SOCIALISM AND THE SOCIAL MOVEMENTS
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It is not by mere chance that I, a German social democrat, am dealing with this topic. We Germans live with a historic contradiction of our own. Our history has been full, perhaps more than that of any other nation, of great social movements – even in the Federal Republic's most recent history, social movements have played a much more important role than in other Western European countries. But at the same time, and although this is something which no longer occurs in the Federal Republic, nowhere have these movements been as feared, or repressed so frequently, as in Germany.

Two souls, thus, within the German breast: one which yearns for order, peace and quiet; the other, which demands 'movement'. One is not surprised then by the fact that it was precisely Germany which produced the first great theorists of the social movement – of whom Marx was only one. A century and a half ago, in the introduction to his 'Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right', he wrote that German history is inspired by a movement – the word 'movement' certainly has a different meaning here, being a movement 'which no nation in all of history has imitated or will imitate. That is to say, that we have shared the restorations of the modern nations without sharing their revolutions. We have been restored, first of all, because other nations began a revolution and, secondly, because other nations underwent a counter-revolution; the first time, due to the fact that our leaders were afraid and, secondly, because our leaders were not afraid in the least. We, being led by our pastors, find ourselves only once to be part of a free society: on the day of its funeral.'

Although this assessment of the situation was once correct, it certainly no longer holds true for the Federal Republic. The freedom given to social movements today is not any less than that existing in other Western democracies. It has been possible for a political culture to develop and become a breeding ground for demands for participation on the part of its citizens. But wariness of social movements both inside and outside the Federal Republic has continued to be great, and the more 'German' the movement, the greater this wariness becomes. There are good reasons for this. It was not so long ago in Germany that it was possible for a social movement to be organised and imposed more effectively than in any other nation, this being a perverted movement, whose purpose was to put an end to all social movements under a millenarian Reich: National Socialism.

When reflecting upon new social movements, one must not neglect to take the old ones into consideration. In this sense, even National Socialism is relevant as historical evidence that fascist violence, wherever it has come to power, has first begun as a small social movement. This has
imposed a heavy burden on all later social movements in the form of an inherited mistrust. Critics at home and abroad of the new social movements in the Federal Republic – both rightists and leftists – have missed almost no opportunity to spread their criticism, alluding openly or cryptically to National Socialism. In the light of German history, in which we have not figured as a cradle for freedom, this mistrust is understandable. Nonetheless, Germany has not contributed less to the initiation of the new social movements – above all in the case of the West German peace movement – even though its opponents have voiced fierce criticism. The vast majority of the supporters of this movement did not wish to relinquish their responsibilities for the defence of the freedom of West Germany, but to demonstrate that all fights become absurd when the means employed lead to the inevitable destruction of all. The principle of the defence of freedom, democracy and human rights are not under debate, but rather the suitability of the means employed.

Even though I have begun with this theme in the country I know best, I will nevertheless attempt to analyse the new movements not solely from the viewpoint of the Federal Republic of Germany. The essential characteristics which the different 'new' regional or national movements in Western Europe have in common are so evident that the majority of the statements made regarding any one of these movements is more or less applicable to the others. It would be much more problematic to compare them with the social movements in Eastern Europe or in countries outside of Europe including the United States, where the traditional, cultural, political, economic or social conditions are different. Thus, I would like to leave these movements aside, even where their content or ways of taking action appear to coincide with the 'new' German movements. Neither the democratisation movement in China, nor the human rights movement in the Czechoslovak Republic can be judged in the same way as one would judge the 'new' social movements in Western Europe.

Also, I am presenting my arguments as a politician, not as a scientist. In other words, I am subjective in my judgements. I also want to avoid an ideological debate. As I am not a sociologist, I cannot be expected to provide an analysis of socialism or of the new social movements according to scientific principles. I would like to focus my statements on the political relationship between social democracy and the new movements. For these reasons, I can deal only superficially with the internal sociological structures of these movements and can hardly consider how each of them has evolved over time. From the viewpoint of my topic, I am mainly interested in the common denominator which can be found among the forms and specific contents of the new social movements.

