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The End of the SPD as We Knew it?

Euromissiles, Peace Activism, and the Transformation of the Political

Abstract: This article explores the transformation of political thought in the Social Democratic Party (SPD) of West Germany in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Placing this story in its sociocultural context, such as the controversies over the deployment of additional nuclear missiles in Europe, this article tracks down how party members and sympathizers renegotiated their understanding of the political. In doing so, it pays particular attention to the involvement of Social Democrats in the extra-parliamentary peace movement. It surveys the contemporary talk about the need to increase political participation of citizens, showing how Social Democrats aimed to democratize the political system of West Germany and their own party structures, as well as how this contributed to the popular anti-institutionalism of these years. The article also reveals the limits of the SPD's erosion as strong forces in the party insisted on a more traditional understanding of the political. Finally, this article suggests foregrounding the early 1980s in Social Democratic history.

Keywords: Social Democratic Party of West Germany (SPD), Euromissile question, understanding of the political, participation, anti-institutionalism, peace movement, Green party.

Introduction

In late March 1979, the nuclear meltdown in the Three Miles Island Nuclear Generating Station in Pennsylvania fueled societal anxieties of nuclear apocalypse.[1] A few months later, the NATO dual-track decision of December 12, 1979, and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan on December 27, 1979, drove East–West tensions to a peak, leading the 1970s' policies of détente into crisis.[2] Between 1979 and 1983, millions

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of people across the Western world mobilized in mass protests, articulating fears of impending nuclear war.[3] In the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), the "peace movement" against the deployment of "Euromissiles", which built on the ecological movement of the previous decade, was swelling like a wave.[4] The Green Party, officially founded in 1979, came as a decisive political materialization of new protest concerns.[5] From anti-nuclear sentiments to the emergence of non-traditional social movements, 1979 clearly set the stage for today. Connected to that, 1979 also marks the beginning of the end of the old Social Democratic world in West Germany.

In this article, I will provide reasons for the assertion that the late 1970s and early 1980s saw the erosion of the Social Democratic Party (SPD) in West Germany as it had been known since the 1950s and 1960s. What does this mean? Until the 1970s, the SPD had aligned itself closely with the principles of representative democracy in West Germany, as well as with social market economy and the "community of Western values." This process reached its climax[6] when the party adopted a new basic program in 1959[7] and gave endorsement to NATO in 1960.[8] Prior to the first oil price shock in 1973/74, the SPD was a politically and economically self-confident party, affirmatively conceiving itself as an integral part of the German post-war order. In the course of the 1970s, however, such convictions became increasingly fragile. The world of the old social democracy perished and new uncertainties emerged.[9] Noteworthy elements are the destruction of the belief in nuclear energy, the erosion of the binary Cold War order that was losing legitimacy in vast segments of Western societies, the questioning of the global economic order, which came under intense scrutiny from people gathering in "third world movements", and the examination of representative democracy by extra-parliamentary movements advocating bottom-up decision-making. I focus here on the last crisis, the renegotiation of the political order, which is an appropriate case study for analyzing the erosion of the SPD, since it served as a proxy debate for Social Democratic identity policies.[10]

The SPD's erosion came from the interplay between extra-party protest and inner-party conflicts. The tension between movement and party was already set in motion when ecological action groups assumed prominence in the 1970s, but it took on a new quality in the early 1980s as an increasing number of Social Democrats questioned the meaningfulness and functioning of political institutions. I understand social democracy not primarily in terms of a political party with fixed hierarchies and political routines, but as a social milieu stretching well beyond formal party affiliation. For my purpose, Social Democrats serve as a kind of orbiter for exploring the fluid fault line between the establishment and social activism. My object under investigation is a particularly complex one, since the fault line ran directly through social democracy itself: many young and female members of the party sympathized with the dissenters and actively engaged in the protest.

Other political parties in Western European states also had to compromise due to divergent inner-party standpoints and newly emerging social movements. However, nowhere was this process as intense and nowhere did it have such grave consequences as in West Germany. In Great Britain, to begin with, the Labour Party proved to be remarkably united in opposing the missiles.[11] This was due to long-standing traditions of anti-nuclear protests in the country and partly due to the fact that Labour had lost power to Thatcher in 1979. As there had been strong bonds between the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and Labour since the late 1950s, the controversies over the Euromissiles witnessed an almost unquestioned alliance between the movement and the party. The Dutch Partij van de Arbeid (PvdA) shared similarities with both the SPD and the Labour Party. Like the SPD, the PvdA only began its opposition in 1982, but like Labour, it had fought against the deployment since the conflict took shape.[12] The reasons lay in the political climate in the Netherlands, where the anti-nuclear consensus was so high that even members of the royal family endorsed the peace movement. Moreover, in 1979, the Dutch parliament vetoed the dual-track decision. Against the background of this political climate, and with nuclear fears settling down in many European societies, it is remarkable that France remained largely untouched by protests. There was a widespread pro-nuclear consensus in the country, and even the socialists of President François Mitterrand's party were strongly in favor of the deployment.[13] This had to do with national pride in the French nuclear program and with fears of renewed German strength. In short, the SPD's situation in the early 1980s was unique in Western Europe.

