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The Semantics of »Democracy« in Social Democratic Parties Netherlands, Germany and Sweden, 1917–1939

Social Democrats have always hotly debated both the value and the true meaning of democracy. The party that is the focus of this article, the Dutch »Sociaal-Democratische Arbeiderspartij« (SDAP), consciously adopted this principle at the end of the nineteenth century by using it as a label. The same goes for its international role models, like the German »Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands« (SPD) and the Swedish »Sveriges Socialdemokratiska Arbetareparti« (SAP). The choice of these names did not entail, however, a consensus on the content of the concept of democracy. Within and outside the labour movement, commentators formulated contrasting definitions of the term »democracy«. Especially during the interwar years, Social Democrats discussed how important democracy was and what a real democracy should look like. The rise of anti-democratic movements forced them to pass judgment on the existing democratic systems and on alternative forms of democracy that others had suggested in response to economic and political crises. At the same time, Social Democrats themselves proposed democratic reforms. In their eyes, the introduction of universal suffrage not only extended the political aspect of democracy, but also opened possibilities to democratise the social and moral spheres of society.

The historical and sociological literature on the social democratic movement has mainly examined to what extent Social Democrats valued »the« democracy. Scholars used their own, anachronistic definition of democracy, which they described as a parliamentary system. They wondered whether Social Democrats regarded democratic politics as a goal in itself or merely as a means to a socialist society. There are two explanations for this historiographical focus. Firstly, historians and some political scientists have been fascinated by Social Democrats' ideological choice between revolution and reform. These authors have agreed that the proponents of an evolutionary, parliamentary strategy gained the upper hand across Europe in the two decades following the revolutionary upheaval of 1917–1919.¹ Secondly, the broad appreciation for democracy after the Second World War has generated a lot of scholarly attention for the »crisis of democracy« in the 1920s and 1930s. As a result, many authors have emphasised the battle between anti-democrats and convinced defenders of democracy.²

1 *Stefan Berger*, European Labour Movements and the European Working Class in Comparative Perspective, in: *id./David Broughton* (eds.), *The Force of Labour. The Western Labour Movement and the Working Class in the Twentieth Century*, Oxford 1995, pp. 245–261, here: pp. 248f.; *Dietrich Orlow*, The Paradoxes of Success. Dutch Social Democracy and its Historiography, in: *Bijdragen en Mededelingen betreffende de Geschiedenis der Nederlanden* 110, 1995, pp. 40–51, here: pp. 40–43; *Gerrit Voerman*, De stand van de geschiedschrijving van de Nederlandse politieke partijen, in: *Bijdragen en Mededelingen betreffende de Geschiedenis der Nederlanden* 120, 2005, pp. 226–269, here: pp. 235 and 237f.; *Sheri Berman*, *The Social Democratic Moment. Ideas and Politics in the Making of Interwar Europe*, London 1998, pp. x and 3f.

2 *Dirk Berg-Schlosser/Jeremy Mitchell*, Introduction, in: *idem* (eds.), *Conditions of Democracy in Europe, 1919–39. Systematic Case-Studies*, Basingstoke/New York 2000, pp. 1–39, here: pp. 1, 34; *Giovanni Capoccia*, *Defending Democracy. Reactions to Extremism in Interwar Europe*, Baltimore 2005, p. 6.

Historians have stressed that Social Democrats during the interwar period embraced »the« democracy in their struggle with anti-democrats.³

However, Social Democrats hotly argued amongst themselves and with others about what »true democracy«, as they called it, was and should be. Democracy has been endowed with many different meanings and can therefore be considered to be one of the most contested concepts in political history.⁴ That was especially true since the early 1920s, when the completion of the parliamentary system across Europe evoked the desire among Social Democrats for further democratisation of the political, societal and moral domains of life. In this process, the concept of democracy gained new content. In the 1930s, Social Democrats and other participants in the public debate argued even more often about the characteristics and limits of this notion. Many of them tried to reform the democratic state, either in order to defend it against attacks of anti-democrats, or to empower it so it could solve the economic crisis.⁵ Therefore, this article primarily analyses how the members of the SDAP understood the concept of democracy.

An analysis of the struggle over the meaning of democracy asks for a two-fold conceptual historical approach. Following recent trends in this scholarly field, this article examines both the contemporary definitions and the rhetorical use of the term »democracy« by Social Democrats. It studies what different Social Democrats meant by »democracy«, when and why they defended varying definitions and how they used their vocabulary to clarify their own profile and position. Before the methods are explained in more detail, it is important to remark that this article adopts two ways to indicate the different social democratic conceptions of democracy. Social Democrats sometimes literally referred to a certain democratic type by adding adjectives to the noun democracy. For example, they explicitly talked about »social democracy« and »bourgeois democracy«. In other cases, their description of democracy only implied variants of the concept. When Social Democrats idealised harmony and mutual respect as democratic values, for instance, they associated democracy with ethics. This hints at a moral conception of democracy, even if the Social Democrats did not label it as such.

The first step of my conceptual analysis is to scrutinise the social democratic vocabulary. Inspired by the classic *Begriffsgeschichte* of Reinhart Koselleck and his students, I examine the contemporary definitions of words in order to establish the connotations of a larger concept.⁶ This analysis of a semantic web shows the values and institutions Social

3 William Smaldone, *Confronting Hitler. German Social Democrats in Defense of the Weimar Republic, 1929–1933*, New York 2009, pp. xii–xiii and 254; Francis Sejersted, *The Age of Social Democracy. Norway and Sweden in the Twentieth Century*, Princeton, NJ 2011, p. 76 (translation by Richard Daly of *Sosialdemokratiets tidsalder. Norge og Sverige i det 20. århundre*, Oslo 2005); Rob Hartmans, *Vijandige broeders? De Nederlandse sociaal-democratie en het nationaal-socialisme, 1922–1940*, Amsterdam 2012, pp. 15 and 17.

4 Walter Bryce Gallie, *Essentially Contested Concepts*, in: *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 56, 1956, pp. 167–198, here: pp. 183–187; Terence Ball, *Conceptual History and the History of Political Thought*, in: *Iain Hampsher-Monk/Karin Tilmans/Frank van Vree* (eds.), *History of Concepts. Comparative Perspectives*, Amsterdam 1998, pp. 75–86, here: pp. 80f.; Oliver Hidalgo, *Conceptual History and Politics. Is the Concept of Democracy Essentially Contested?*, in: *Contributions to the History of Concepts* 4, 2008, no. 2, pp. 176–201, here: p. 196.

5 Tom Buchanan/Martin Conway, *The Politics of Democracy in Twentieth Century Europe. Introduction*, in: *European History Quarterly* 32, 2002, pp. 7–12, here: p. 10; Stefan Berger, *Democracy and Social Democracy*, in: *European History Quarterly* 32, 2002, pp. 13–37, here: pp. 13f. and 24–27.

6 For literature on the methodologies of conceptual history, see *Iain Hampsher-Monk/Karin Tilmans/Frank van Vree*, *A Comparative Perspective on Conceptual History. An Introduction*, in: *id.*, *History of Concepts*, pp. 1–9, here: p. 2; Pieter François, *De convergentie tussen de Angelsaksi-*

Democrats associated with the concept of democracy. This article is mainly based on the semasiological method: it examines the meaning of terms such as »democracy«, »democratic«, »democrat« and »anti-democrat« in order to find out what notion these words referred to. Since these were buzzwords in the interwar years, it is worthwhile to focus on their definition. This article also uses the opposite, but complementary method of onomasiology, which starts out with a concept and tracks down the terms that have been used to describe it. This approach uncovers a field of phrases that were related to the notion of democracy, like »power of the people«, »influence of the people«, »participation«, »equality«, »liberty«, but also »harmony«, »responsibility«, »discipline« and »leadership«. The last and most recent method of conceptual history that is applied in this article is the study of metaphors. This has become a popular object of study of conceptual historians and can shed new light on the question what democracy meant to Social Democrats.⁷

In addition to the meaning of concepts, recent conceptual historians analyse the function of those concepts in political conflicts. Their combination of the German *Begriffsgeschichte* and the Anglo-Saxon history of ideas has generated the insight that linguistic changes have influenced political innovation and vice versa. After all, politics exist partly by the grace of communication.⁸ An interest in the role of communicative practices in the political process raises questions that are relevant here. In what circumstances did Social Democrats talk about democracy? Was it a matter of internal debate about socialist ideology, or did it come up in practical discussions with their political adversaries? Since language entails struggle, the interaction and relationship between numerous interlocutors should be examined. Such an analysis should not be limited to the reactions of Social Democrats to their opponents, but should also include different arenas within the social democratic movement. Theoretical treatises, journals, parliamentary speeches, committees and (youth) conferences of the SDAP and its international sister parties reflected different usages of the concept of democracy. Another question is whether Social Democrats felt the need to explicitly define democracy, or referred to it in circumspect terms. Moreover, what did they hope to achieve by speaking about democracy?

sche ideeengeschiedenis en de Duitse/continentale begripsgeschiedenis. Een status quaestionis, in: *Revue Belge de Philologie et d'Histoire* 83, 2005, pp. 1175–1206, here: pp. 1175–1187; *Rudolf Valkhoff*, Some Similarities between Begriffsgeschichte and the History of Discourse, in: *Contributions to the History of Concepts* 2, 2006, no. 1, pp. 83–98, here: p. 83; *Willibald Steinmetz*, 40 Jahre Begriffsgeschichte. The State of the Art, in: *Heidrun Kämper/Ludwig M. Eichinger* (eds.), *Sprache – Kognition – Kultur*, Berlin 2008, pp. 174–197, here: pp. 174–183.

7 For recent literature on the combination of metaphorology and conceptual history, see *Rüdiger Zill*, »Substrukturen des Denkens«. Grenzen und Perspektiven einer Metapherngeschichte nach Hans Blumenberg, in: *Hans Erich Bödecker* (ed.), *Begriffsgeschichte, Diskursgeschichte, Metapherngeschichte*, Göttingen 2002, pp. 209–258; *Frank Beck Lassen*, »Metaphorically Speaking« – Begriffsgeschichte und Hans Blumenberg's Metaphorologie, in: *Ricardo Pozzo/Marco Sgarbi* (eds.), *Eine Typologie der Formen der Begriffsgeschichte*. Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte, Hamburg 2010, pp. 53–70; *Rieke Schäfer*, Historicizing Strong Metaphors. A Challenge for Conceptual History, in: *Contributions to the History of Concepts* 7, 2012, no. 2, pp. 28–51.