Does any common denominator really exist? Can the new alternative movements and the new peace movements all be included under the same heading? What is it that links the new environmentalist movement to the new feminist movement? The new movements have something more in common that their outward forms. Movements based on the most diverse ideologies are comparable with one another because there are analogous attitudes of thought and protest. Naturally, each movement possesses its own individual features, especially the feminist movement, whose demands concern both specific conditions and the general principle of equality. But this movement, in all its diversity, undoubtedly, can also be included within a new type of social movement.

Following the disintegration of the student protest movement of the 1960s, social protest dispersed either into dogmatic political groups of little importance, or into spontaneous circles on the New Left, into housing communities, into alternative projects, into groups carrying out their own experimental efforts, and those providing aid to Third World countries. Another considerable part of extra-parliamentary opposition was formed from those who, with an initial reformist zeal, passed from the student movement into the traditional parties of the working class, later returning to enter institutionalised politics. But already in the early 1970s, the first initiatives of citizen participatory groups, as well as the feminist movement, were beginning to be seen. Still it was impossible to appreciate that this diffused situation would give rise to a widespread wave of protest movements, which took as their reference point for protest, not the capitalist system, but the question of social reproduction. Only when confronted with the oil crisis of 1973 were people more widely aware of the ecological problems resulting from industrial growth, the progressive destruction of natural and social living space, or the growing risks and dangers of the new, great technologies.

This new awareness regarding limits to growth, the deterioration of the environment, and restrictions of technology was the true breeding-ground for a counter-cultural protest which mobilised the social movements in a new way.

By the late 1970s, protest was everywhere – protest against industrialism, against patriarchy,
against militarism and the arms race, against the state, against technology, against progress and also against socialism. With regard to the new social movements, it seems that André Glucksman is right, at least this time, when he speaks of a negative humanism and understands this as meaning that human beings no longer define themselves on a positive image of their human essence, but on the marking of boundaries separating them from the inhuman, from catastrophe. It also seems to me that the new movements – except the feminist movement – are too limited and exclusive in their protest. They are countermovements, that is to say, movements not motivated by the fight for human rights, but by the protest against the violation of human rights; not by the fight for racial equality, but by the protest against apartheid; not by the effort to achieve a clean environment, but by the protest against the pollution of the environment. This difference is no mere sophism. I mean by this that the new movements are typical of a mature society in which freedom and well-being no longer need to be won through fighting for them; it suffices to maintain them. Speaking in favour of this interpretation is the fact that the educated new middle class are the ones heralding the new social movements.

However, a counter-cultural protest was also central to the first social movements. Weren’t these also interpreted at first as being ‘anti’ movements – anti-capitalist, anti-fascist, anti-middle-class or any other ‘anti’? So are the ‘new’ movements really so new?

The ‘social movement’ started some 150 years ago as a labour movement. That is to say, the concept was first applied to a movement which provided a socialist answer to the ‘social question’. In the twentieth century, the social movements of the 1970s and 1980s were interpreted as being new as compared to the traditional, institutionalised forms of the labour movement – the trade unions and the parties of the left. Does this also mean a break with socialist ideals and ideas of the ‘old’ labour movement? I would like to analyse this question.

Unlike the ‘new’ movements, the student protest movement of 1968 followed entirely the same ideological lines as the socialist labour movement although it had already adopted the methods used in the fight waged by other movements imported from America, with unconventional forms of civil disobedience – ranging from fantastic demonstrations, to provocative sit-ins or happenings, to the limited violations of regulations. The anti-authoritarian protest of the 1970s now also developed the autonomous, decentralised, network structure of the new social movements. Politically the student movement conceived itself as being an extra-parliamentary, rather than an anti-parliamentary, opposition. That its protest did not take institutionalised form was due above all to the fact that it did not have institutions at its disposal. It should not be misinterpreted as opposition to the institutionalisation of politics. Indeed, Rudi Dutschke proclaimed ‘the long march through the institutions’. Many of those taking part in the movement of 1968 took that road and have become, in turn, part of these institutions. Not long ago, even Daniel Cohn-Bendit became a councillor for cultural affairs in Frankfurt. Nonetheless, the political principles of the new social movements were profoundly anti-institutional and impregnated with a deep mistrust of the capacity of institutionalised politics to solve real problems. From a historical point of view, this anti-institutional position is nothing new. These ways of thinking and feeling were typical of the great anarchist or union trend within the European labour movement.