Based on original archival research, I advance the argument that the Euromissile question effectively worked as a catalyst for an inner-party renegotiation over core issues, among them, most importantly, the SPD's understanding of the political. By studying the examination of the political in the SPD, my article enters new historiographical terrain.[14] Following the so-called "Bielefeld approach," I conceive "the political" in a constructivist way "as a communicative sphere that is subject to substantial variation in space and time."[15] These variations are brought about by acts of verbal, visual, and performative communication. Operationalizing this Bielefeld approach allows us to historicize the comprehension of the political itself and to reveal this contested concept as contingent and hence reversible.

The article is arranged in three parts. First, I trace the cases of inner-party fraud in a systematic manner ("Anatomy of a Crisis"). Second, I address the party relations regarding the peace movement in greater detail ("The Blurring of Boundaries"). Third, and building on this, I examine the renegotiation of the understanding of the political in the SPD ("Rethinking the Understanding of the Political"). Finally, I synopsize the SPD's socio-cultural transformation and its limits in the 1980s.

In simplified terms, two types of Social Democrats clashed in the conflict over the Euromissiles. On one hand, the SPD figures who criticized the deployment and contributed to the peace movement were young and female. They defined their place on the left of the SPD and came from the party's lower rungs and margins. On the other hand, the majority of the Social Democrats who supported the dual-track decision were male and older than the protesters; consequently, they took positions that were more conservative. Both types of Social Democrats used different styles of communication, which fueled the inner-party conflict.

As a point of departure, for the Social Democrats, the controversies over the Euromissiles ran along a vertical opposition between the party elites and the grassroots. At least at the beginning of the debates, in 1979–81, condemnation of the deployment was driven from below by the fundamental constituents of the party. Numerous motions were passed by regional party conventions, appeals were drafted by local SPD groups, and letters were written by individual party members, all of which substantiate this claim. Examples include a letter from the local SPD chapter Vaterstetten, a small town in Bavaria, to the party headquarters in Bonn.[16] In this letter, party activists tried to push the leadership to collaborate with peace groups and, in so doing, to make sure that no missiles would be deployed in West Germany.[17] It is essential to note that by 1980, many local groups of the SPD regarded themselves as an integral part of the peace movement.[18] Thus, the distinction between "the SPD" and "the peace movement" does not work at the grassroots. This mirrored what had happened in local SPD chapters when they discussed the atomic power plants after 1975. The centers of opposition were the German states of Baden-Württemberg, Saarland, and Schleswig-Holstein, in general, and the party districts of Hesse South, Middle Rhine, and Bremen, among many others.[19] On the contrary, the leadership's course followed the logic sketched out by NATO: after the SPD's federal convention of 1979 had officially decided to support NATO's dual-track move, which offered the Warsaw Pact mutual arms reductions and threatened that, in the event of disagreement, NATO would deploy more missiles in Western Europe, party officials requested that the SPD delay its internal conflict and await the outcome of the 1983 negotiations.[20] This logic was of little significance for many people at the grassroots; here, federal party conventions seemed quite distant.[21] They dreaded a nuclear war that would result in their deaths and the devastation of Europe. This interpretation – that the deployment of nuclear missiles would increase the likelihood of nuclear death – profoundly structured their outlook on international relations and interfered with the party elite's reasoning.[22] Certainly, some of the SPD leaders also felt uneasy about the dual-track decision and the Euromissiles. The party chairperson

Willy Brandt and his close ally Egon Bahr, among others, voiced skepticism in private conversations early on.[23] With regard to their public statements, however, one needs to read between the lines to find traces of doubt.[24] In the minutes of the party's executive board, critical voices emerged only after the SPD lost power in September 1982.[25] The reasons are easily deciphered, since the party elites felt pressured to support the political course of Chancellor Helmut Schmidt, a Social Democrat who was among the most fervent supporters of NATO's policies.[26] Having established this much, analysis of the controversies of the SPD as a conflict between the party elites and the grassroots requires demonstration of the temporal change. Resistance increasingly spread from the grassroots to higher levels in the SPD, and after September 1982, it began to impact on the SPD as a whole.