8 *Terence Ball/James Farr/Russell L. Hanson*, Editor's Introduction, in: *id.* (eds.), *Political Innovation and Conceptual Change*, Cambridge/New York etc. 1989, pp. 1–5, here: pp. 2f.; *James Farr*, Understanding Conceptual Change Politically, in: *Ball/Farr/Hanson*, *Political Innovation and Conceptual Change*, pp. 24–48, here: pp. 24–32 and 36–40; *Willibald Steinmetz*, New Perspectives on the Study of Language and Power in the Short Twentieth Century, in: *id.* (ed.), *Political Languages in the Age of Extremes*, Oxford/New York etc. 2011, pp. 3–51, here: pp. 6, 31, 37f. and 49–51; *Angelika Linke*, Politics as Linguistic Performance. Function and »Magic« of Communicative Practices, in: *Steinmetz*, *Political Languages in the Age of Extremes*, pp. 53–65, here: pp. 55f. and 59–62.

Furthermore, this article has been inspired by recent approaches in transnational history. The analysis will not remain limited to one nation, since both the social democratic movement and the debate on the true meaning of democracy were international phenomena in the interwar years. On the one hand, a comparison of the Netherlands with Germany and Sweden will show that the members of the SDAP, SPD and SAP used a specific social democratic language, but on the other hand, it will bring different definitions of »democracy« to light. Some conceptual historians have suggested that such differences can occur when a word is radically altered while it is translated into another language.⁹ That, however, was not the case here, since the term »democracy« sounds more or less the same in Dutch (*democratie*), German (*Demokratie*) and Swedish (*demokrati*). Instead, I will argue, the differences were caused by different positions of the Social Democratic parties in the national political landscape. At the same time, these conceptual differences affected the respective political situation of the party.

Even more important than the comparison of the three countries is the analysis of the transfer between them. The Social Democrats' attitude towards democracy was affected by their views of the situation in other countries. In order to understand their reactions, it is more relevant to study their contemporary perception than to compare the three countries on the basis of current knowledge. The crucial question is how the Social Democrats regarded the situation in neighbouring countries, not whether their views were correct in hindsight.¹⁰ This article focuses on the observations of the SDAP because this nationally isolated party often admired the international social democratic models in Germany and Sweden. Interestingly enough, the Dutch party also noted important differences in the political circumstances of the three countries. After the conference of the »Sozialistische Arbeiter-Internationale« in 1933, SDAP-leader Willem Albarda commented: »The politics of the Social Democratic parties [...] should, now more than ever, derive its content and shape from the special circumstances that differentiate one country from the other.«¹¹

The results of this transnational history of social democratic conceptions of democracy add a layer of understanding to the traditional view of the social democratic dilemma between revolution and reformism. Against the well-known background of this ideological debate, it will become clear that Social Democrats viewed democracy from a political, a social and a moral perspective. They applied this concept to three different domains of public life: the involvement of voters in government decisions, the equal participation in economic affairs by all citizens and a code of conduct among human beings. Within each of these spheres, Social Democrats referred to numerous types of democracy, either explicitly or implicitly. At the same time, it will become clear that these forms of democracy sometimes overlapped. Finally, an analysis of their strategic use of the concept of democracy will show how language and politics have influenced each other. The first three sections examine how the members of the SDAP spoke about the three dimensions

9 Pim den Boer, Vergelijkende begripsgeschiedenis, in: *id.* (ed.), *Beschaving. Een geschiedenis van de begrippen hoofsheid, heusheid, beschaving en cultuur*, Amsterdam 2001, pp. 15–78, here: pp. 16–19; Steinmetz, *40 Jahre Begriffsgeschichte*, pp. 193–195; Margrit Pernau, Whither Conceptual History? From National to Entangled Histories, in: *Contributions to the History of Concepts* 7, 2012, no. 1, pp. 1–11, here: p. 9.

10 Cf. Henk te Velde, Political Transfer. An Introduction, in: *European Review of History* 12, 2005, pp. 205–221, here: pp. 206, 209 and 217; Charles Tilly, Introduction to Part II. Invention, Diffusion, and Transformation of the Social Movement Repertoire, in: *European Review of History* 12, 2005, pp. 307–320, here: p. 314; Henk te Velde, Inleiding. De internationalisering van de nationale geschiedenis en de verzuiling, in: *Bijdragen en Mededelingen betreffende de Geschiedenis der Nederlanden* 124, 2009, pp. 499–514, here: p. 513.

11 Willem Albarda, Over politiek, in: *De Socialistische Gids. Maandschrift der Sociaal-Democratische Arbeiderspartij* (from here on: *De Socialistische Gids*), 1934, pp. 244–251, here: p. 246.

of democracy, starting with their ideological dream of a democratic society and ending with practical debates about the defence of democratic virtues and parliamentary regimes. The closing section compares these findings to the German and Swedish cases.

I. HOPING FOR A TRULY DEMOCRATISED SOCIETY

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, German-speaking Marxist theoreticians distinguished between »political democracy« and »social democracy«. The first term referred to the type of political system that was developing in Europe at that time, while the latter denoted the socialist utopia. Marxists associated the concept of democracy with participation and equality, and they felt that these principles should be applied in all spheres of life. In their eyes, the parliamentary regime was merely partly democratic since it limited the people's participation to the political arena. Only a society which gave all citizens an equal say in as many societal and economic domains as possible deserved to be called a »true democracy«. Karl Marx was the first to say so in 1852 when he predicted that »bourgeois democracy« would be supplanted by »proletarian democracy«.¹² His followers agreed, though they often used the terms »political democracy« and »social democracy«. Around 1900, both the orthodox Karl Kautsky and the revisionist Eduard Bernstein rejected a purely political interpretation of democracy and pursued a democratised society, despite their contrasting views on the means to achieve this goal. Austro-Marxists also called the process of democratisation incomplete. In 1926, Max Adler lamented in his »Politische oder soziale Demokratie«: »the democracy we *have is no* democracy and the democracy that is a true democracy, *doesn't exist yet*«.¹³

A phrase that was closely related to Marxist hopes for a democratised society was the »dictatorship of the proletariat«. Marx had coined this term to denote the period of transition between capitalist and socialist society. This process corresponded with the conversion of »bourgeois democracy« into »proletarian democracy«, which meant that Marx did not necessarily regard the concepts of democracy and dictatorship as opposites. Neither did he explicitly equate »dictatorship« with violence or force. However, because Marx failed to give a clear definition of a »dictatorship of the proletariat«, his followers argued about the nature of the transition between capitalism and socialism. The least radical among them, like Friedrich Engels in his later work and Bernstein, felt that parliament should remain in place during the dictatorship. Kautsky and Adler agreed, on the condition that the Social Democrats controlled the majority of the seats. In 1917, Vladimir I. Lenin radicalised the concept of a »dictatorship of the proletariat«. He replaced parliament by councils of workers and soldiers under control of the Bolshevik minority and used coercion to introduce the communist state.¹⁴

Unlike these Marxist intellectuals, the leaders of the SDAP at first did not emphasise the distinction between »political democracy« and »social democracy«. Before the introduction of full male suffrage in 1917 and full female suffrage in 1919, they merely spoke of »democracy«, which they defined solely as a political system. They equated it with the

12 *Karl Marx*, *Der achtzehnte Brumaire des Louis Bonaparte* (3rd revised edition, Berlin 1965), cited in: *Berger*, *Democracy and Social Democracy*, p. 18.

13 *Max Adler*, *Politische oder soziale Demokratie. Ein Beitrag zur sozialistischen Erziehung*, Berlin 1926, p. 31 (in the Dutch translation: *Politieke of sociale democratie*, Amsterdam 1928, translated by *Frank van der Goes*; emphasis in the original). See also *Berger*, *Democracy and Social Democracy*, pp. 18–24.

14 *Adler*, *Politische oder soziale Demokratie*, pp. 56–73; *Mike Schmeitzner*, *Ambivalenzen des Fortschritts. Zur Faszination der proletarischen Diktatur in der demokratischen Revolution 1918–1920*, in this volume. I am grateful to Dr. Mike Schmeitzner for letting me read his manuscript.

principle of power of the people (*»volksmacht«* in Dutch). The most often mentioned instruments to achieve this democratic ideal were the extension of the voting rights and – later – the parliament. In 1894, the founders of the SDAP copied the label *»Social Democratic«* from its predecessor, the *»Sociaal-Democratische Bond«* (SDB), who could trace this name back to its German counterpart. And yet the SDAP was the first Dutch Social Democratic party that invested the term *»democracy«* with a parliamentary meaning. That became apparent in its Foundation Manifesto and in party literature around 1900, in which the SDAP distanced itself from the anti-parliamentary, anarchist SDB. The leaders of the SDAP also linked democracy to universal suffrage and parliament during election campaigns, during parliamentary speeches and in their intellectual journal, *»De Socialistische Gids«*. This means that the SDAP's use of the term *»democracy«* before the interwar years boiled down to what Marxist theorists called *»political democracy«*. However, it also means that the leaders of the SDAP did not yet feel the need to use this adjective, because they hardly talked about any other forms of democracy at this point. Even when they talked about the social meaning of democracy, they referred to progressive laws instead of a societal democratisation. Neither did they use the phrase *»economic democracy«* yet.¹⁵

The difference between the definitions of *»democracy«* of Marxist theorists and the SDAP-leaders at the turn of the century can be explained by the role they wanted to fulfil at that moment in the social democratic movement. The ideologues wanted to promise the proletarians a better society. One way to do so was claiming that the political interpretation of democracy of the bourgeois reformers of 1848 was lacking an essential social component. That made the phrase *»social democracy«* a weapon in the rhetorical battle against liberalism. The politicians in the SDAP, on the other hand, fought a practical fight for political influence. Their quest for universal suffrage brought them in opposition with conservatives, who did not wish to extend the franchise, and with radical socialists, who advocated revolution over parliamentarism. As long as the electoral reform had not been achieved, Dutch Social Democrats did not consider it an appropriate strategy to denounce the parliamentary system as an incomplete form of democracy. Their priority was to conquer the political institutions; establishing a democratic society would follow later.¹⁶

After the introduction of universal suffrage in 1917 and 1919, the difference between a Marxist theory of democracy and the vocabulary of the SDAP executives, Members of Parliament (MPs), union leaders and publicists faded away. Like the German-speaking theoreticians had done before, many leading members of the SDAP now stressed that parliamentary methods were merely a means to an end, i.e. a socialist society. That affected their language. They started using adjectives to differentiate varying forms of democracy. They rechristened the parliamentary system *»political democracy«* or *»bourgeois democracy«*. Furthermore, more often than before SDAP leaders referred to *»social democracy«*, *»economic democracy«* and *»democratic socialism«* in their speeches and writings. Radicals and reformists in the party disagreed, however, on the proper use of these phrases. The former used *»social democracy«* to emphasise that a democratic society was more desirable than a democratic state. The latter, on the other hand, stressed that democracy

15 Jan van de Giessen, *De opkomst van het woord democratie als leuze in Nederland*, Den Haag 1948, pp. 174–198; *Ismee Tames*, *Voorbereid op nieuwe tijden. De Nederlandse discussie over »de ware democratie«* tijdens de Eerste Wereldoorlog, in: *Ismee Tames/Madelon de Keizer* (eds.), *Modernisme en massacultuur in Nederland 1914–1940*, Zutphen 2004, pp. 47–65, here: pp. 53–54 and 56–60; *Henk te Velde*, *De domesticatie van democratie in Nederland. Democratie als strijdbegrip van de negentiende eeuw tot 1945*, in: *Bijdragen en Mededelingen betreffende de Geschiedenis der Nederlanden* 127, 2012, pp. 3–27, here: pp. 11–13.