Given that by definition all social movements share the similarity that they are to some extent extra- or anti-institutional, these new movements were marked by the distance they kept from the political institutions. Of course, a new movement could break with the institutional forms of the preceding movement and still seek the same fundamental objectives. Indeed, the old labour movement, in order to regain its relevance, will have to break with the petrified forms of organisation that characterise it today. While it was a relevant movement it maintained its loyalty to its extra-institutional form, keeping its distance – no less carefully than the new movements of today – in respect to the institution of the state, and placing no less importance on its autonomy – a proletarian autonomy as opposed to middle-class politics – and did not refrain from showing its support for participation and unconventional action. These same aspirations – solidarity, choice and the unfulfilled desire for productive relations freed from domination – which inspired the old cooperatives and self-help workers’ movements, now give inspiration to the new alternative movements. If the key issues differ in some form from those posed in earlier times, it is not because the social aspirations have altered in the minds of workers, but because over the space of a century there have been considerable social changes.

Social movements are the gauges of social
change. Because, while the masses bring on social change independently, they do so through social movements. But movement also means participation. People are not objects but the subjects of history. They directly influence social change. They are not simply sounding boards for the political activity of a select minority which heads the state. This does not make social movements democratic as such, nor does it make them synonymous with the forces of progress – as was believed by the 'old' labour movement. In its irrepressible push forward the socialist labour movement overlooked the fact that it is possible to go backward just as easily. Later on, fascism would open the eyes of the movement to this truth.

No one would say that social movements are not democratic. On the contrary. Their aversion to institutionalised politics is rooted in their desire for a more direct, more radical democracy. Consequently, they are organised 'democratically into grassroots divisions'. Undoubtedly, this democratic grassroots organisation is not, in any way, as new as it is sometimes claimed to be, but this is also a part of the ideological constant of 'traditional' leftist radicalism. Take the initial struggles of the labour movement during the time of the Paris Commune: an anecdote, though possibly not completely true, tells a great deal more about the democratic grassroots nature of movements than any cut and dried scientific analysis. There is, for example, the splendid story of the simple, small-town man who falls asleep in the City Hall as a private citizen and wakes up as the Mayor. This honourable man was supposed to say a few words regarding a commonplace business matter at the City Hall in Paris on 18 March 1871, but when he arrived he found that there was no one in the building. The public officials staffing the building had fled the revolt. In his search for someone to help him, the poor devil wandered from room to room until he finally came to the Mayor's office. He must have felt quite at home there because those who had occupied the building found him asleep in the Mayor's chair. These participants in the Commune interpreted this as being a sign and they elected the bewildered man as the new Mayor without further ado. Of course, this grassroots democracy fairy tale was not long-lived as it immediately became evident that the new Mayor was not able to do his job, given that he did not know how to read or write.

I am not telling you anything that you do not already know when I point out in this way that Karl Marx considered the Paris Commune to be a model revolutionary socialist society. And all those who later attempted to re-create socialist theory, in its true spirit, or to put it into practice, have followed this radical democratic guide. Rosa Luxemburg, for example, could only imagine the socialist society as an order born out of the revolutionary, unbridled, free spontaneity of mass movements. Karl Liebknecht did not think very differently. He was the great hero and martyr acclaimed by the masses of that great twentieth-century German peace movement which began towards the end of 1914 with 1000 striking workers and – growing non-stop – reached its high-point at the beginning of 1918 with 1.5 million strikers. In 1917, in prison, Liebknecht penned phrases that are every bit as radically democratic as the grassroots democratic 'creed' of the 'new' social movements. I would like to quote only one of these phrases: 'To reach the masses, and each individual, moral and spiritual independence; scepticism of authority; initiative in decision-making, and a free, natural aptitude and ability to take action is, above all, the sole sure basis for the progress of a labour movement capable of rising to meet the challenge of its mission in history, in addition to being the essential prerequisite for eradicating the peril of bureaucracy.'