Second, cases of the inner-party fraud followed a horizontal opposition between the left and the right. Many critics of deployment considered themselves part of the left-leaning political terrain in the SPD. They participated in the meetings and activities of the *Frankfurter Kreis*, an influential circle of the SPD left. However, the most fervent supporters of the dual-track decision came from the party's right wing, the *Godesberger Kreis*.[27] Membership numbers of these informal and loose networks were rather limited – roughly, the *Frankfurter Kreis* was three times larger than the *Godesberger Kreis* – but both networks had numerous informal supporters in the SPD.[28] Chancellor Helmut Schmidt and the leader of the SPD in Baden-Württemberg, Erhard Eppler, were the two Social Democrats who best embodied these factions. While Schmidt, throughout his political career, was a proponent of the SPD's right wing and, in the 1980s, a staunch supporter of the dual-track move, Eppler had a reputation as a leftist Social Democrat and, in the controversies over the Euromissiles, as Schmidt's most fervent opponent.[29] If the inner-party battle zones paralleled the left–right distinction, this had implications for the argumentative reasoning patterns they used in the discussions. On the one side, the party's supporters of the dual-track decision argued from within the logic of established security policies. For them, the Soviet Union was the ideological enemy and the Harmel strategy of both deterrence and dialogue was vital in approaching the Warsaw Pact. In their reading, nuclear weapons were indispensable for Western security.[30] On the other side, the SPD's left argued for the relaxation of enemy stereotypes and for alternative security conceptions.[31] Compared to the *Godesberger Kreis*, the *Frankfurter Kreis* was more open to collaboration with the greens. Exploring the Euromissile question in the SPD as a contested issue between left and right also helps to explain why regional chapters such as Middle Rhine and Hesse South, which traditionally stood on the left of the SPD's political spectrum, opposed the deployment.[32] With the left being much closer to distancing themselves from NATO's policies, the regional chapters of the SPD – like Western Westphalia, which leaned to the more conservative side of

the SPD party spectrum – were more supportive of the dual-track decision.[33] However, this explanation only works for the early phase of the debates. As the broader resistance against NATO's plans grew among Social Democrats, the party's right wing quickly became agitated by the anti-nuclear sentiment. This probably explains why in 1983 even such well-known figures as party executive manager Peter Glotz or the prime minister of North Rhine Westphalia Johannes Rau, who were exponents of the *Godesberger Kreis*, advocated for the strategic coalition between social democracy and the peace groups.[34]

A third division within social democracy ran along generational lines. At the beginning of the controversies, it was the party's youth who voiced criticism of the deployment. In a paper published in the leftist newspaper *Frankfurter Rundschau*, by 1978, young socialists were calling on the party leadership to renounce any deployment of new weapons in Germany.[35] They linked the financial means necessary for the production of those weapons to the allegedly underfunded welfare state and to development aid. This was a common pattern used by Social Democratic critics of the dual-track decision.[36] The fact that the party's youth demonized the Euromissiles at the very moment that the public debate took shape comes as no surprise, since the SPD membership had transformed in the course of the student protest movement of 1968. In particular, younger people had begun to flood the party in the early 1970s when Willy Brandt was chancellor.[37] As a relatively young and charismatic politician who advocated political reform and societal liberalization, he attracted thousands of students, pupils, and apprentices. These new members brought with them the student movement's intellectual background. Dietmar Süss describes how they set in motion a profound transformation of the tradition-rich party and its socialization practices.[38] By the late 1970s and early 1980s, however, they had lost their radicalism. Similarly, their membership numbers decreased from 103,000 in 1976 to 52,000 in 1982.[39] Compared to the overall number of SPD party members in 1982, this meant that in 1982 the young socialists comprised one quarter of all SPD members, but this quarter was still eager to disagree with the party elite.[40]

Fourth, the inner-party fraud displayed a gender clash since women in the SPD, in comparison with their male fellow party members, were much more likely to oppose the deployment. Comparable to young socialists, the association for women in the SPD took a critical stance against nuclear weapons remarkably early in the evolution of the conflict. In 1979, they condemned the deployment of the Euromissiles by aligning themselves with minorities in the global south and by pointing to their own discrimination in society.[41] They held that it was because of their own exclusion from full political and social participation throughout the centuries that they were capable of realizing the necessity of disarmament.[42] Women in the SPD – approximately 23 percent of the party membership were female in 1980 – used femi-

nist frames of reference to counter the missile deployment.[43] For them, war was the outcome of male aggression, overestimation, and hubris. They imagined women as peaceful, reconciliatory, and understanding.[44] Arguing against the missile deployment, therefore, meant further advancing the feminist cause.[45] While women in the SPD had mostly fought for emancipation in areas assigned to them by men, such as female professions or abortion policies, they now turned to a traditionally masculine-coded issue.[46] International relations along with security policies, they argued, were no longer to be organized according to the traditional schemes of victory and defeat or strength and weakness.[47] They advocated for the abandonment of enemy stereotypes and the implementation of peace education in schools in order to facilitate harmony between people.[48]

