

**Mathieu Fulla, Marc Lazar (eds.), *European Socialists and the State in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries*, Cham, Palgrave Macmillan, 2020, 400 p.**

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It is a commonplace in American political discourse that socialists are statists, zealous to resolve society's ills through the intervention of activist government. To a nineteenth-century European labor militant, however, this might come as a surprise. The state, as he saw it, was not there to lend a helping hand but to repress, and the gendarme and military man, not the social worker, were its emblematic agents. Late twentieth century Third Way socialists on the model of Tony Blair might also protest. Yes, they would acknowledge, the state has a role to play in making for a better world, but so too does the market. The modern socialist from this point of view understands the state as one useful instrument among many and for a certainty does not worship at the altar of state power. So, the relationship between socialism and the state is not a simple one and for sure not as simple as stereotyped thinking would have it.

That is the core argument this volume has to make. It consists of twenty-one essays, each dealing with one aspect or another of European socialism's relations with the state. The coverage is continent-wide. An essay is devoted to Spain and one to Greece. The bulk of attention, however, is paid to four cases, those of France, Germany, Scandinavia, and the United Kingdom, which together account for more than half of the contributions. In a short space, it's impossible to detail what each essay has to say, but a number of themes recur, and to help identify them, the editors supply synoptic essays of their own. The result is a volume that is both coherent and thought-provoking.

So, what does the reader learn? First of all, that the story of European socialism and the state falls into three periods: the era before the Second World War, the postwar decades, and the years of mounting crisis consequent on the globalizing turn of the 1970s. Each period had its accomplishments and challenges, but the volume's overall story arc does not have a happy ending. Socialism, today, is in trouble.

Socialists for a long time preached the gospel of revolution, a stance that created nagging dilemmas for the more pragmatic-minded among them. Did revolutionaries engage in electoral politics, serve in government, effect reform? Didn't such activities prop up the bourgeois state which was a class state designed to protect property? Socialists knew all too well government's repressive potential, even in liberal regimes

with parliamentary institutions. In the troubled decade of the thirties, however, a number of Europe's socialist parties set aside such self-questioning and assumed positions of government responsibility. What is most striking about these experiments in power is socialism's consistent devotion to democracy, to the expansion of the suffrage and to the preservation of parliamentary norms against the fascist threat. Largo Caballero, the "Spanish Lenin" as he is identified in Juan Francisco Fuentes' essay, was the exception. The cause of social reform was also embraced, but there were limits to what could be done. In the Popular Front era, socialists governed in coalition, and coalition partners were not always keen on making profound changes. In France, Léon Blum was outflanked on the Left and had to worry about what the communists would say or do. The era then witnessed reform but not of a system-altering sort. Paid vacations enhanced the quality of life; labor relations were improved. In Sweden, however, matters went further. Sweden had not known the revolutionary upheavals that roiled the rest of Europe in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and so the state was not looked on with the same suspicion that it was elsewhere. Nor was a formidable communist party on hand to impose constraints as in France. In fact, Sweden's socialists found constructive helpmates in farmers' parties, which made possible a red-green alliance with enough electoral clout to leverage the socialists into office as early as 1932. They would not depart until thirty-four years later. Sweden's socialists did not promise revolutionary transformation but a People's Home-style democratic nationalism, centered not so much on state control of the economy through nationalizations and planning as on the expansion of welfare provision and corporatist bargaining among organized interests.

The Second World War marked a watershed in the history of socialism. Socialists had taken part in the fight against a Nazi-dominated Europe. In the war's aftermath, they remained steadfast in defense of democracy and, as such, came to be seen as potential, even essential partners in the West's face-off against Soviet-bloc communism. Electorates warmed to socialist promises of a more just and egalitarian continent, and entrenched interests found less reason to be fearful. Power beckoned. British socialists seized the opportunity. Their French and German counterparts were more reluctant to jettison the Marxist rhetoric of old but did so in the end. Socialist parties remade themselves into parties of government. The editors' introductory essay speaks of a "socialist acculturation to the modern state" (p. 6). The phrase is an apt one and has multiple meanings. The first and most obvious has to do with policy. In some instances, socialists pioneered in welfare-state construction; in others, they took a back seat to Christian Democrats. In some instances, they pushed planning, corporatism, and the mixed economy. In others, less so. But willy-nilly, socialists came to embrace the state and what it could do. By the 1960s and 1970s, they had made themselves into the staunchest defenders of Europe's new statist order, and, indeed, they were just as staunch partisans of the idea of Europe itself.