16 *Berger*, *Democracy and Social Democracy*, pp. 15–18 and 20; *te Velde*, *De domesticatie van democratie in Nederland*, p. 13.

should combine parliamentary and social elements. They too talked of »social democracy«, but in the 1930s they preferred the less radically sounding »democratic socialism«. The radical and moderate wing of the SDAP chose different linguistic strategies to cope with the changing circumstances of the interwar period, as this section shows.

The shift in social democratic language after 1917 was related to the extension of the franchise. Now that the parliamentary system seemed to be more or less complete, the SDAP could no longer use the absence of universal suffrage to accuse the bourgeoisie of an undemocratic attitude. That allegation would now only stick when the Social Democrats convinced the masses that the real democracy was a »social democracy«. »Democracy« remained the watchword of the SDAP, but its association with voting rights and parliament had lost most of its strategic value. In addition to this rhetorical and strategic argument, Social Democrats genuinely believed that Marx' promise of a truly democratised society would soon be fulfilled, either with the help of a revolutionary coup or a strong position in parliament (hopefully a majority, even if that might take a while).¹⁷ The new reality of the franchise and their hopes enabled Social Democrats to extend their concept of democracy.

The fact that radical and moderate SDAP members used this possibility differently can be traced back to the failed attempt to stage a revolution by party leader Pieter Jelles Troelstra in November 1918. Inspired by the revolutionary situation in Germany and other countries, he demanded that the Dutch government resigned. Within a week, however, he had to admit that he did not have enough support among the Dutch populace and his prominent party members to back this claim. Most moderate SDAP functionaries and MPs believed that socialism could be reached through parliamentary means, either a Social Democratic majority or – more likely, given the disappointing electoral result of 22% of the votes for the Second Chamber in July 1918 – a cooperation with other parties. The moderates in the party leadership realised that Troelstra's revolutionary adventure expanded the gap between the SDAP and other parties.¹⁸ The incident gave radical Social Democrats a cause to demand »social democracy«, but also created semantic difficulties for the moderates who feared that a radical rhetoric would isolate the SDAP. That fear was justified because Troelstra's revolution generated bourgeois mistrust in the SDAP that would last for twenty years. The circumstances and the language clearly influenced each other.

Especially in the first half of the 1920s, radical SDAP members used the term »social democracy« to denote a complete renewal of democracy, which would not be realised until the establishment of a socialist utopia. Until his resignation as party leader in 1925, Troelstra and his followers repeatedly used this vocabulary. During the SDAP party conferences in 1919 and 1920, they complained that moderate party members settled for »parliamentary democracy« or »bourgeois democracy«, without aiming for »real«, »true« or »pure democracy«. ¹⁹ Their speeches lacked definitions, but Troelstra stressed that democracy encompassed more than universal suffrage. He went into more detail in the »De Socialistische Gids« in 1919 and 1920. In a series of articles, he defined »social democracy« as the »social fulfilment« of the principle of equality, »which bases equal political rights on equal economic possessions«. ²⁰ The goal of this language was to engage in a

17 *Floris Cohen*, *Om de vernieuwing van het socialisme. De politieke oriëntatie van de Nederlandse sociaal-democratie, 1919–1930*, Leiden 1974, pp. 229f.

18 *Bastiaan van Dongen*, *Revolutie of integratie. De Sociaal-Democratische Arbeiders Partij in Nederland (SDAP) tijdens de Eerste Wereldoorlog*, Leiden 1992, pp. 781–809.

19 *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant*, 22 April 1919 (morning and evening edition), 25 May 1920 (morning edition).

20 *Pieter Jelles Troelstra*, *De revolutie en de SDAP, deel I*, in: *De Socialistische Gids*, 1919, pp. 201–222, here: p. 209; *id.*, *De revolutie en de SDAP, deel II*, in: *De Socialistische Gids*, 1919, pp. 377–401, here: p. 394.

polemic with the advocates of a parliamentary strategy within the SDAP. Despite the failure of revolution in November 1918, Troelstra and his radical followers refused to renounce revolutionary strategies. In order to defend this attitude, they called a revolutionary course democratic and severed the conceptual ties between democracy and parliamentarism. In short, they mobilised the concept of democracy in the rhetorical battle against their moderate party members.

Radical Social Democrats also referred to »democracy« when they talked about the preparations for a socialist utopia. They associated democracy with both the first steps on the road towards socialism and the end of that road (which they called »social democracy«). The party's newspaper »Het Volk«, which was edited by Troelstra, sketched this process in 1924: »The limited democracy, glorified as historical beginning of the bourgeois state, had to be developed into a complete political democracy, and at the same time it had to be used to achieve social democracy.«²¹ The first step in »the gradual introduction of social democracy«, according to Troelstra, was political reform.²² Franc van der Goes – Marxist theoretician, co-founder of the SDAP and the most radical leftist of its functionaries – suggested during the party conference in 1919 that the SDAP should follow the German example and replace parliament by councils of workers as soon as they had seized power. He emphasised that this should not be considered undemocratic.²³ Troelstra elaborated this theory in »De Socialistische Gids«, in the popular-scientific supplement of »Het Volk« and in international speeches. Until 1923, a committee of politicians, union leaders and theoreticians also discussed his desire for a National Assembly and a Worker's Council.²⁴

The second preparatory step in the development towards »social democracy« that radical Social Democrats linked to the concept of democracy was economic in nature. They regarded the socialisation of property as the road towards socialism, although they were not sure what this meant in practice. A committee that discussed economic reforms described socialisation in 1920 as the gradual replacement of private property by communal ownership of the means of production. Three years later another committee formulated more moderate aims by defining »corporate democracy« as the co-determination of employees in decisions concerning their workplace.²⁵ In »De Socialistische Gids«, the phrase »economic democracy« was used in a similar manner. G. de Schipper wrote in 1919 that »after the conquest of the political democracy – which is nearing completion in all countries – the proletariat should commence the battle for economic democracy: taking away the leadership over the production process from the hands of private entrepreneurs.«²⁶ In 1924, the union leader Frans van Meurs copied the German demand for »economic democracy«: »If the demand for participation in the economic life is to be called democratic, this must mean that the will of those who are involved in the production is taken into consideration.«²⁷ These references to political and economic democratisation in preparation of »so-

21 Het Volk, 20 March 1924.

22 Troelstra, *De revolutie en de SDAP*, deel I, p. 209.

23 Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant, 22 April 1919 (morning edition).

24 Pieter Jelles Troelstra, *De revolutie en de SDAP*, deel V, in: *De Socialistische Gids*, 1919, pp. 681–703, here: pp. 681–691; Het Volk, 10, 17 and 24 April and 8 May 1920; Ernst Hueting/Frits de Jong Edz./Rob Neij, *Troelstra en het model van de nieuwe staat*, Assen 1980, pp. 89–91, 95 and 109; Piet Hagen, *Politicus uit hartstocht. Biografie van Pieter Jelles Troelstra*, Amsterdam 2010, pp. 714–716 and 739–741.

25 Cohen, *Om de vernieuwing van het socialisme*, pp. 29f. and 46.

26 G. de Schipper, *Over socialisatie*, in: *De Socialistische Gids*, 1919, pp. 418–431, here: p. 418.

27 Frans van Meurs, *Bedrijfsorganisatie en medezeggenschap*, deel I, in: *De Socialistische Gids*, 1924, pp. 105–131, here: p. 120; *id.*, *Bedrijfsorganisatie en medezeggenschap*, deel II, in: *De Socialistische Gids*, 1924, pp. 226–249, here: pp. 232f. and 240.

cial democracy« were not meant to attack the moderate members of the SDAP, but to win the votes of the Dutch workers.

Although Troelstra remained leader of the SDAP until 1925, he was increasingly isolated in his own party by its many reformist leading functionaries. The most important among them were Willem Albarda (Troelstra's successor as party leader and Chairman of the Social Democrats in the Second Chamber), Jan Schaper (a prominent MP), Willem Vliegen (the party Chairman until 1926), Johan Frederik Ankersmit (Troelstra's successor as editor of »Het Volk«) and Willem Adriaan Bonger (who served as head of the editorial board of »De Socialistische Gids«). They marginalised the radical minority in the 1920s and forced the most vocal left-wing critics out of the SDAP in 1932. At that time, the moderate wing of the party pursued the same fundamental goal as the radical wing – the destruction of capitalism and the establishment of the socialist utopia – but followed a different strategy to reach this goal. That was a pragmatic decision because the reformists were convinced that an evolutionary, parliamentary course would be more successful than revolutionary insurrection. Moreover, they tried to break out of the political and societal isolation that the SDAP suffered in the two decades after Troelstra's revolutionary attempt.²⁸

As a result, the reformists quickly adopted a more moderate tone than Troelstra and his followers. To begin with, they continued to emphasise political issues when they talked of »democracy« or associated terms. They even did so in less radical terms than in the nineteenth century. The notion of »power of the people« (»volksmacht«) was replaced by »influence of the people« (»volksinvloed«). »Democracy« no longer meant that the people had to be completely in power, but merely that they should have a say in governmental affairs. »Participation« became the key word, instead of a complete take-over of power. Universal suffrage and parliamentary representation remained the most important participatory instruments. The reformists did not put too much emphasis on their desire for political reforms that could enhance the democratic nature of the Dutch state – like referenda or elections of high-level civil servants.²⁹ They wished to stress that the existing parliamentary system was democratic enough since 1917 because they tried to convince the authorities that the SDAP would not embark on another revolutionary adventure. Moreover, they argued against their radical party members that a revolution was unnecessary. The reformists entered the polemic with the revolutionaries head-on.

In 1919, reformists explicitly defined democracy as a parliamentary regime in response to Troelstra's challenging demands for »social democracy«. In his conference speech Schaper reacted: »[T]rue democracy is and remains the expression of the pure popular will. We possess the institutes to reach a full democracy.«³⁰ Vliegen shared this political definition: »There is only one kind of democracy, namely the one in which the people govern, in which the people appoint the government.«³¹ The reformists insisted that the existing parliamentary system was democratic enough, for the time being, and hardly mentioned other forms of popular participation. Their supporters in »De Socialistische Gids« explored this issue more thoroughly and juxtaposed worker's and soldiers' councils with universal suffrage. Ankersmit wrote: »[W]orkers' councils are no democratic institutions.«³² Influenced by

28 Cohen, *Om de vernieuwing van het socialisme*, pp. 40–43, 75–79 and 175; *Peter Jan Knegtmans, Socialisme en democratie. De SDAP tussen klasse en natie (1929–1939)*, Hilversum 1989, pp. 20–26; *Hagen, Politicus uit hartstocht*, pp. 697–698.