Fifth, the conflict over the Euromissiles was driven by the fact that Social Democrats favored different communicational styles. This was the result of the sociocultural transformation through new (young and female) members. Anti-nuclear protesters shared with other peace activists a discursive repertoire based on plain speaking, authenticity, individualization, and, most importantly, emotionalization, which departed significantly from the more conventional style that supporters of the dual-track logic preferred.[49] Not only were fears of nuclear war a common language inside and outside the SPD, they also summed up the collective doomsday mood that became the signum of the age.[50] Eckart Conze rightly argues that this apocalyptic sentiment was part of a widespread criticism of modernity and technological progress that came over Western societies in the 1970s and 1980s.[51] Nuclear fears, however, were older than this. In 1955, philosopher Bertrand Russell issued a manifesto highlighting the dangers posed by nuclear weapons, and in West Germany, prominent scientists, among them Otto Hahn and Werner Heisenberg, denounced the government's plans to equip the Bundeswehr with nuclear weapons in 1957.[52] Such anti-nuclear fears led to the "Struggle Against Atomic Death" movement that, supported by Social Democrats and trade unionists, politicized Western Germany in the late 1950s.[53] These anxieties were refreshed in the 1970s when ecological movements began to raise doubts about the safety of atomic power plants.[54] They reached their climax when NATO decided to deploy a new generation of nuclear missiles in Europe. Consequently, collective worries haunted peace activists within and beyond the SPD and led them to develop on a very specific style of communication. While Chancellor Schmidt described himself as a rational and pragmatic statesman capable of bringing the superpowers back to the negotiation table, the peace activists in the SPD denied that these policies were sane.[55] They outplayed the self-stylization of Schmidt, thus replacing rationalization with emotionalization and authenticity. To cite one paradigmatic source, a female Social Democratic activist wrote in a letter to the party headquarters:

> Have you ever bent over the bed of a sleeping child? Have you ever felt those two little arms that tenderly twine around your neck? Don't you have any memories of your mom's or dad's tenderness? Have you ever been in love with another person and were trembling for his or her life? Think of any of those persons and re-start the process of being human again. Cease your warmongering security and defense projects, and join those who, like me, want to live without being afraid all the time.[56]

People supporting the extra-parliamentary movement judged the policies regarding balance and equilibrium as divorced from reality. They built on theories presented by psychoanalyst Horst-Eberhard Richter, who argued that emphatically confessing fears was the precondition to getting rid of them.[57] With the help of psychoanalytic techniques, peace activists expected that being alarmed was a survival tactic in the advanced nuclear age.[58] Emotionalization and authenticity appeared to them to be both an act of individual liberation and a modus of insight that would help transcend established security policies and finally overcome the Cold War's binary order.[59] However, the adversaries of the policies of balance and nuclear deterrence not only expressed their anxieties and fears over nuclear death, but also advanced a number of ideas on how to make deployment dispensable. These ideas ranged from highly detailed proposals for the superpower negotiations in Geneva, such as the reduction of force levels, missile flight ranges, or nuclear warheads, to broader conceptions intended to replace the existing military strategies. For instance, the "civilian (or social) defense" approach, developed by German philosopher Theodor Ebert, suggested non-violent actions like resistance and disobedience as means of defense.[60] More importantly for Social Democrats, the "non-offensive offensive" approach, put forward by former FRG minister Andreas von Bülow, proposed redesigning the Bundeswehr so that it would appear incapable of mounting assaults.[61]

Assuming that the inner-party controversies ran along four dividing but intersecting lines (gender and age, horizontal and vertical opposition) and utilized a particular stylistic repertoire, it is necessary to stress that this systematization of the inner-party fault line underemphasizes temporal change, since the number of opponents constantly increased. In the end, the anti-nuclear sentiment was the common position in the SPD, and social democracy had turned upside-down. It is, therefore, crucial to explore in depth the blurring of the line between party and society by looking more closely, and from a chronological perspective, at the inner-party rebels' triumphant march.

The Blurring of Boundaries

Between 1979 and 1983, the line between the establishment and extra-party activism became increasingly unstable. This was the prerequisite for the renegotiation of the SPD's understanding of the political. It was at the end of 1980, around the first anniversary of NATO's dual-track decision, that some left-leaning Social Democrats started to doubt whether negotiations regarding the missiles would lead to a meaningful conclusion.[62] The international context of these anxieties was the deterioration of the relationship between the superpowers.[63] In fact, the phase of détente seemed to have come to a standstill in the last years of the Carter administration. With the ascent to power of President Ronald Reagan, who moved into the White House in January 1981, the superpower relationship deteriorated further.[64] Reagan claimed that the United States must be strong both politically and militarily. He allowed himself to be guided by a vivid concept of the enemy image in the form of the Soviet Union and harshly condemned Soviet policies. In March 1983, he even spoke of the Soviet Union as the evil empire. These developments on the international stage were the fruitful soil upon which Social Democrats raised alarm about the chances of an outcome to negotiations.

Among the first SPD chapters to officially question the logic of the dual-track decision was Baden-Württemberg under the leadership of Erhard Eppler in May 1981.[65] For the party elites in Bonn, the dissension of one of the largest party chapters concerning the NATO decision was a bad sign.[66] Schmidt began to recognize that he was losing the backing of his party.[67] Things further deteriorated as a vast number of Social Democrats participated in the German Protestant *Kirchentag* in Hamburg in June 1981.[68] By linking their Christian faith to the purpose of international reconciliation, they displayed fundamental disagreement with the policies of Schmidt and the government.[69] Again, a few months later, on October 10, 1981, thousands of Social Democrats rallied together with other peace activists on the Hofgartenwiese in Bonn.[70] Eppler, who in the meantime was regarded a leading figure of the peace movement, gave a widely received speech to the protesters.[71] The rally of October 10, 1981, made visible to the public just how estranged Social Democrats had become since 1979.[72] Not only did the party leadership encompass such adversarial politicians as Schmidt and Eppler, with Brandt standing somewhere in the middle, but the Social Democratic spectrum was torn apart by the involvement of many local and regional SPD organizations in the movement.