In the leftist radical criticism of the 'bureaucratic' degeneration of socialism, the anti-institutionalism of the 'new' social movements was already evident. The new movements attempt to interpret the problems differently and to demonstrate alternative means of socialisation. The left-wing socialists and the communists of the 'Councils' had tried to do the same. The 'new' movements rebelled against the levelling, anonymity and devaluation of the individual in a society shaped by technology. The anarchists had done the same before them. As the different radical leftist movements had done in the past, so now the 'new' movements sought to counter the dominant structures of daily, institutionalised ways of acting and thinking. This is nothing other than what Trotsky was considering when he made the appeal for permanent revolution.

Although this 'new' anti-institutionalism essentially follows the same direction as the old – challenging open or concealed institutional dominance – the value of its political and social position has certainly changed. That is to say that, as institutionalised ways of acting and perceiving changed, so the alternative patterns of action and the cultural focus of the new social movements also changed away from traditional models of leftist radicalism. The attempt to shed old ties and
dependent ways has revealed new constraints – for example, the standardisation and commercial marketing of lifestyles, and the lack of opportunities for self-creation as a consequence of being bound to systematic and complex organisation of marketing of lifestyles, and the lack of opportunities for self-creation as a consequence of being bound to systematic and complex organisation of a 'state security' type of social life. Modern society not only shows such trends limiting individual freedom, but it is also characterised simultaneously by a series of diametrically opposed procedures: a progressive trend towards both individualisation and pluralisation. This is shown in the structural changes in the labour world – a tendency that is reflected in the individual's desire for self-fulfilment. It is expressed in the protest against the rules and the authoritarian structures of traditional society, in the search for new social forms which give people a sense of identity, as well as in the growth of a wide variety of subcultural lifestyles.

The protest of the new social movements against a computerised, controlled society, against police states, and against 'nuclear states', denotes the new battle lines between the growing need for self-determination as human beings, on the one hand, and the pressures for systematic management, technocratic regulation and social control on the other. It is no longer the given and structured social conditions of existence, but a concern with specific areas of that existence which now forms the nucleus of the new social movements. Democratic socialism would be doomed to fail if it were not to take these concerns seriously and take them into account in its strategies. I do not believe that I need stress which trends must be supported by social democrats and which must be countered. In the struggle to broaden the possibilities for individual and social self-determination, the socialists and the new movements are natural allies. With social change, the focal crystallisation points of the new movements have shifted position. Both modern and traditional issues – be they the emancipation of women, the democratisation of society, the future of labour, or keeping the peace – come to light differently under different social conditions. New topics, not taken into account previously, are being added; above all, the ecological threat to humanity itself.