29 *Handelingen van de Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal (Minutes of the Second Chamber, from here on HTK) 1919–1920, Supplement 428, no. 4, pp. 5–6; HTK 1919–1920, pp. 2595f., 2600, 2607, 2618–2620 and 2635f.; te Velde, De domesticatie van democratie in Nederland*, p. 20.

30 *Nieuwe Rotterdamse Courant*, 22 April 1919 (morning edition).

31 *Nieuwe Rotterdamse Courant*, 22 April 1919 (evening edition).

32 *Johan Frederik Ankersmit, Het raden-stelsel. De kern van bolsjewisme en Spartakus*, in: *De Socialistische Gids*, 1919, pp. 283–301, here: p. 301.

German experiences and Kautsky's writings, he argued that a democracy should protect minorities from oppression and should grant all citizens an equal say in government. Therefore, he called workers' councils »objectionable to the Social Democrat [...], who wants a democratic government of the people«. ³³ Because the SDAP quickly reached consensus on this matter, »De Socialistische Gids« stopped paying attention to it after 1921. ³⁴

Another difference between radical and moderate Social Democrats was that the latter hesitated to use phrases like »proletarian democracy« and »bourgeois democracy«. After all, these terms were coined by revolutionaries to sever the link between democracy and parliamentarism. In 1933, Vliegen tried to convince his fellow board members that the party should exercise restraint in the use of »revolutionary words«. ³⁵ Social democratic MPs refrained from radical vocabulary, in an attempt to distance themselves from Communists who attacked »bourgeois democracy« in their parliamentary speeches. ³⁶ Intellectuals in the SDAP also refuted the radical idea that a true democracy could only exist in socialist society. Arie IJzerman's review of »Politische oder Soziale Demokratie?« in 1928 warned »that Adler runs the risk of throwing the baby out with the bathwater when he renounces false and bourgeois democracy, which would mean that not only the »false« and the »bourgeois«, but also the democracy would be lost«. ³⁷ He criticised the Austro-Marxist defence of a »dictatorship of the proletariat«, or, in Adler's words, a »proletarian democracy«. ³⁸ IJzerman aimed this message at the rank and file readers of the popular-scientific supplement of »Het Volk«. »De Socialistische Gids« also scathingly reviewed books in Adler's tradition. In 1935 Bonger wrote: »These authors see themselves as democrats, but are in fact no democrats.« ³⁹

Bonger himself personified the reformist majority that associated democracy with politics. He formulated a definition of »democracy« that stressed its political dimension (in addition to a moral dimension, as we shall see): »[D]emocracy is a form of government of a community with self-determination, in which a large part of its members either directly or indirectly participates, and in which freedom and equality are guaranteed by law.« ⁴⁰ He also denied the importance of the social dimension of democracy: »All attempts to perceive social equality as *the* hallmark of democracy must fail.« ⁴¹ Bonger maintained that democracy already existed in the Netherlands because its population could influence the government. He reached a large audience because the SDAP's youth movement used the successful popular edition of his »Problemen der democratie«, published in 1936, to edu-

33 Ibid.

34 *Willem Adriaan Bonger*, *Evolutie en revolutie*, in: *De Socialistische Gids*, 1919, pp. 321–361, here: pp. 338–345 and 358–360; *Joseph Loopuit*, *Jaurès over de diktatuur van het proletariaat*, in: *De Socialistische Gids*, 1919, pp. 949–954, here: p. 954; *Karl Kautsky*, *Klassendictatuur en partijdictatuur* (translated by *Emanuel Boekman*), in: *De Socialistische Gids*, 1921, pp. 641–655; *Hueting/De Jong Edz./Neij*, *Troelstra en het model van de nieuwe staat*, pp. 91–93, 112f., 171 and 183.

35 Minutes of the SDAP Board meeting, 29 April 1933, cited in: *Hartmans*, *Vijandige broeders?*, p. 166.

36 *HTK* 1933–1934, p. 1226.

37 *Het Volk*, 28 December 1928 (evening edition).

38 *Adler*, *Politische oder soziale Demokratie*, pp. 32f., 60–63 and 66–69.

39 *Willem Adriaan Bonger*, *Godsdienst en democratie*, in: *De Socialistische Gids*, 1935, pp. 738–744, here: pp. 742f. See also *Gerard van den Bergh*, *Bas van den Tempel, Democratische vrijheid en socialistisch recht*, in: *De Socialistische Gids*, 1934, pp. 586–592, here: p. 592; *Cornelis Hendrik Ketner*, *J. L. Snethlage, Democratie en dictatuur*, in: *De Socialistische Gids*, 1933, pp. 405–406.

40 *Willem Adriaan Bonger*, *Problemen der democratie. Een sociologische en psychologische studie*, Groningen 1934, p. 17.

41 *Ibid.*, p. 16 (emphasis in the original).

cate generations of Social Democrats.⁴² The fact that Bonger's association of democracy with political influence was more influential than Adler's emphasis on the democratisation of society illustrates the moderate tone of voice that the majority in the SDAP practised.

That does not mean that moderate SDAP members rejected the phrase »social democracy« completely. However, they preferred to use it in combination with the term »political democracy«. They did distinguish between these two, but did not regard them as opposites, unlike their radical opponents. The reformists wanted to democratise the society and economy without replacing the parliamentary system. When Marinus Jan Moltzer reviewed Bonger's book in »De Socialistische Gids« in 1934, he wrote: »It is appropriate that Bonger has distanced himself from the Marxist perspective, which distinguishes between true and false democracy and which contrasts political with social democracy; it is appropriate that he sees democracy as one large historical phenomenon.«⁴³ In 1919, Vliegen had made the same point: »Social democracy and economic democracy must be expansions of political democracy. These are no opposites; these are matters in which one follows from the other.«⁴⁴ He repeated himself ten years later during a conference before the elections.⁴⁵ Social democratic intellectuals like Hilda Verweij-Jonker acknowledged the mutual relationship between political and social aspects of democracy in the early 1930s. She addressed »developed bystanders«, i.e. educated non-Social Democrats, because she wanted to reassure them that the SDAP would not use dictatorial or violent methods in its quest for socialism.⁴⁶

These statements show that moderate Social Democrats who preferred parliamentary rule instead of a revolution did talk about »social democracy«. Nevertheless, during the 1930s »democratic socialism« became a more popular term among them to denote the prospect of a socialist society. With this phrase, they hoped to convince the voters and the authorities that they differed from Communists (who had contaminated the term »social democracy« by contrasting it to »bourgeois democracy«) and National Socialists. One of the first social democratic ideologues to elaborate the concept of »democratic socialism« in 1933 was Willem Banning, an influential religious socialist. As a result, the SDAP would include this concept as one of its main goals in its revised Political Manifesto of 1937. One of Banning's supporters in a committee on this issue even suggested to change the name of the party to »Democratic Socialist People's Party«. Koos Vorrink, leader of the youth movement and after 1934 Chairman of the SDAP, ensured that the term »democratic socialism« popped up everywhere: in »De Socialistische Gids« and »Het Volk«, in speeches during youth rallies and election campaigns, and in popular books that were aimed at »the proletarian masses«.⁴⁷

42 Leo Hartveld/Frits de Jong Edz./Dries Kuperus, *De Arbeiders Jeugd Centrale AJC. 1918–1940/1945–1959*, Amsterdam 1982, p. 140.

43 Marinus Jan Adriaan Moltzer, Bonger's boek over democratische problemen, in: *De Socialistische Gids*, 1934, pp. 416–430, here: pp. 425–427. Cf. *Knegtmans*, *Socialisme en democratie*, pp. 150f.

44 *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant*, 22 April 1919 (evening edition).

45 Willem Vliegen, Het partijcongres te Nijmegen, in: *De Socialistische Gids*, 1929, pp. 193–199, here: p. 196.

46 Hilda Verweij-Jonker, *Het socialisme in onze tijd. Een inleiding voor buitenstaanders waarin verwerkt college-aantekeningen van Prof. R. Kuyper*, Amsterdam 1935, pp. 23f. and 81–83; Cohen, *Om de vernieuwing van het socialisme*, pp. 18–20 and 26f.; *Hueting/De Jong Edz./Neij, Troelstra en het model van de nieuwe staat*, pp. 112f.; *Knegtmans*, *Socialisme en democratie*, pp. 26–31 and 147–150; *Margit van der Steen*, *Drift & koers. De levens van Hilda Verweij-Jonker (1908–2004)*, Amsterdam 2011, p. 134; *Hartmans*, *Vijandige broeders?*, pp. 66 and 284.

47 Henk Brugmans, *Grondslagen van het democratisch socialisme*, Amsterdam 1940, p. 6. See also *Knegtmans*, *Socialisme en democratie*, pp. 91, 99–101, 104, 108 and 250f.; *Hartmans*, *Vijandige*

Because the term »democratic socialism« was widespread, it gained an ambivalent meaning. One point of contention was whether the concept referred to the socialist utopia or to an existing combination of the parliamentary regime and a partly democratised society. In 1934, Ankersmit described »democratic socialism« as the goal of »our battle for the preservation of democracy, which will be filled with social and economic content«. ⁴⁸ Likewise, Vorrink stressed that true democracy could only be realised in a socialist society, but he also conceded that some democratic elements could be found in the existing capitalist society. In 1932, he lectured young Social Democrats: »[D]emocracy can only be realised in full in a socialist society«. ⁴⁹ »Het Volk« interpreted his words as proof that at least »a piece of the full democracy« was present. ⁵⁰ This illustrates the SDAP's tendency to use the term »democracy« to refer to both the present and the future. A second question was which arena »democratic socialism« referred to. According to many, it had a social connotation. The Political Manifesto of 1937 defined it as »a society characterised by collective ownership of the means of production and collective management of industries in which religious and political freedom is guaranteed«. ⁵¹ And yet, as we shall see, the notion of »democratic socialism« also added a moral dimension to the concept of democracy.

II. DEMOCRACY AS A WAY OF LIFE

The growing threat of political extremism in the 1930s forced the members of the SDAP once again to redefine their concept of »democracy«. In order to differentiate themselves from Communists, National Socialists and other radical movements, they embraced democracy. It no longer sufficed to long for »social democracy«, since this socialist dream still made the Social Democrats suspect in the eyes of the bourgeois parties. Moreover, Social Democrats and other democratic forces wanted to improve the existing political type of democracy in order to protect it against increasing criticism. This social democratic redefinition of »democracy« was more complex and multilayered than many scholars have realised. Peter Jan Knegtman and other historians have argued that moderate Social Democrats used a more narrow version of this concept in the early 1930s, when they supposedly abandoned a pursuit of »social democracy« for the conservative defence of »political democracy«. This historiography states that the SDAP finally regarded »political democracy« as a goal in itself, instead of being a means to reach »social democracy«. ⁵²

By contrast, the remaining section of this article shows that the members of the SDAP widened their definitions of »democracy« in response to the extremist threat. They did so in two ways. First, they did not merely defend the existing parliamentary variant of »political democracy«, but also participated in debates about the reform of the democratic institutions. This will become clear in the next paragraph. Second, Social Democrats re-

broeders?, pp. 218–226; *Harm Kaal*, *Constructing a Socialist Constituency. The Social-Democratic Language of Politics in the Netherlands, c. 1890–1950*, in this volume, I am grateful to Dr. Harm Kaal for letting me read his manuscript.