In the early 1980s, the boundaries between social democracy and civil society became increasingly fluid. Most obviously, a significant number of SPD members and sympathizers participated in the activities of peace groups on the local and regi-

onal level or sought collaboration with the Greens. They hosted house meetings with non-SPD peace activists from the churches or the communists to discuss the prospects of disarmament. They set up information tables and talked to pedestrians on the streets or conducted door-to-door canvassing; they gathered signatures for petitions, drafted letters or appeals, and mobilized letter-writing and phone-calling to the government or the American and Soviet embassies. They helped organize large demonstrations and peace rallies and spread flyers, and they put up posters and sewed banners. There are numerous primary sources demonstrating this development. The activities of Social Democrats in the South German city of Stuttgart, for instance, are well documented.[73] Among other things, these sources show that Social Democrats provided other peace activists with the necessary expertise to organize mass events.[74] Political activism was at the core of what Social Democrats were practicing during their leisure time, but it was not something one would expect the general public to know. This is why practical skills and knowledge migrated from the party to the extra-parliamentary peace groups in the early 1980s.[75] Skills and knowledge moved in the opposite direction, too, since many Social Democratic chapters at the grassroots were eager to rebuild and modernize their repertoire of actions.[76] This is important because the peace movement, in comparison with the traditional non-verbal communication style of SPD members, broke fresh ground. For instance, activists performed "die-ins" or "human carpets" to increase awareness of the deadly consequences of nuclear escalation.[77] These various ways of demonstrating dissent, which were formerly unbeknown to the SPD, infiltrated the Social Democratic repertoire in the 1980s, thus paving the way for closer cooperation with political forces outside the party.[78]

In the summer of 1981, even Peter Glotz, the party executive manager, started to build bridges between the SPD headquarters and the movement's coordination committee in Bonn.[79] For this purpose, he hired Wolfgang Biermann, one of the leading peace activists in West Berlin, as a new consultant for peace and disarmament and as a contact person for the coordination committee.[80] Biermann had achieved some prominence during 1980–81 when he criticized the SPD for accepting the dual-track decision in 1979.[81] In particular, he successfully collected signatures for a petition against deployment.[82] After Biermann had moved into his office in the summer of 1981, he tirelessly drafted memos for the party leader Brandt and for executive board members, advancing the rapprochement of the party and the movement.[83] Updating the SPD leadership about discussions in the coordination committee of the peace movement, Biermann created the impression that peace activists were avidly seeking cooperation with social democracy.[84] Yet this was, unsurprisingly, a selective take on reality, because only those activists who were interested in cooperation aligned themselves with the Social Democratic spectrum. In fact,

the coordination committee comprised very different political groups, among them Church-related, Green, and communist factions.[85] At the very least, the Greens viewed greater Social Democratic involvement in the peace movement very suspiciously.[86] This did not stop Biermann from advocating for continued change in the SPD toward the positions of the peace movement.

Affiliating with peace forces in West Germany was only possible after the party's loss of power in September 1982. With Schmidt gone as chancellor, the most fervent supporter of the dual-track decision in the SPD had left the political stage. The door was now open for the Social Democrats to officially join the peace movement. In November of 1982, a federal SPD party conference in Kiel passed a motion urging the superpowers to negotiate seriously, stating that deployment would be unacceptable for the SPD.[87] In June 1983, only a few months after the SPD's dramatic defeat in the federal elections of March 1983 by Helmut Kohl (a Christian Democrat), and the Greens' entry into the Bundestag, the party leadership finally recommended that all members should take part in the activities of the peace movement.[88] This was the sign that even the SPD elites regarded the peace forces as associates. If the years 1981 and 1983 both witnessed huge demonstrations with the participation of SPD members at the Hofgartenwiese in Bonn, they differed in that the rally in 1983 obtained the official stamp of approval from the party headquarters.[89] After Eppler's performance in 1981 had been highly contested in the SPD leadership, none other than the party chairperson Willy Brandt spoke to the protesters in 1983.[90] Only a few weeks later, the SPD's federal party convention in Cologne passed a motion asking for the extension of the negotiation deadline and proposed a "freeze" of the arms race.[91] The Hofgarten rallies of 1981 and 1983, along with the Cologne convention of November 1983, symbolize the metamorphosis of social democracy in the early 1980s.

