



AURÉLIE DIANARA ANDRY

Social Europe, the Road not Taken.
The Left and European Integration in the Long 1970s
(Oxford Studies in Modern European History)

Oxford University Press | Oxford 2022
336 Seiten, Hardback | £ 81.00
ISBN 978-0-19-286709-4

reviewed by

BENJAMIN THOMAS, University of Nottingham

Criticism of the neoliberal character of the European Union and its institutions has been a common refrain on the political left, and has increased in intensity since the 2008 financial crisis. By portraying the Community as designed for the interests of business and capital, workers and social protection are identified as the great losers in a race to the bottom. By contrast, supporters of the European project emphasise that European social legislation is an incomplete but nonetheless progressive project, and that supranational institutions are the best possible bulwark against the power of multinational capital. Aurélie Dianara Andry's book »Social Europe, the Road not Taken« situates this debate in a historical context by revisiting debates from the long 1970s to examine mobilisations and thinking at the time around an alternative vision of a social Europe centred on workers, economic and industrial democracy, and the upwards harmonisation of social policies. These debates make the reforms of the 1980s, Jacques Delors' much fêted »Social Europe«, look like a weak and incomplete project, lacking the radicalism of earlier visions and conceding to the neoliberalisation of the European institutions.

Andry outlines a constellation of actors and projects building this vision, from Stuart Holland's »Alternative Economic Strategy« in the United Kingdom and »Beyond Capitalist Planning« to the Bonn »Theses for a Social Europe«. In doing so, the author challenges the depiction of the 1970s as a dark age of intellectual barrenness among the left or of complacency against neoliberalism, as well as stereotypical portrayals of Britain and West Germany as undifferentiated blockers to the development of a progressive Europe. Here a worker's Europe, typified by a policy of worker control in companies, a reduction in weekly working hours and the orientation of further integration away from reliance on a productivism paradigm, presents itself as an alternative both to the European post-war order and to the neoliberal market hegemony, that was still emerging at the time. It also represents a very different vision from those associated with Eurocommunism.

Arguing against portrayals of the 1970s as barren for the left/centre-left, we can read »Social Europe« as in keeping with a wave of excellent recent scholarship on transnational left organising,

on conceptions of social policy in Europe, and on the alternatives articulated to neoliberalism.¹ The real strength of this book, however, lies in its synthesis, bringing together its archival sources with a wide range of multilingual literature and thus demonstrating the scope of this alternative vision and its by no means marginal character. Moving between different layers - national, supranational and international - as well as different arenas of politics - trade unions, intellectuals, parties, policy committees and high political discussions - Andry demonstrates an impressive command of these interrelated discourses and the dynamics of the underlying power structures. Marshalling these levels and structures makes the claim of a distinctive vision for Europe centred on the worker compelling as it is traced from the grassroots to elite policy debates.

The second line of argument in the book deals with the long 1970s as a transition point in power structures within Europe. With the neoliberal right still emerging, the left sees a period of resurgence before it collapses. A key factor, according to the book, is organised labour, with trade unions actively seeking to influence policy developments. As Andry explains, the 1970s represent a period in which both the political left/centre-left and trade unions grapple with the limitations of national organising in the face of economic rationales, the forces of globalisation, and organised business and begin more active forms of transnational and supranational organising and collaboration. Andry details the formation of new parties, their conferences and organisations, as well as the power struggles between and within new trade union institutions. As such, the worker's Europe was not just a policy proposal, but a social movement driving forward new forms of organisation and engagement, and thus a genuine form of European integration.

Lingering in the background as Andry presents these developments is the ultimate failure of the project to be adopted or implemented at European level. As the title states, this road was *not* taken. Andry explains the failure of proposals for a worker's Europe as multi-faceted and stemming from the failings of political elites, the inability for the European left to organise collectively as well as internal disagreements. While there was strong support for the language and the general idea of a worker-centred social Europe, the specifics of this framework - worker self-management or co-management, management or planning - split the political coalitions. This multiplicity of causes may indicate that failure was overdetermined. It could be argued that the internal fissures within the coalition campaigning for a worker's Europe suggest that the internal coherence of the project and its viability as an alternative path were never as strong as its proponents thought. In terms of revising the image of Jacques Delors, this could represent the difference between seeing him as a villain betraying earlier commitments to radical change, or a bit player constrained by larger structural and political pressures. Nonetheless, this kind of strategic analysis is useful to understand the variety of challenges facing such a progressive vision in the 1970s, and, as the author suggests, also for analysis of our contemporary moment, with weaker organised labour and with institutional structures concretised through path dependencies.

To be clear: any doubts about the viability of a worker's Europe do not undermine the general thrust of »Social Europe, the Road not Taken«. The core argument, presenting the existence of an alternative vision among the Left in the 1970s of a socially oriented European community prioritising workers and democracy, is clearly demonstrated. The second argument, the formation of a supranational left, is likewise clearly made, irrespective of the question of its coherence in this period. Andry's book presents historical precursors to the lively contemporary political debates about the viability of Europe as a progressive project, industrial democracy, working time, degrowth and more. Simultaneously, it highlights the structural, ideational and political obstacles that actors face when attempting to put these ideas and visions into practice.

¹ Cf. *Christian Salm*, *Transnational Socialist Networks in the 1970s*. European Community Development Aid and Southern Enlargement, Basingstoke 2016; *Michele Di Donato/ Mathieu Fulla* (Eds.), *Leftist Internationalisms. A Transnational Political History*, London 2023; *Kiran Klaus Patel*, *Bridging the Void. Social Justice in the History of the European Union*, in: *Martin Conway/Camilo Erlichman* (Eds.), *Social Justice in Twentieth Century Europe*, Cambridge 2024; *Colm Murphy*, *Futures of Socialism. »Modernisation«, the Labour Party, and the British Left, 1973–1997*, Cambridge 2023.

Zitierempfehlung

Benjamin Thomas, Rezension zu: Aurélie Dianara Andry, *Social Europe, the Road not Taken. The Left and European Integration in the Long 1970s*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2022, in: *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* (online) 64, 2024, URL: <<https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/afs/82014.pdf>> [13.8.2024].