48 *Johan Frederik Ankersmit*, *Het veertigste paaschcongres der SDAP*, in: *De Socialistische Gids*, 1934, pp. 321–330, here: pp. 326f. and 330.

49 *Het Volk*, 19 July 1932 (morning edition). See also *Koos Vorrink*, *Om de vrije mens der nieuwe gemeenschap. Opvoeding tot het democratische socialisme*, Amsterdam 1933, pp. 64f.

50 *Het Volk*, 14 December 1933 (evening edition).

51 *Political Manifesto of the SDAP, 1937*, cited by: *Bart Tromp*, *Het sociaal-democratisch programma. De Beginselprogramma's van SDB, SDAP en PvdA. Een onderzoek naar de ontwikkeling van een politieke stroming*, Groningen 2002, p. 391.

52 *Knegtman*, *Socialisme en democratie*, p. 145; *Hartmans*, *Vijandige broeders?*, pp. 203–208.

garded democracy as a way of life, as more than only a state form or a way of organising society. In their discourse, »democracy« had not only political and societal connotations, but also gained a moral dimension. In the perception of Social Democrats, democracy was more than a political constellation to gain influence or a promise of future communal responsibility for economic aspects of society. Albarda formulated this tripartite definition of democracy in 1933: »More than once, the Party has explicitly declared that she regards democracy as a principle, a means and a goal.«⁵³ He addressed the government, in an attempt to dispel its distrust in the SDAP. But he also used this message to discourage workers from violence against fascists, which would ultimately destroy the democratic spirit of tolerance. The ethical dimension of democracy will be the focus of this section.

One term in the SDAP's dictionary that highlighted the moral aspect of democracy was »democratic socialism«. This phrase referred to a democratic ethos, in addition to a collectivist society. Especially Banning's religious socialists and Vorrink's youth movement emphasised that Social Democrats should develop their own culture and mentality. These subdivisions of the SDAP managed to influence the party's rhetoric on democracy. They were inspired by the French socialist leader Jean Jaurès and the Belgian thinker Hendrik de Man. These ideologues provided socialism with an ethical foundation, based on the democratic ideals of equality and solidarity. Their theoretical works were well received by the SDAP. Bonger applauded De Man's »Zur Psychologie des Sozialismus« in 1927: »The pages that De Man dedicates to democracy, not as a matter of secondary importance, but as something essential for socialism, belong to the best part of his book, and also belong to the best that has ever been written about democracy.«⁵⁴ A moral interpretation of democracy received even more attention among social democratic intellectuals after the fall of the Weimar Republic. Banning had already been convinced that democracy should be both the starting point and the goal of the socialist struggle, but he used Adolf Hitler's rise to power to underline this point in a lecture for the »Socialist Association for the Study of Societal Issues« in 1933.⁵⁵

Some Social Democrats explicitly stated that they associated »democratic socialism« with a democratic attitude. In his lecture on a youth rally in 1932, Vorrink defined it as »an ethos, based on sacrifice and a sense of community.«⁵⁶ He agreed with Adolf Wallentheim, Chairman of the Swedish social democratic youth movement, who had stated during the conference of the Socialist Youth International in that same year: »Socialism is the realisation of democracy in *all* domains of life.«⁵⁷ The term »democratic socialism« referred to both a »societal ideal« and an »ethical ideal«, as SDAP's ideologue Herman Bernard Wiardi Beckman put it in 1935.⁵⁸ In this sense, the phrase »democratic socialism« contained more than the phrase »social democracy«, which mainly denoted equal participation in society and economy. According to Vorrink, »democratic socialism« could be combined with »political democracy«. He even called the latter »the mightiest force behind the edu-

53 *Johan Willem Albarda*, Over politiek, in: *De Socialistische Gids*, 1934, pp. 244–251, here: p. 247. See also *Hueting/De Jong Edz./Neij*, Troelstra en het model van de nieuwe staat, pp. 194 and 203; *te Velde*, De domesticatie van democratie in Nederland, p. 21.

54 *Willem Adriaan Bonger*, Het boek van De Man, in: *De Socialistische Gids*, 1927, pp. 673–689, here: p. 683. See also *Cohen*, Om de vernieuwing van het socialisme, pp. 184–194; *Knegtmans*, Socialisme en democratie, pp. 98f.

55 *Willem Banning*, Hoe hebben wij de Duitse gebeurtenissen te verstaan?, in: *De Socialistische Gids*, 1933, pp. 669–679, here: pp. 669f. See also *Knegtmans*, Socialisme en democratie, pp. 91, 152–157 and 250f.

56 *Het Volk*, 19 July 1932 (morning edition).

57 *Vorrink*, Om de vrije mens der nieuwe gemeenschap, p. 66 (emphasis in the original).

58 *Herman Bernard Wiardi Beckmann*, J. Huizinga, In de schaduwen van morgen, in: *De Socialistische Gids*, 1935, pp. 718–725, here: p. 722.

cation in societal responsibility«. ⁵⁹ That does not mean, however, that the strong support for »democratic socialism« should be interpreted as a social democratic embrace of parliamentary democracy as the only form of democracy, as many authors have done. ⁶⁰ Instead, these Social Democrats clearly developed an ethical vision of democracy as well.

Another way for Social Democrats to express their love for a democratic way of life was to explicitly define »democracy« as an ethos based on harmony, tolerance, liberty and equality. In this sense, they presented »democracy« as the opposite of dictatorship, instead of the opposite of aristocracy, as they had done in the nineteenth century. Before the introduction of universal suffrage, Social Democrats described »democracy« as a state form in which all classes had equal political influence, in contrast to the »aristocratic« regime. In the 1930s, however, Social Democrats defined »democracy« as freedom from dictatorial oppression. This shift in antonyms hints at a shift from a political to an ethical understanding of »democracy«. ⁶¹

This moral definition of »democracy« differed in two respects from the ethical meaning of »democratic socialism«. Where »democratic socialism« referred to equality, the moral interpretation of »democracy« stressed the importance of freedom. Bonger mentioned both equality and liberty as democratic ideals in »Problemen der democratie«, but called the latter the most important. ⁶² Furthermore, »democratic socialism« was seen as a utopia. Vorrink illustrated this when he told young SDAP members in 1933: »democratic man is still being formed«. ⁶³ Social Democrats who talked of »democracy« in a moral sense, on the other hand, referred to an ethos that already existed. In their eyes, true democrats should already be tolerant. In order to distinguish this definition of »democracy« from »democratic socialism«, I use the term »moral democracy«.

It is interesting to note that Social Democrats did not use an adjective for their moral view on democracy, although some contemporaries used a suitable term in the 1930s. Abraham Carel Josephus Jitta, the editor of the progressive liberal journal »De Groene Amsterdammer« and a law professor, coined the phrase »essential democracy« in 1936. Inspired by Bonger's definition of democracy, he stated that democracy entailed both a »formal democracy« (a political system based on popular sovereignty) and an »essential democracy«. He defined the latter as »the religious and ethical ideal which one hopes to realise by acknowledging popular sovereignty«. ⁶⁴ SDAP leaders must have been familiar with Josephus Jitta's views since he was a well-known intellectual and a prominent member of the progressive liberal »Vrijzinnig-Democratische Bond«. Moderate Social Democrats shared his fear that the rise of the Dutch national socialist movement would destroy the democratic ideals. Therefore, the SDAP supported the national movement »Eenheid door Democratie« (Unity through Democracy) in its defence of civil liberties. Its social democratic and progressive liberal members (like Josephus Jitta) perceived democracy as the best way of life. ⁶⁵ And yet, Social Democrats did not copy the term »essential democracy«.

⁵⁹ Vorrink, *Om de vrije mens der nieuwe gemeenschap*, p. 67.

⁶⁰ Knegtmans, *Socialisme en democratie*, p. 145; Hartmans, *Vijandige broeders?*, pp. 203–208.

⁶¹ *Te Velde*, *De domesticatie van democratie in Nederland*, pp. 19f. and 23.

⁶² Bonger, *Problemen der democratie*, p. 15.

⁶³ Vorrink, *Om de vrije mens der nieuwe gemeenschap*, p. 62.

⁶⁴ Abraham Carel Josephus Jitta, *Het wezen der democratie*, Leiden 1938, pp. 10–12. Josephus Jitta had already defended a moral view on democracy in *De Groene Amsterdammer*, 29 May 1936.

⁶⁵ H. Zeldenrust, *Het bolwerk van de Nederlandse democratische gedachte. De geschiedenis van de Nederlandse beweging voor Eenheid door Democratie (1935–1940)* (unpublished master thesis), Groningen 1985, p. 1; Frits Rovers, *Eenheid door Democratie. Een analyse van een burgerlijk-democratische volksbeweging in de jaren dertig*, 1986, in: *Utrechtse historische ca-*

Nevertheless, an analysis of explicit social democratic definitions and descriptions of »democracy« shows that the SDAP did share Josephus Jitta's moral notion of democracy. This can be deduced from many writings and speeches, both in the internal debate on the reform of the party and in practical debates with outsiders on the anti-democratic threat. One of the clearest examples was offered by the committee that discussed the possible programmatic renewal of the SDAP in 1933: »Democracy [...] is a lot more than the basis for a political system: it is the expression of a belief, based on the principles of freedom and equality for the law for all people.«⁶⁶ That was mainly Banning's work, but the committee also contained representatives of all subdivisions within the party.⁶⁷ Many articles in »De Socialistische Gids« offered the same description of democracy. The religious socialist Moltzer, for instance, emphasised in 1934: »[T]he real terrain of democracy is neither psychology, nor sociology, but ethics.«⁶⁸

The moral aspects of democracy were also highlighted with metaphors. In 1935, Albarda told parliament: »[D]emocracy is a gentlemen's agreement between people to honour and protect each other's rights and liberties.«⁶⁹ With this figure of speech, he underlined that democracy was more than a specific type of political system based on parliamentary rule and universal suffrage. Instead, it was a code of conduct. Moreover, he used the metaphor as an argument to defend democracy against anti-democrats. At the same time, he implied that heartfelt democrats should have as much liberty as possible. The »gentlemen's agreement« only worked, he argued, if everybody honoured it. If not, offenders should lose their privileges. »Democracy«, he said, »should not, no, simply cannot tolerate that democratic rights and liberties are abused by one group to destroy the rights and liberties of others.«⁷⁰ The journal of »Eenheid door Democratie« contained a similar metaphorical message in 1938, when it compared democracy to a public park. The most important characteristic of a park was not its design and layout, as this could be reconfigured from time to time. The true value of the park lay in the opportunities it offered its visitors to freely discuss or criticise these new designs. Only those who believed in the need of a dictatorship needed to be watched by park rangers.⁷¹

The desire for action against anti-democrats fanned a debate within the SDAP about the level of repression that was allowed in a democracy. The party grappled with a dilemma: was it democratic to deprive anti-democrats of their right to criticise democracy in the streets, the press and parliament? Both advocates and opponents of repressive measures defended their position in terms of »moral democracy«. The most famous proponent of a ban on anti-democratic parties was George van den Bergh, a professor in constitutional law. For him, democracy above all guaranteed freedom of opinion. That principle was so valuable that anti-democrats forfeited their equal rights to their own freedom if they did not respect the liberties of others. Van den Bergh concluded in his inaugural lecture in

hiers 7, 1986, pp. 1–97, here: pp. 31f. The journal »Eenheid door Democratie« contained many examples of a moral definition of democracy. See for example the issue of 1 November 1935. A speech by Josephus Jitta on »essential democracy« during a conference of »Eenheid door Democratie« was published in: *Het Vaderland*, 15 October 1936 (morning edition).