Rethinking the Understanding of the Political

How can we explain this transformation? Most obviously, social change affected SPD members. As new social movements drew people into politics and politicized everyday life in West Germany in the 1970s and 1980s, with millions of people joining peaceful street demonstrations, the Social Democratic world was turned upside down. Social change also affected members of other parties in the FRG – such as the Christian Democrats and the Free Liberals – but since they were not that divided, they did not start questioning the principles of political deliberation.[92] Social Democrats, on the contrary, affiliated with the peace movement, and they also examined the very foundations of their own political identity. From the perspective of the opponents of deployment, this process led to a renegotiation of the conception of the

political in three distinct but interwoven steps. Even if my emphasis in what follows is on those actively engaged in the renegotiation, it is crucial to keep in mind that there were many other Social Democrats, usually among the party elites, who insisted on a more traditional understanding of the political. It is also noteworthy that the remodeling of the concept of the political did not necessarily come with tangible political results in lawmaking.

First, Social Democratic opponents of the missile deployment sought to reassert democratic authority against the political elites. By referring to elites, they meant both the SPD leadership and more generally the political class of the FRG. In particular, they blamed the Bundestag for enforcing NATO's deployment plans against the will of the majority.[93] In a coalition with other peace activists and members of the Green Party, they held that the Bundestag had no right to decide against millions of people protesting in the streets.[94] This became obvious as the SPD members of parliament, like Herta Däubler-Gmelin, helped organize the so-called "parliament of the majority" that took place on 20 November 1983, the eve of the Bundestag discussion regarding the missile deployment.[95] After hour-long deliberations, the "parliament of the majority" issued a statement saying that the Bundestag was not entitled to endorse deployment.[96] Despite the resistance of right-wing Social Democrats around Schmidt and the former Minister of Defense Hans Apel, peace activists hurled defiance at the government and denied them the right to decide on matters of life and death.[97]

Arguing that there was a gap between the representative majority in the Bundestag and the majority of the populace, Social Democrats affiliated with the peace movement insisted that the government and parliament, instead of supporting deployment, grant further participation privileges to voters.[98] In a very broad sense, participation was understood as the engagement of citizens working together to address an issue of concern. This also included opening the basic law to participatory decision-making, or, in a first step, allowing people to make their anti-missile voices heard at the ballot box. Together with the coordination committee of the peace movement, they demanded that there be a "consultative referendum" about the missile deployment in West Germany.[99] In so doing, they became guided by an emphatic understanding of the political. Gerhard Schröder, at the time a leading young socialist, and from 1998 to 2005 federal chancellor, described street protests as essential for democracy because they were capable of shedding light on undesirable developments.[100] According to Schröder, new forms of political deliberation with the inclusion of a greater number of citizens were necessary to close the gap between legality and legitimacy. Even Horst Ehmke, the more conservative deputy chair of the SPD Bundestag group, admitted that there was a growing tension between the parliamentary and plebiscitary majorities.[101] Uwe Lambinus from the party's left

wing in Bavaria claimed that the SPD should fight for the decentralization of the German political system, giving more power to the grassroots.[102] Social Democrats who shared no similarities with the new social movements strongly opposed those plans. The vice president of the Bundestag, Annemarie Renger, for instance, issued a warning to her fellow SPD members to remember that plebiscitary democracy paved the way for the rise of the Nazis.[103]

Incorporating more participatory elements in the constitution appeared vital to many observers at the time. On one hand, as Silke Mende shows, there was a vibrant political debate among the Greens and their supporters, who built their program at least partly on the demand for democractization of the political decision-making process.[104] Participation was the catchword with which both activists and theorists of the peace movement translated the anti-deployment goal into a broader political assertion.[105] These theorists, on the other hand, were not necessarily SPD members, but they often sympathized with the party. Even if they adhered to other political movements such as the Greens, this showcases that the SPD's renegotiation of the understanding of the political was not limited to the ranks of the Social Democrats. Most noteworthy in this regard is the political thought of sociologist Bernd Guggenberger. Together with other scholars, among them Claus Offe, he published widely on the limits of majoritarian democracy and the crisis of representative democracy.[106] In a chapter of a book in 1984, they argued that the majority principle was the necessary but insufficient precondition of democracy.[107] They declared that should the government no longer be able to guarantee the survival of its citizens, they would no longer be obliged to uphold their loyalty towards the state. Physicist and philosopher Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker, who cooperated with the SPD in the late 1970s and early 1980s, had already diagnosed a failure of democracy in 1976.[108] However, in the first half of the 1980s, this renegotiation of the FRG's political fundaments reached its culmination. Wolfgang Huber, a well-known theologist and Social Democrat, wrote about the limits of state action and the duty to resistance.[109] Jürgen Habermas, one of Germany's most notable philosophers, justified civil disobedience.[110] Such ideas found their way into social democracy, where they reverberated around the SPD membership.[111]

Participation, a key concept for Social Democrats, went all the way back to Willy Brandt and his well-known call "to dare more democracy."[112] In 1969, Brandt not only set the tone for his own coalition government with the Free Liberals but also boiled the zeitgeist of the late 1960s down to an essence. Daring more democracy, nonetheless, was an old demand of the labor movement which stemmed from its origins in the nineteenth century. Back then, Social Democrats advocated for liberal social reforms such as workers' and womens' participation.[113] In most SPD party programs, notions of democratization, participation, and liberalization played major

parts as political guiding principles. The Godesberg program of 1959, for instance, essentially centered around democratization in the economic, social, and political sector.[114] In the Euromissile crisis, these ideas regained shape in the demand to restore the true sense of democracy by allowing more people the opportunity to participate in the political process. It is not hard to see why the demand for participation turned up again in the course of the Euromissile debate. As these years witnessed existential fears of nuclear annihilation through bad decisions by elected representatives, it was only consistent for the grassroots to claim power over the political process. This is why "participation" emerged as the keyword in many primary sources of the time. It was used by Social Democrats opposing the deployment of Euromissiles both as the catchy description for a whole semantic field and as the denotation of a tangible political goal.