In my opinion, it would be an error to classify a movement as being new only because it provides another right answer to an old problem which is now manifesting itself in a different way. But the 'old' institutionalised socialism must express its answers in keeping with the times if it does not want to become an anachronism. Perhaps, in this sense, we should be speaking of a 'new' socialism. But what is the attitude of such a new socialism regarding the environment? The issue itself is new, given that it has been recently 'discovered'. Likewise, the environmentalist movement is a new movement – and different from the movements with a traditional ideology, such as feminism, democratisation, or the peace movement. Environmentalism is an entirely new type of movement. In regard to its ways of thinking and acting, it possesses its own specific dynamic, and attracts an equally new type of opposition directed against an irrational economic conservatism put forward, not only by the capitalist, but also by the socialist administrations. Both the capitalist desire, already analysed by Marx, to obtain maximum profits and accumulation, and the socialist desire to increase industrial growth by developing all the productive forces in order to ensure the welfare of all, have now been shown to pose a threat to human existence. For the socialist movement, the fundamental contradiction between capital and labour was the cornerstone of private accumulation. The protest of the new environment movement has been fired by the no less fundamental contradiction between the progress of the productive forces and deterioration of the environment. For socialists the issues concern distribution and ownership of the means of production; for environmentalists it is a matter of a change in consumption aimed at avoiding annihilation through excess production. From this standpoint, social power structures are regarded by the new movements not so much in class terms as in technocratic-instrumental terms. I do not conceal the fact that I consider this to be an appropriate order of priorities for a present-day society at risk. But I would also add that social democrats must not neglect the problems of social class. The demand for greater social justice is an inalienable part of socialism. For the old socialist movement, as for the new environmentalist movement, work continues to be a key concept, as work constitutes the prerequisite for all production and for all means of production. But it also produces technological and environmental risks.

In the light of the increasingly acute unemployment problem, a debate has broken out on the future of work, and in Germany and elsewhere the positions of the social democrats and the new movements have been brought closer together through this debate. In the draft of a new Social Democratic Party (SPD) statement of principles, work is defined, in the sense proposed by Hannah Arendt, as a meaningful social activity. In this sense, the concept of work has been broadened...
beyond that activity for which payment is received as such — with all the consequences for family life and economic existence. The future as envisaged by the new movement, the environmentalist movement, is based on an entirely similar concept of work. I would now willingly go on at length to expand the thesis that this new definition of the concept of work is not really new, that it has rather been taken from old socialist ideals, even from genuine Marxist ones, in which labour is no longer considered as a saleable commodity, but as a means by which people can fulfil their potential. However, within the framework of this paper, I cannot go into greater depth on this issue, to which André Gorz’s latest book makes a very interesting contribution.

In general, it cannot be denied that the new social movements have affinities, at least in part, with earlier ones. The example of the new definition of work reveals that a parallel exists between social democracy and the new movements, and the discussions between them have not been limited only to work or the labour process. The disarmament proposals of the peace movement are now on the agenda of diplomatic negotiations and the defence concept of ‘attack incapability’, which is now a point in the German social democratic programme, was originally coined by the peace movement. For some time also, the trade unions have been referring to socially and environmentally compatible technologies; to alternative production, or company self-management in the factories threatened with closure. Without the pressure exerted by the feminist movement, no participation quota would have been agreed for women in the SPD. And it would have been difficult for the socialist parties to heed environmentalist reasoning if they had not been constantly subjected to strong pressure on the part of the environmentalist and anti-nuclear movements.

The new social movements are based on new thinking of a kind which became popular in the 1970s, when the environmental crisis became dramatically apparent. The optimism of unlimited progress, which the socialist labour movement had endorsed, pointed in fact to the destruction of a livable and sustainable environment. The concept of progress was being questioned, with large sections of the political left becoming pessimistic about the prospects for civilised life itself. If progress leads to destruction, then the thought which led to the idea of progress must be erroneous. Thus, the European enlightenment, along with its rationality — the thinking from which the left had been born — was now subject to question.

Evidently, the ‘new’ thought of the ‘new’ movements contains a rather conservative, neo-romantic trait. (I am not using the word ‘conservative’ here with the negative connotations of political circles, but in the sense of preserving traditional values. I also expressly stress that I am not putting this ‘looking back’ under the same heading as ‘going back’, typical of fascist movements.) The democratic orientation, according to the old values, typical of the new movements, has nothing in common with the fascist ‘terror’ of returning to the past, any more than with the ‘democratic’ Stalinist terror. In comparison with social democracy, the new social movements suffer from the loss of their sense of utopia. They are not sustained by the general idea of a better order towards which society may progress. The ideologies of the new movements vary with the coming and going of new tendencies. What they foresee for the future is as limited as the issues motivating them, and they lack the tenacity which is nourished by a sense of utopia. Another reason for the limited inspiration of these movements ‘based on one sole issue’ is the fact that they do not address key questions which concern personal security, such as economic or social policy, or employment. Socialists, on the other hand, should not abandon the idea of progress, the belief in achieving better conditions, or what Ernst Bloch called the ‘principle of hope’. Those who conceive social utopias as a guide for political action can have no hope without believing in the possibility of progress. Contrary to what is claimed by these new movements, social democracy must take a stand with regard to universal values.