66 Cited by: *Hartmans*, *Vijandige broeders?*, p. 207.

67 *Knegtmans*, *Socialisme en democratie*, pp. 96–105.

68 *Moltzer*, *Bonger's boek over democratische problemen*, pp. 420 and 422–424. See also *Johan Willem Albarda*, *Over politiek*, in: *De Socialistische Gids*, 1933, pp. 413–426, here: p. 419; *Van den Bergh*, *Bart Van den Tempel*, pp. 586–592, here: p. 592; *Willem Adriaan Bonger*, *Het staatkundige stelsel der sociaal-democratie*, in: *De Socialistische Gids*, 1935, pp. 493–498, here: pp. 493f.; *Bonger*, *Godsdienst en democratie*, p. 739.

69 *HTK 1935–1936*, p. 218.

70 *Ibid.*

71 *Eenheid door Democratie*, 24 December 1938.

1936 »that democracy can use dictatorial weapons for one single purpose: to defend itself against dictatorship«.72 Most of his fellow Social Democrats, however, complained that Van den Bergh's suggestion was too radical and undermined the democratic principle of tolerance. »Het Volk« protested: »[A] very true democrat will agree that democracy guarantees the protection of the minority against the ›dictatorship‹ of a majority.«73

The SDAP leaders had a number of reasons to emphasise the moral value of democracy. First of all, they hoped to attract voters. The disappointing electoral results during the economic crisis (the party gained around 20 % of the parliamentary seats) made them realise that not all workers would automatically follow their calls. Therefore, the board decided to moderate the party's ideology. Part of this strategy was an increasing emphasis on the democratic nature of the SDAP, for example by using »democracy« as a slogan in election campaigns. Social Democrats also regarded it as their duty to instil their followers with democratic sentiments.74 Finally, the SDAP leaders wished to end the political isolation of their party. Since Troelstra's revolutionary attempt in 1918, the other parties hesitated to form a government with the SDAP. Moreover, the conservative authorities kept a watchful eye on Social Democrats. Their distrust was strengthened when the SDAP refused to condemn a mutiny of sailors in the navy in 1933, which led to repressive measures that limited the freedom of its members. SDAP leaders hoped to escape this situation by underlining their loyalty to the ideal of democracy.75 They overlooked that their bourgeois opponents did not share their moral interpretation of democracy, as the next paragraph shows.

III. DEFENDING AND REFORMING DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS

In addition to the protection of the democratic ideal, the defence of democratic institutions was an important topic of public debate in the 1930s. During these practical discussions, Social Democrats used the term »democracy« mainly to refer to a political constellation. This demonstrates that the political interpretation of democracy never left the social democratic vocabulary, despite all simultaneous claims that a true democracy was an equal society or a way of life. In their defence of democracy, members of the SDAP alternated between a political and a moral understanding of the concept. This brought them into conflict with the bourgeois majority of Catholics, Protestants and conservative Liberals. These parties, who dominated the government in the 1930s, regarded democracy as a mere state form. Moreover, they tried to reform the existing parliamentary system into an authoritarian version of democracy, either because they were unhappy with it themselves or because they wanted to prevent that large parts of the population would renounce a representative form of government altogether. By contrast, almost all Social Democrats associated democracy with a strong parliament. As a result, the debate about the defence of democracy also entailed a debate about what democracy should look like.

In the 1930s, what I would like to call ›disciplined democracy‹ was one of the most popular alternatives to a parliamentary version of democracy in Europe. It was based on

72 *George van den Bergh*, *De democratische Staat en de niet-democratische partijen*, Amsterdam 1936, pp. 8 and 25f. (emphasis in the original).

73 *Het Volk*, cited by: *Leeuwarder Nieuwsblad*, 7 October 1936. See also *Het Vaderland*, 15 October 1936 (morning edition); *Johannes A. O. Eskes*, *Repressie van politieke bewegingen in Nederland*, Zwolle 1988, pp. 246–256.

74 *Hartmans*, *Vijandige broeders?*, pp. 148–152, 178–181 and 229; *Kaal*, *Constructing a Socialist Constituency*.

75 *Hans Blom*, *De mouterij op De Zeven Provinciën. Reacties en gevolgen in Nederland*, Bussum 1975; *Knegtmans*, *Socialisme en democratie*, p. 111.

the idea that the people and their representatives should act responsibly towards the government, instead of the other way around. If this civic attitude was lacking, a strong executive should have repressive measures at its disposal to restore law and order. Civil liberties could be sacrificed for the national interest, as long as all citizens were treated equally. Ideally, the balance of power shifted from the legislative to the executive. Many commentators mentioned »democracy« together with »authority«, »leadership« and »responsibility«. The German jurist Karl Loewenstein even introduced the adjectives »militant«, »disciplined« and »authoritarian« to denote this form of democracy, after he had fled Nazi Germany.⁷⁶ He urged European states to defend themselves against political extremists within their borders. He also underlined the contested nature of the concept of democracy, when he wrote that »disciplined« or even »authoritarian« democracy »shattered« the delusion that democracy is a stationary and unchangeable form of government.⁷⁷

In the Netherlands, the Catholics, the Protestants and the conservative Liberals embraced such a »disciplined democracy« even before Loewenstein did, although they did not copy his phrase »authoritarian democracy«. Starting in the late 1920s, and especially after 1933, they took repressive measures against radical movements. Frightened by domestic unrest and by the fall of the Weimar Republic, they removed extremists from parliament and the civil service, curbed the freedom of the press and of associations and made it possible to ban political parties. The latter proposal differed from Van den Bergh's suggestion: the government outlawed any party that had broken the law, whereas the social democratic professor only wanted to make anti-democratic parties susceptible to a ban based on their ideology. This means that the governmental measures were not only aimed at Communists and National Socialists, but also kept Social Democrats in check. Conservative politicians and journalists explicitly stated that democracy and authority went hand in hand, in order to underline the democratic nature of their repressive measures. Jannes van Dijk, a Protestant MP, asked the rhetorical question: »Can one speak of a healthy democracy, when it pursues means to undermine the authority of the government?«⁷⁸

Only a small minority of Social Democrats talked about democracy in a similar fashion. The legal scholar Isaac Coopman based his dissertation in 1939 partly on Loewenstein and considered certain measures against extremist MPs (including temporary and permanent suspension) as »weapons of democracy«. ⁷⁹ A better-known Social Democrat who defended the idea of »disciplined democracy« was the engineer Jan Goudriaan. He felt that the SDAP leaders should have condemned the naval mutiny in 1933 more clearly. In »De Groene Amsterdammer«, he compared them to people in a working-class neighbourhood who watched approvingly how a bunch of rascals lighted a fire and overpowered a police officer, edged on by a lunatic armed with bullets and dynamite. This ended tragically because one of the rascals died in police fire and the lunatic enjoyed free publicity. Goudriaan not only attacked the mutineers (the rascals) or communist agitators (the lunatic), but the Social Democrats who laughed at the predicament of the police. He made it

76 Karl Loewenstein, *Autocracy Versus Democracy in Contemporary Europe*, in: *American Political Science Review* 29, 1935, pp. 571–593 and 755–784, here: pp. 580 and 593; *id.*, *Militant Democracy and Fundamental Rights*, in: *American Political Science Review* 31, 1937, pp. 417–432 and 638–658; *id.*, *Legislative Control of Political Extremism in European Democracies*, in: *Columbia Law Review* 38, 1938, pp. 591–622 and 725–774, here: p. 774.

77 *Ibid.*

78 HTK 1932–1933, p. 1969. Many other examples can be found in *Joris Gijzenbergh*, *Crisis of Democracy or Creative Reform? Dutch Debates on the Repression of Parliamentary Representatives and Political Parties, 1933–1940*, in: *id./Saskia Hollander/Tim Houwen et al. (eds.), Creative Crises of Democracy*, Brussels 2012, pp. 237–268.

79 Isaac Coopman, *Bescherming van het parlement. Maatregelen tegen de orde verstorende en revolutionaire afgevaardigden*, Amsterdam 1939, p. 2.

absolutely clear that he deemed this attitude undemocratic: »Strong governmental authority is no reactionary slogan; it is a democratic demand par excellence.«⁸⁰

Many other Social Democrats, however, rejected the notion of ›disciplined democracy‹ and criticised the advocates of strong leadership as undemocratic. Their arguments show that the SDAP refused to associate democracy with authority. In the 1920s, the party did not favour social democratic German administrators who were responsible for suppression. When Carl Severing, Minister of the Interior in Prussia, proposed in 1923 to ban the »Deutschvölkische Freiheitspartei«, »Het Volk« condemned this act.⁸¹ The paper also regarded Goudriaan's article as treasonous and welcomed his decision to leave the SDAP in 1933.⁸² More often, Social Democrats aimed their criticism at the Catholics, Protestants and conservative Liberals. Vliegen for instance complained in parliament that »democracy is being clipped, shrunk, besieged« as a result of the ban for military personnel to join the SDAP.⁸³ Because he emphasised freedom, the notion of ›moral democracy‹ can be recognised. Albarda also used the concept of democracy as a weapon against governmental repression. The difference to Vliegen was that Albarda described democracy as a political system, by arguing that a »true democracy« allowed all political movements the right to be represented. He urged the other MPs »to refrain from the destruction of principal democratic institutions«.⁸⁴

Social Democrats also showed their love for the existing parliamentary system in a more positive way, by claiming that it had to be defended against anti-democrats. They presented this as the defence of democracy without clamouring for complete democratic renewal, in contrast to the bourgeois advocates of ›disciplined democracy‹. First, this meant that Social Democrats only accepted moderate repressive measures that did not hinder the right of representation. Their parliamentary group, for example, defended stricter parliamentary rules in 1934, together with other MPs. To make their case, they used the following metaphor: »These rules are an antidote, not from the dictatorial poison cabinet, but prepared from simple medicine in the home apothecary.«⁸⁵ In effect, they said that the regulations fitted in the existing democracy with a strong parliament. The SDAP chose a different rhetorical strategy than the advocates of ›disciplined democracy‹, who defended the democratic nature of their repressive measures by stressing the need for a strong executive in a renewed democracy. The social democratic rhetoric was meant to recommend parliamentary regulations, without setting a precedent for stricter repressive measures that could hinder the SDAP as well.