Second, many Social Democrats who opposed the deployment contributed to the popular anti-institutionalism of the 1980s. In doing so, they often delegitimized the complex workings of mediating institutions. Not everyone in the SPD went as far as Alfred Emmerlich, a member of parliament, who claimed that "political parties, lobby groups, government and the media" "monopolize" politics.[115] For a healthy society, it was crucial, he said, that citizens contribute to the political process in "local initiatives and new social movements." Politics from the bottom up was essential to keep democracy alive, Social Democrats argued. In 1984, Jürgen Schmude, the former SPD Minister of the Interior, acknowledged the peace movement's political vitality and wished that the Bundestag could learn from it.[116] Such imaginaries – especially drawing analogies between lively political activism at the grassroots and a barely movable political system at the top – were mixed with profound criticism of democratic institutions. This connected the Social Democratic discourse with the peace movement and the Green Party, and it disconnected the anti-nuclear faction in the SPD from more conservative segments of the party, such as the trade unionists, the *Godesberger Kreis*, and some regional grassroots chapters like Western Westphalia. As early as 1981, Erhard Eppler had suspected that the Bundestag was incapable of discussing what actually troubled people.[117] He insinuated that those who were afraid of opening the political system to more participatory elements should not refer to the Weimar Republic, but should trust in the maturity of German democracy. For Eppler, the political grassroots were of greater importance. Movements from the bottom up should drive the government to execute the will of the majority, he wrote. Hermann Scheer, a leftist exponent, defined public campaigns as corrective of a defective parliamentary system.[118] Horst Peter, an SPD member of parliament, even labeled the system of representative democracy the opposite of true democracy.[119] By advocating referenda and plebiscites, SPD figures like Peter, Scheer, and Eppler aimed to democratize and pluralize politics. This anti-

institutionalist conception of the political also had implications for the understanding of social democracy as a political party.

It followed from this logic, which constitutes the third point, that the boundaries between the party and society had to be destabilized. This even caused an epistemological crisis of the concept of "political party" in the SPD.[120] Questioning static forms of political organization has to be put into perspective in relation to the contemporary crisis of mass organizations.[121] For numerous Social Democrats at the grassroots who were engaging in extra-parliamentary protests and had not yet left the SPD for the Greens, the idea of a political party as a model of political activism seemed increasingly outdated.[122] Opponents of the missile deployment lamented over the SPD's cumbersome structures. They saw it as a disadvantage of their party that it was so difficult to bring about political change.[123] Instead, they preferred fluid forms of political action. Primary sources from these years demonstrate that many Social Democrats questioned the very functioning of their political party: they criticized the programmatic objectives and the party life of the SPD;[124] they saw the Social Democratic organization as stuck, hardly in motion, estranged, perhaps even boring;[125] and thus they proposed that the SPD be open to more nonbinding forms of political engagement.[126] People wanted to get involved in single-issue movements, Bundestag member Karsten Voigt, believed; they did not want to commit themselves to long-term membership of a political party.[127]

Of course, the Schmidt faction fundamentally disagreed with such a perspective.[128] However, even high-ranking SPD officials like Peter Glotz admitted that the party organization was somewhat fusty and dysfunctional in the face of recent societal developments. In 1982, the SPD executive manager published a book in which he compared the SPD to a lumbering tanker.[129] He conceded frankly that the SPD was torn apart between "the state and new social movements."[130] On the one hand, according to him, the SPD had traditionally aligned itself with the state and understood itself as some sort of "state party."[131] On the other hand, however, Social Democrats felt their own party's unattractiveness in the face of the new social movements. Acknowledging this dichotomy, Glotz found no other possible way out but to ask the people in extra-parliamentary movements to be patient with the SPD.[132] His reasoning was deeply unsatisfactory: clearly, he shed light on the core of the SPD's problem, but he was unable to present a solution that was acceptable to both the party establishment and the extra-party pressure groups.[133] He tried to provide the protesters with a somewhat unclear offer of integration and, at the same time, denied that their political ideas were viable. This move was an attempt to pacify the estranged SPD party, and it helped to close the ranks. However, many of the people who protested in the streets saw the Greens as the political alternative to the SPD.[134] This was the dilemma of social democracy in those years: the large majority of its constituents

remained skeptical when it came to inner-party change, and the impetus for renewal in the SPD was very limited.