But this should not mean that socialists, moving towards the future, should not stop once in a while and take a look back. Walter Benjamin recommended something of this sort in his philosophical-historical theses. Moments spent in self-reflection are a part of progress, especially in a society at risk. Criticism from the new movements has aided socialists in understanding that it will not be possible to reach the future with a naive optimism of the ‘hurrah, progress is on its way’ type. Thus, the new movements have contributed decisively to the concept of the modernisation of society through insistence on democratic control.

An openly-flaunted anti-intellectualism is typical of the new social movements and, in comparison with the socialist movement, this is something new. A loss of a sense of utopia is associated with a loss of theory, and I see them as being related.
The student protest movement of 1968 introduced modes of action used by later movements, but within the framework of leftist socialist tradition, they strove to derive their political actions from a general base of social theory. Their expectations, based on a critical analysis of capitalism which they directed towards the working class, and those relegated to living on the fringe, in industrial society or the Third World, led them into error. Disenchantment led to theories becoming ossified into dogma, and the 1968 movement disintegrated into sects. But dogmas provide no answers for new problems. The theory of the New Left simultaneously lost its ability to interpret the experiences, the hopes and the fears of a new generation and to unite them under the banner of new utopias.

From this point of view, the break of the new social movements from the traditional labour movement was also a break which freed them from their ‘-isms’, be it Marxism, Leninism, Maoism or plain and simple socialism. This break also has its positive side. I need not explain how good it makes a social democrat feel when the adjective ‘revisionist’ is not considered to be an insult for the latest generation of leftists. The break with ‘-isms’ was to be expected, because it meant throwing ideological ballast overboard and interpreting reality more coherently. It was to be expected because socialism, especially in the East, was going from bad to worse, and its ossified dogmas were crumbling.

The ecological crisis made the weakness of socialist theory apparent. A new type of movement arose because the labour movement was not capable of solving its own crisis. New social movements spring up when serious problems cannot be solved by traditional politics. But this does not mean that socialists need be left bereft of theory. On the contrary, if the old left-wing socialist plan provides no further new results, this means that the time has come to create a new plan or programme which thrives on protest but is inspired by the utopia of a more just social order. This is the spirit which, in the past, made socialism more than simply a protest movement against capitalism. This is the spirit which today best symbolises the difference between socialist democracy and the new social movements.

At the end of the 1980s the communist systems were disintegrating due to the lack of freedom and democracy. Without a doubt, the socialist ideal could be harmed by this collapse, not least, if the fascination with capitalism were to increase. Thus, it is precisely now that the left needs a new socialist project for freedom which can oppose the bankruptcy of the planned economies of communism. This should provide a golden opportunity for the triumph of social democracy! In the midst of this general confusion, which political force will be capable of leading the left in formulating a project for the future? It is evident that social democracy should exert all its efforts to this end. To be on the left means to act.

As I have stated, the new movements sprang up as a protest against the lack of action taking place in socialist circles – not so much as a protest against socialism per se, but rather as a protest against its presumed failure. It is not only the so-called ‘real’ but in effect ‘non-socialism’ of the East which has come to a standstill. Let us not deceive ourselves by comparing it with the prophesied socialist utopias, on the basis that socialism, wherever it has come to power, has not accomplished enough. It achieved its historic role as the opposition and won its greatest victories as the opposition. This is valid for the communists – it suffices to compare its merits in the democratic struggle against the fascist dictatorships with the miserable democracy that it established in its own domain. And this is no less true of social democrats. Their great historical merit, the socialist welfare state, was achieved by the labour movement in its struggle against the aims of capital; and I am deliberately stating that it was achieved by way of a struggle because the means required for it, be they strikes or mass protests, were those of an opposition rather than of those having to do with the art of governing.