As socialists acculturated to the state, socialist parties themselves evolved. The process began with a change in socialism's electoral profile. Industrial labor remained its core constituency, but educated middle-class voters, public-sector workers, and civil servants also flocked to socialism's banner in ever increasing numbers. A socialist party was not just a class party but a *Volkspartei*. The same kind of observation may be made apropos of party membership. Party leadership had always included some middle-class types. The school-teacher turned socialist official is

almost a cliché. But school-teachers now found themselves rubbing shoulders with a proliferation of new types: experts, economists, and even senior civil servants (who were no longer quite so suspicious of socialist designs as in days gone by). All that muscle, electoral and intellectual, made it possible for socialist parties, some of them at least, to win outright majorities and to set the policy agenda without need of partners who might slow things down. The result was one-party rule, a vast expansion of the state's activities, and a deepening symbiosis between state and party. Bernd Faulenbach's contribution on West Germany in these years characterizes the SPD as a "*Staatspartei*" (p. 166). Such intimacy between party and power had its dangers, corruption and wastefulness not least among them. A solid party culture rooted in memories of Red Vienna or buoyed by the inspirational example of a Jean Jaurès might help militants to sidestep such pitfalls, but this was not the case everywhere, not in Bettino Craxi's Italy, as Marc Lazar shows, or in Andreas Papandreou's Greece, *pace* Gerassimos Moschonas.

Overall, however, these were "golden years" for socialists. The phrase is taken from Kjell Östberg's essay on Sweden (p. 212). What helped to make them so was not just that socialists had a clear agenda and the requisite electoral backing to make things happen but that the times were good. The boom decades of the postwar *trente glorieuses* were the backdrop to European socialism's years of success. But the boom did not last.

The oil shocks of the 1970s brought them to an end, ushering in a period of uneven growth. Moreover, growth, such as it was, favored new industries, not the heavy manufacturing sector of old, which in fact shrank. As Europe deindustrialized, the unionized, working-class communities that had once been European socialism's electoral bedrock shrank along with. The financialization of advanced economies, like those of Europe, didn't help matters. The global financial webs in which national economies found themselves ever more entangled imposed constraints on policy-makers' room for maneuver and were themselves a source of periodic instability. Sebastian Voigt's essay on the fate of German social democracy in the globalizing decades post-1970 sums up how these changes effected the way the state functioned. It became less and less an "engine for reform" and more and more "a crisis manager" (p. 293).

There were also political challenges to face down. A first one had to do with the New Social Movements that burst on the scene in the wake of the upheavals of 1968. The militancy of anti-nuclear activists, feminists, greens, and the like reconfigured the Left. Just as consequential was transformation on the Right. Conservatives proclaimed they had a solution to the problem of a sputtering growth: the state needed to tax less, regulate less, and let the market work its wealth-creating magic. The formula broke through first in 1979 in Thatcher's UK and then went world-wide as Reagan's America followed suit.

Socialists fought over how to respond, whether to stick with the old, statist program or to try something new. Everywhere, socialist parties made adjustments, above all tinkering with party programs to accommodate the demands of new social movement activists. In a number of states, the advocates of innovation went further, in Tony Blair's UK, for example, or Gerhard Schröder's Germany. There was a concerted effort to chart a new path forward, a Third Way between old-style statism and

Reagan-Thatcher *laissez-faire*. The welfare state needed streamlining, not jettisoning. The public sector needed shrinking, though not to the point of disappearance. Looked at one way, social democracy stayed true to itself, even as it adapted to novel circumstances. It remained, as ever, committed to democracy and, as ever, committed to social well-being, although the target of the state's welfarist largesse was changing, from the industrial working class to new social groups—immigrants, women, and *les exclus*.

Looked at another way, the Third Way gambit has been a disaster for socialist parties. Workers more worried about jobs than clean air did not always welcome green policies. The new and improved welfare state was, it seemed, more concerned about looking after the “*improductive*” than hard-working citizens (see Andersson and Östberg's essay on Sweden, p. 332). Europe's working class was contracting, and what remained of it was not as loyal to socialism as it had been in former times. Social democracy fared better with its middle-class constituencies, but there were problems on this front as well. Public sector workers and civil servants had little incentive to embrace privatization or streamlining of the state, policies that exposed them to the cold winds of the private sector labor market, if not to outright unemployment. Third Way policies were often punishing to socialism's own voters, and they began to vote with their feet, heading to the Left—to the Greens or to Die Linke—or to an emergent populist Right. Social democracy lives on in today's Europe, but it is a shadow of its former self.

Fulla and Lazar's volume has a sobering story to tell. A detail might have been added here and there. This reader wanted to know more about socialism and the agrarian question. The end of empire and European construction are themes just touched upon. But the overall picture is still clear, and it is panoramic. The contributors reflect on a focused problematic—the question of socialism's relationship to the state—, but the end result is something bigger, a grand narrative of socialism's rise and decline across a turbulent century and a half.