It came as no surprise that the renewed emphasis on participation in the SPD did not materialize in legislative efforts such as the attempt to amend the German basic law. Reflecting on the need to better include citizens in the decision-making process was part of the Social Democratic answer to the questions of extra-parliamentary activism. Shortly after 1983, as the missile deployment had begun and the peace movement was dwindling, the demands for participation disappeared from SPD newspaper op-eds and party convention speeches. The draft for a new SPD basic program from 1986, however, again reinforced these demands.[135] When the SPD finally passed its new basic program in 1989, they asserted that politics "was not limited to the institutions of the state."[136] Departing from a Hegelian understanding of the state, the program argued that the state was not mind objectified but rested on the consent of the governed. This thought stood in the tradition of the Anglo-American history of political thought, according to which the political order should serve society's needs. Political parties, Social Democrats held in 1989, were the mediators between society and the state, since they were supposed to translate the social movement's demands into legislation. Proposing more forms of direct involvement of citizens, such as a more effective system of petitions, the program even spoke of "democracy as a way of life."[137] Although these ideas mainly reflected what was already common sense in the FRG's political debate, they still bore witness to the fact that the SPD had been changing in the years around and after 1983 – as had society as a whole.

Conclusion

While German Social Democrats after 1979 struggled over their positioning towards the deployment of the Euromissiles, they did not only discuss security policy issues or international relations. Their conflict was the starting point of a profound renegotiation of the party's identity. The emergence and rise of the peace movement, together with the entry of the greens in the Bundestag, were the driving forces in this process, which resulted in a pluralization of voices in the SPD. Extra-party and, to some extent, anti-party protests challenged social democracy and led some party factions to reformulate their mental maps. In so doing, they sought to connect with discourses in the peace movement. Participation is the keyword in many contemporary sources. Social Democrats who opposed the missile deployment aimed to democratize both the representative political system of the FRG and their own party structures. Some leftist party speakers even contributed to the popular anti-instituti-

onalism of the 1980s. They denied that the Bundestag was the legitimate and appropriate institution in which to discuss and decide about the Euromissiles. They preferred bottom-up decision-making and action at the local level. Not surprisingly, this generated an epistemological crisis of the concept of the "political party" within the SPD. When Social Democrats complained about traditional SPD structures, they often considered extra-party movements more natural and spontaneous than their own party. Consequently, they encouraged political conversation in the SPD. They also transformed the self-understanding of the party itself.

Synopsizing this transformation, however, entails assessing the limits of change. It is obvious here that strong forces within the SPD insisted on the traditional understanding of the political, with representative democracy and vertical party hierarchies as core elements. Consequently, the outcome of the renegotiation of the political was ambivalent. Social Democrats who aligned themselves with the peace movement often advocated revolution within the SPD, but the party leadership and numerous SPD members from the trade unions and other more conservative terrains delayed change. The result, in the end, was a fractured SPD, lumping together disparate political projects. This process surfaces as the sign of a long-term sociocultural and political erosion of social democracy in West Germany in the last third of the twentieth century. While it is clearly an exaggeration to interpret the early 1980s as the time when the SPD as we knew it from the 1950s and 1960s came to an end, it makes sense to conceive of these years as the time when social democracy plunged into a profound crisis. The SPD, once a powerful movement, was losing its integrational strength. Its formerly homogenous milieu splintered, with the Greens emerging as a new political rival. The pluralization of the party scene in the FRG is perhaps the manifest example of this conversion. But even the notion of a "political party" with its organizational and intellectual constraints seemed anachronistic to a growing number of party members.

Synopsizing this transformation also entails answering the question whether the reformulation of the understanding of the political in the SPD really was as profound as this article claims. It is useful to put the claim into perspective with other turning points in Social Democratic history after 1945 and beyond: most importantly, 1959/60, when the SPD, by passing the Godesberg program, departed from conceiving itself as a class party and started to understand itself as a legitimate actor in the political system of the FRG (followed by 1960, when they accepted the country's integration into NATO as a defense community with shared values); or the time around 1969 with its euphoria for daring to increase democracy. If the years 1979–83 may not seem that prominent when compared to 1959/60 and 1969, this is probably because the renegotiation of the political did not come with substantial amendments in legislation. Nevertheless, concentrating on political decisi-

ons can lead to disregarding the actors' intellectual setting. Through this analysis of these transforming perceptions and representations of the political, it becomes clear that the time between 1979 and 1983 was indeed a decisive phase of metamorphosis for German social democracy. Therefore, I suggest foregrounding the early 1980s in Social Democratic history. My argument, in a nutshell, is that changing attitudes towards the political process and the institutional system implicitly affected the ways Social Democrats weighed in on other political issues. These changes were subtle and indeed hard to measure. But if that is true, it may be adequate to speak of a triad of points of consolidation in which the Social Democratic understanding of the political changed or in which change became manifest: 1959/60–1969–1979/83. Historical accounts of the Social Democratic history should place more emphasis on the transformation of the 1980s.

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