I do not mean by this that the governments of the left which have been elected throughout this century in the parliamentary democracies of Western Europe have been either bad or useless. On the contrary, they were necessary to embody in legislation the objectives of socialist movements. Socialist and social democratic governments laid out what the labour movement had prepared. In Germany, for example, having gained the historic backing of the revolution in 1918, democracy needed the establishment of social democratic governmental authority. In 1969, following the euphoria of the reforms unleashed by those representing the events of 1968, social democracy came to power again. It was only at the beginning of the 1970s that some of the reforms for which the social movement had prepared the way, socially and politically, were provided with institutional guarantees.

I am certainly not one of those who understate the merits of the West German liberal-social
coalition governments of Willy Brandt and Helmut Schmidt. Nor am I reproaching particular individuals if I state here that somewhere along the way, the liberal-social coalition lost the reformist initiative which it had originally possessed. The entire SPD allowed its projects for reforms, and the links with the social movements which had initiated them, to be overlooked while it wasted its time dealing with state institutions. Nor do I wish to be misinterpreted on this point. I know all too well that it is necessary to deal with matters of urgent importance, and that socialist governments cannot ignore these matters. But according to socialist thought, governing must entail something more than just the administration of priorities. Included in this 'something more' are the initiatives which stem from the social movements.

Concentrating its efforts on the actions taken by the state, towards the end of the 1970s the SPD was not capable of reflecting the reform policies initiated by the new social movements in government or of providing the foundations for them. The result is well known: the weakening of the reformist movement by the split of the ‘greens’. From then on, social democracy had only its state ‘leg’ to stand on, but when standing on only one leg it is very difficult to get anywhere at all. Yet for a socialist or social democratic party it should not be very difficult to reach out to social movements while being the party in power. Quite frequently, their members take an active part in the movements. For example, it was the Social Democratic Party who turned the West German peace movement into a mass movement. The forerunners of the West German environmentalist movement – led by Erhard Eppler – were social democrats. Undoubtedly, the loss of political power made it easier for the SPD to participate in the new movements. It was not merely by chance that the West German protest movement reached its high point in 1983, following shortly after the conservative party’s victory at the polls.

German social democracy will be able to carry out its tasks to the extent that it continues to be a movement itself. If it has stopped moving, it must start to move again. And it must not only be a movement in opposition. It must be able to maintain the difficult balance between state power and movement, even when it is in power. This means that as well as the administration of priority matters, it must also reflect those emancipating initiatives which stem from society, and put them into practice politically. This also means putting an end to traditional ‘statism’ in the Hegelian tradition, and instead promoting the liberation demanded by the labour movement.

The democratic nature of the future depends upon the degree to which citizens participate in the state, in the economy and in society. One of the lessons worth pointing out from what has happened in the communist world is that a state monopoly of responsibility, which incapacitates the individual, leads to a dead-end in the long term. Thus in the future the democratisation of responsibility will be of great importance, and the new social movements have played an essential role in this sense. They have broken down the monopoly of experts in the decision-making process and have turned the questions regarding future technology and its social control into the object of public political debate. Only in this way have real alternatives been posed.

Socialists must respond to such a challenge. The relationship between social democracy and the new social movements must go beyond a situation of peaceful coexistence between the two social forces on the political left: one aware of its power, the other defiant. We need a kind of symbiosis. I can only imagine socialism as being a movement. It must derive its political and spiritual drive from the plurality of other left social movements. But it also must protect itself against the constraints of ‘single-issue’ politics by formulating a wider project for society as a whole. In this way it will neither be a market trend, nor deprived of the sting of criticism, nor weakened.

The creative tension between real politics and protest, between responsibility and utopia, between the power of the state and the social movements must be sustained by the left in government. This is easier said than done. We need it to ensure that socialist governments, on the road to the future, do not end up being mere staging posts in history.