Second, the explicit defence of »political democracy« became an important theme in the journals, conferences and committees of the SDAP. These sources did not say anything about the reform of the existing parliamentary regime, but stressed that the Social Democrats embraced this system as a goal, instead of it merely being a means to the development of socialist society. »Het Volk« perceived Hitler's rise to power as »an urgent warning to protect democracy, the political and economic democracy, against all attacks«.⁸⁶ »The example of the Scandinavian democracy« showed how the extremists could be contained, according to an article in »De Socialistische Gids«: »Here people have shown that the

80 De Groene Amsterdammer, 18 February 1933.

81 Het Volk, 24 November 1923; *Gotthard Jasper*, *Der Schutz der Republik. Studien zur staatlichen Sicherung der Demokratie in der Weimarer Republik 1922–1930*, Tübingen 1963, pp. 141–143.

82 *Blom*, *De miterij op De Zeven Provinciën*, pp. 163f.

83 HTK 1932–1933, p. 1964.

84 HTK 1938–1939, p. 1317.

85 HTK 1933–1934, Supplement 231, no. 4, p. 5.

86 Het Volk, 31 January 1933 (evening edition), cited in: *Hartmans*, *Vijandige broeders?*, p. 105.

political democracy is viable, when there is enough political will.«⁸⁷ The SDAP saw democracy as a political system that deserved to be defended, both against extremists and against conservatives who were willing to undermine parliamentary representation and civil liberties. Again, the increasing moderation of the SDAP is visible. Social Democrats combined their renewed faith in parliamentary democracy with their defence of a democratic ethos. It is once again clear that »democracy« had no unequivocal, clear-cut meaning in the eyes of the SDAP.⁸⁸

IV. DIFFERENT INTERNATIONAL ROLE MODELS: GERMANY AND SWEDEN

Both the German SPD and the Swedish SAP started to widen their concept of democracy after the introduction of universal suffrage, around the same time as the SDAP.⁸⁹ Before that moment, all three parties used the term »democracy« without an adjective to refer to the parliamentary system. The German communist Arthur Rosenberg described the social democratic language of the nineteenth century: »The masses, in harmony with the vocabulary of the civilised people and politicians, got used to equate democracy with liberal democracy, with its peaceful and parliamentary methods.«⁹⁰ Socialist journalists and MPs also associated democracy with parliamentarism, due to the experience of SPD functionaries in representative institutions. The same applied to Swedish MPs, who refrained from radical rhetoric.⁹¹ German and Swedish Social Democrats changed their understanding and use of the concept of democracy when the introduction of universal suffrage seemed to complete »political democracy«, as in the Netherlands. Despite their common starting point, however, they adopted different linguistic strategies and emphasised different types of democracy. The SAP was more ambitious and successful in widening its concept of democracy than the SPD because of different positions in their respective national political landscape.

At first sight it would seem that German Social Democrats were in a good position to develop the notion of »social democracy«. While their Dutch counterparts were struggling with the aftermath of Troelstra's failed revolution, the SPD had risen to power in 1918. As the largest party throughout the 1920s, it dominated the Federal Government in the first two years of the Weimar Republic. The party also wielded considerable power on the local level in the 1920s and again provided the chancellor between 1928 and 1930. Yet, it proved impossible to use this power base to democratise societal and economic areas of life in interwar Germany. One reason for this failure was that the SPD felt forced to spend all its energy on the protection of the new parliamentary regime against the Communists and National Socialists. The bourgeois parties left this task to the SPD because they themselves were not entirely enthusiastic about the democratic constitution. During the party conference in 1924, Social Democrats complained that they had had no time to expand

87 *H. Jacoby*, *Denemarken, het land van de sociale democratie* (translated by *L. J. Kleijn*), in: *De Socialistische Gids*, 1935, pp. 190–198, here: p. 198.

88 Cf. *Knegtmans*, *Socialisme en democratie*, pp. 145, 250 and 252; *Berger*, *Democracy and Social Democracy*, pp. 21f. and 26; *Hartmans*, *Vijandige broeders?*, pp. 204–208.

89 Sweden already knew full male suffrage since 1909, but did not introduce universal suffrage for all representative chambers for men and women until 1921. In Germany, universal suffrage was introduced in 1919.

90 *Arthur Rosenberg*, *Demokratie und Sozialismus. Zur politischen Geschichte der letzten 150 Jahre*, Amsterdam 1938, p. 326.

91 *Berman*, *The Social Democratic Moment*, p. 99; *Berger*, *Democracy and Social Democracy*, pp. 16 and 21.

political democracy: »[T]he defence of the republic demanded all the power which social democracy could muster.«⁹²

Another explanation for the lack of a strong pursuit of »social democracy« was the strife in the SPD. Radical members wanted to use revolutionary means to establish complete social and economic equality, but lacked well-developed plans to use the unexpected fall of the *Kaiserreich* to their advantage. Moderate Social Democrats, on the other hand, voluntarily put the socialist dream on hold. They refrained from revolutionary reforms of the newly established democracy and embraced »political democracy«, hoping that universal suffrage would soon bring a socialist victory. They avoided terms like »social democracy« in order to distance themselves from radical socialists. This strategy backfired, since it created a gap between moderate party leaders on the one hand and their radical rank-and-file members and young party functionaries without parliamentary experience on the other hand. Many party members had been raised with revolutionary Marxist rhetoric and now felt that the time had come for a quick and complete take-over of society.⁹³ These moderate German SPD leaders were the exact opposite of Troelstra, who overestimated the revolutionary zeal of the working class.

Between 1918 and 1920, these semantic conflicts in German Social Democracy resembled the debates in the SDAP. In order to defend their revolutionary strategy, the radical members of Social Democratic parties in both countries stressed that democracy was not finished. The »Unabhängige Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands« (USPD) called the »dictatorship of the proletariat« democratic. Its members in the Executive Council of the Worker's and Soldiers' Councils of Berlin (Vollzugsrat der Berliner Arbeiter- und Soldatenräte) claimed that institutions such as theirs should be the stepping stone for the future »proletarian democracy«.⁹⁴ Some journalists and politicians of the »Mehrheitssozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands« (MSPD) agreed that only a »dictatorship of the proletariat« could establish the »true democracy«.⁹⁵ The leaders of the MSPD, however, countered that any regime that was not based on the majority of the people destroyed a »democratic principle«.⁹⁶ In addition to this explicit defence of parliamentary democracy, they suppressed the proponents of a »dictatorship of the proletariat« in 1920. They acted more like the Dutch reformists, albeit for a different reason: the SPD tried to defend the new republic, while the SDAP tried to get accepted.

In the following decade, the moderate and radical members of the reunited SPD remained divided on the issue of a »social democracy«. The left wing of the SPD continued to demand a democratisation of society, especially in the turbulent year of 1923 and during the Great Depression. Radicals lost faith in the ability of the party leaders to lead them out of the economic crisis and into a »social democracy«. This pessimism was justified because local and national social democratic functionaries could not bring about large-scale reforms of society and economy that their followers wished for. Many workers were also disappointed by the decision of the party leadership to give the defence of »political democracy« the priority over the pursuit of a »social democracy«. This was illustrated by an appeal of the party executive board to its voters in the party newspaper »Vorwärts« in 1928.

92 Cited in: *Wilhelm Leo Guttsman*, *The German Social Democratic Party, 1875–1933. From Ghetto to Government*, London 1981, p. 312. See also *Donald Sassoon*, *One Hundred Years of Socialism. The Western European Left in the Twentieth Century*, London 1996, p. 49.

93 *Guttsman*, *The German Social Democratic Party*, pp. 309 and 311; *Berman*, *The Social Democratic Moment*, pp. 122f., 137–142, 142–149, 184 and 200; *Stefan Berger*, *Social Democracy and the Working Class*, Singapore 2000, pp. 4 and 94–114.

94 Cited in: *Schmeitzner*, *Ambivalenzen des Fortschritts*.

95 Cited in: *ibid.*

96 Cited in: *ibid.*

It mentioned »full democracy« and socialism as goals, but presented »democracy« as the means to achieve this goal. The executive board explicitly associated democracy with »political power« that could be gained in elections.⁹⁷ Constitutional theorists Gustav Radbruch and Hermann Heller also described democracy as a state form.⁹⁸

Nevertheless, moderate SPD leaders did pursue some democratisation outside of the political arena. Two alternative forms of democracy that did gain their support in the second half of the 1920s were »economic democracy« and, to a lesser extent, »corporate democracy«. These terms were developed by economists and unionists like Rudolf Hilferding, Fritz Tarnow and Fritz Naphtali, but were also popular among social democratic journalists. At first, they used the term »economic democracy« in a radical sense. Naphtali stated that the abolition of private ownership could only be completely achieved after the eradication of capitalism. And Erik Nölting, a Prussian MP for the SPD, said during a trade union meeting in 1928 that »economic democracy« was a consequence of »the inadequacy of the mere formal democracy of the ballot«.⁹⁹ However, SPD members soon struck a more moderate tone. Naphtali himself felt it was possible to make a start with »economic democracy« in a bourgeois society, by introducing a moderate form of planned economy and some types of worker participation in decision-making processes. This means that these social democratic intellectuals and unionists propagated a combination of an early form of »economic democracy« and »political democracy«, just as many leading figures in the SDAP.

This was partly a strategic decision to emphasise the feasibility of »economic democracy« in the short run. In 1919, the Reich Minister of Economy Rudolf Wissell already admitted that the MSPD should have done more than establishing a »formal political democracy« to keep the people happy.¹⁰⁰ Tarnow argued in 1925 that the piecemeal pursuit of »economic democracy« would quickly restore the proletariat's faith in the ability of the social democratic movement to improve living standards. However, the Dutch socialist J. Hessen stressed in 1933 that this strategy had failed. He warned the readers of »De Socialistische Gids« that the fall of the Weimar Republic had shown that workers needed a »social democracy« to keep their faith in the advantages of »political democracy«.¹⁰¹ His analysis of the German situation was adequate: many workers were indeed disappointed that the SPD wanted to put economic power in the hands of the state instead of the workers.¹⁰² The Dutch audience was not susceptible to Hessen's warning, though, because Hitler's rise to power had convinced the SDAP even more of the value of »political democracy«.

