 6.2	16.8	34.7	+17.9
Greece	22.3	28.3	+ 6.0	-	43.0	-
Great Britain	45.5	32.6	-12.9	45.1	29.2	-15.9
Ireland	28.1	29.7	+ 1.6	14.5	8.7	- 5.8
Italy	37.6	34.7	- 2.9	17.3	16.4	- 1.1
Netherlands	39.6	28.1	-10.5	25.9	31.0	+ 5.1
Norway	35.5	27.6	- 7.9	42.9	37.4	- 5.5
Austria	41.4	38.5	- 2.9	46.3	45.4	- 0.9
Portugal	32.6	35.4	+ 2.8	-	27.2	-
Sweden	40.1	30.2	- 9.9	46.8	44.5	- 2.3
Schweizerland	47.0	36.1	-11.9	24.3	20.7	- 3.6
Spain	33.9	33.3	- 0.6	-	45.4	-

Sources: OECD Historical Statistics 1960-89: 40; electoral results: own computations from Mackie/Rose 1982; various issues of electoral studies.

Appendix

Electoral Share (%) of Social Democratic Parties at National Elections
in Western Europe (Averages)

	1945-89	1945-73	1960-73	1974-89	1980-89
Austria	45.4	44.2	46.3	48.1	45.4
Belgium	30.2	32.1	30.0	27.2	28.0
Denmark	35.9	37.7	38.7	31.8	30.9
Finnland	24.8	24.8	24.0	24.9	25.4
France	21.7	17.5	16.8	32.3	34.7
FRG	37.3	36.3	41.0	40.2	39.4
Greece	-	-	-	35.4	43.4
Ireland	11.2	12.4	14.5	9.3	8.7
Italy	16.5	17.6	17.3	14.9	16.4
Netherlands	29.0	27.7	25.9	31.5	31.0
Norway	42.3	44.2	42.9	38.7	37.4
Portugal	-	-	-	30.6	27.2
Sweden	45.5	46.3	46.8	43.9	44.5
Schwitzerland	24.5	25.5	24.3	22.7	20.7
Spain	-	-	-	38.2	45.4
UK	41.5	46.0	45.1	34.3	29.2
Averages	31.2	31.7	31.8	31.5	31.7

Note: The following parties are taken into consideration:

Austria-SPÖ; Belgium-BSP/PSB; Denmark-SD; Finnland-SDP; France-PS/SFIO;
FRG-SPD; Greece-PASOK; Ireland-ILP; Italy-PSI/PSDI; Netherlands-PvdA;
Norway-DNA; Portugal-PSP, Sweden-SAP; Switzerland-SPS; Spain-PSOE; UK-
Labour Party.

Notes

1. It was first published in German in the Politische Vierteljahresschrift, 1/1965, p. 20-41.

2. Kirchheimer distinguishes between two subtypes of mass integration parties: the class-mass parties and the denominational mass parties. Here I am dealing exclusively with the transformation of the first type.

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