German Social Democrats who actively battled against the Nazis referred to the same new types of democracy as their Dutch counterparts. First, SPD functionaries embraced pluralism as a democratic ideal, hoping that the notion of »moral democracy« would help

97 Vorwärts, Berliner Volksblatt, Zentralorgan der Sozialdemokratischen Partei Deutschlands, 29 April 1928 (morning edition), cited in: *Wolfgang Luthardt*, Sozialdemokratische Arbeiterbewegung und Weimarer Republik. Materialien zur gesellschaftlichen Entwicklung 1927–1933, vol. I, Frankfurt am Main 1978, pp. 39 and 41.

98 *Guttsman*, The German Social Democratic Party, pp. 313f. and 317–321; *Sassoon*, One Hundred Years of Socialism, pp. 51f.; *Berger*, Democracy and Social Democracy, pp. 21f. and 25.

99 *Erik Nölting*, Wirtschaftsdemokratie. Zum Kongress des Allgemeinen Deutschen Gewerkschaftsbundes, in: Metallarbeiter-Zeitung, Wochenblatt des Deutschen Metallarbeiter-Verbandes, 1 September 1928, cited in: *Luthardt*, Sozialdemokratische Arbeiterbewegung und Weimarer Republik, vol. I, p. 294.

100 Cited in: *Schmeitzner*, Ambivalenzen des Fortschritts.

101 *J. Hessen*, Het lot der Duitse sociaal-democratie (translated by *L. J. Kleijn*), in: De Socialistische Gids, 1933, pp. 373–380, here: p. 379.

102 *Berman*, The Social Democratic Moment, pp. 183–186; *Berger*, Social Democracy and the Working Class, pp. 124f. and 128f.; *Berger*, Democracy and Social Democracy, p. 25.

them in their fight against right-wing anti-democrats.¹⁰³ Some of them also pursued an ›disciplined democracy‹, although they formed a small minority in the party. For decades, historians and political scientists have perceived the Weimar Republic as a weak state which could not defend itself from the national socialist onslaught.¹⁰⁴ Recent scholarship, however, has rightly emphasised that it is important to study the history of the Weimar Republic through the eyes of its contemporaries, who focussed on the possibilities the Republic had to offer.¹⁰⁵ Therefore, it is worthwhile to study the views of the few advocates of ›disciplined democracy‹ in the SPD on the combination of repression and democracy. These views are at least as relevant as a verdict by later scholars on the success of their attempts to attack anti-democrats.

Two minority factions in the SPD propagated a strong militant democratic state. The most energetic group was composed of young social democratic intellectuals who stood on the right wing of the SPD and some of whom were connected to the small group of (Protestant) Religious Socialists. They wanted to reform the representative system: parliament should express the people's unity instead of its differences and the power of the executive should be increased. Furthermore, citizens' liberties should be curtailed if that was in the national interest. The *Reichstag* deputy Carlo Mierendorff desired in 1932 »a democratically organised state that wants the state to be a strong state, and which does not regard the constitution as a system of checks to safeguard the individual sphere, but that instead wants to firmly organise the collective will with the goal of state control and direction of the economy.«¹⁰⁶ His supporters also linked democracy to people's unity and strong leadership in their writings. Historian Stefan Vogt labels their discourse as »authoritarian democracy«.¹⁰⁷ Although these young intellectuals did not use this adjective, the resemblance with Loewenstein's »authoritarian democracy« is undeniable. It is important to note that these circles formed a tiny minority. Nevertheless, some of them occupied a position in the SPD thanks to their contacts with sympathising party leaders, like Carl Severing and Albert Grzesinski.

These local and national administrators and police chiefs formed the second group in the SPD that advocated the use of repressive instruments in a democratic state. These authorities suppressed Communists and National Socialists, especially between 1922 and 1930. They tried to reassure the German citizens that their democratic republic was not defenceless. Therefore, they acted against troublemakers, radical civil servants, slanderous propaganda, unruly demonstrations, the public display of uniforms and political violence. They even considered banning local offices of political parties.¹⁰⁸ They emphasised that repression was democratic. For example, Severing stressed in 1923 that it was legitimate to

103 Ibid., p. 26.

104 Jasper, *Der Schutz der Republik*, pp. 2f.; Capoccia, *Defending Democracy*, pp. 203 and 206–208.

105 Eric D. Weitz, *Weimar Germany and its Histories*, in: *Central European History* 43, 2010, pp. 581–591, here: pp. 582–585; Benjamin Ziemann, *Weimar was Weimar. Politics, Culture and the Emplotment of the German Republic*, in: *German History* 28, 2010, pp. 542–571, here: pp. 543, 554f., 564f. and 569.

106 Carl Mierendorff, *Der sozialistische Weg*, in: *Sozialistische Monatshefte* 38, 1932, pp. 989–993, here: p. 990, cited by: Stefan Vogt, *Strange Encounters. Social Democracy and Radical Nationalism in Weimar Germany*, in: *Journal of Contemporary History* 45, 2010, pp. 253–282, here: p. 279.

107 Stefan Vogt, *Nationaler Sozialismus und Soziale Demokratie. Die sozialdemokratische Junge Rechte 1918–1945*, Bonn 2006, p. 213. See also *ibid.*, pp. 153 and 207–232.

108 Wolfram Pyta, *Gegen Hitler und für die Republik. Die Auseinandersetzung der deutschen Sozialdemokratie mit der NSDAP in der Weimarer Republik*, Düsseldorf 1989, pp. 265–274 and 366; Smaldone, *Confronting Hitler*, pp. 181f. and 193–201.

ban a party in »the most libertarian democracy in the world«, provided the ban was based on the party's illegal actions instead of ideology.¹⁰⁹ That could be interpreted as the first step on the road towards a »disciplined democracy«, even if Severing did not use this term. Many of his party comrades disagreed with Severing. They objected that party bans and other repressive measures were detrimental to civil rights. Their reaction shows that the majority of the SPD rather maintained the parliamentary system with its ethos of tolerance. The SPD never fully embraced the notion of »disciplined democracy«, which might help to explain its failure to stop the NSDAP.¹¹⁰

Sweden offered better opportunities for Social Democrats to extend and creatively use the concept of democracy. Swedish Social Democrats owed their success to their predecessors before the First World War, led by Hjalmar Branting, who had toned down their Marxist rhetoric. While the SAP continued this revisionist strategy, it won electoral victories between 1920 and 1940 (its share of the vote rose from 29.7 to 53.8%) and enjoyed the confidence of the bourgeois parties (at least compared to the SPD and SDAP). This provided the SAP with a position in numerous cabinets between 1920 and 1926 and dominance over the government between 1932 and 1939. As a result, the party could introduce political and economic reforms. Moreover, it could present its policies as a process of democratisation. Therefore, the Swedish Social Democrats left their mark on the national debate about the true meaning of democracy.¹¹¹

The members of the SAP used this latitude first of all to pursue »social democracy«. The party leaders alternately used a radical and a moderate definition of this phrase. The radical wish for a completely democratised society in the long run, which could only be reached in the future, was expressed in the intellectual journal »Tiden« (sanctioned by the board of the SAP), the party programme, in parliament, in newspapers and during party meetings. Starting in the early 1920s, prominent party members called for the widening of the concept of »democracy« by adding the adjectives »social« and »economic«, and sometimes also »cultural« and »industrial«. With these phrases, they demanded that the principles of equality and participation would be applied to all spheres of life. Unlike the SDAP and SPD, the SAP emphasised the importance of the equal distribution of immaterial welfare, like education, under the heading of »cultural democracy«.¹¹²

The best known spokesman of the prominent advocates of »social democracy« was Per Albin Hansson, Chairman of the SAP since 1925 and Prime Minister between 1932 and 1946. In 1935, for example, he declared that all societal domains should be democratised before it could be said that »democracy prevailed completely«.¹¹³ Hansson used the vernacular of his followers, as he addressed 20,000 Swedish, Danish, Finnish, Norwegian and Icelandic Social Democrats during the »Day of the Nordic Democracy«. In the same

109 Jasper, *Der Schutz der Republik*, pp. 142f.

110 Ibid., pp. 162f., 171f. and 288–291; Vögt, *Nationaler Sozialismus und Soziale Demokratie*, pp. 207–209 and 214f.; Smaldone, *Confronting Hitler*, pp. 199 and 201.

111 Berman, *The Social Democratic Moment*, pp. 96f.; Sassoon, *One Hundred Years of Socialism*, pp. 42–46; Sejersted, *The Age of Social Democracy*, pp. 73, 78, 127–129, 141–143 and 159–162; Anna Friberg, *Towards Total Democracy? The Concept of Democracy within the Swedish Social Democratic Party, 1921–1939*, in: *Gijzenbergh/Hollander/Houwen et al., Creative Crises of Democracy*, pp. 215–236, here: p. 217.

112 Ibid., pp. 218 and 222–234; Anna Friberg, *Democracy in the Plural? The Concepts of Democracy in Swedish Parliamentary Debates during the Interwar Years*, in: *Contributions to the History of Concepts* 7, 2012, no. 1, pp. 12–35, here: pp. 19–21 and 27–31.

113 Cited in: Jussi Kurunmäki, »Nordic Democracy« in 1935. On the Finnish and Swedish Rhetoric of Democracy, in: *Jussi Kurunmäki/Johan Strang (eds.), Rhetorics of Nordic Democracy*, Helsinki 2010, pp. 37–82, here: p. 49.

speech he welcomed the alliance of his sympathisers with the »bourgeois democracy«.¹¹⁴ By doing so, he both stressed the Social Democrats' allegiance to the democratic ideal and underlined that they pursued another type of democracy than the bourgeois parties. In that last respect, he differed from the moderate SDAP leaders. After all, they shunned the phrase »bourgeois democracy« because they associated it with their revolutionary opponents.

At the same time, Hansson and his followers also used the phrases »social democracy«, »economic democracy« and »industrial democracy« to refer to the stage that preceded the socialist utopia. Alongside their more radical message that the full democracy could only be attained with the advent of the socialist society, Swedish Social Democrats maintained that the first steps towards social and economic equality could already be taken in the existing capitalist order. They also stated that this beginning democratisation could take place in the parliamentary system. In order to make this point, they explicitly combined the phrases »political democracy« and »social democracy«. These conceptual changes were meant to make the democratisation of society more compatible with the existing »political democracy« in the short run, before the destruction of capitalism. In this respect, the SAP looked a lot more like the moderate SDAP.

An early example of this linguistic moderation was that the concepts of »economic democracy« and »industrial democracy« underwent changes since the late 1920s, when the SAP's belief in quick socialisation had waned. The party no longer defined »economic democracy« as complete communal ownership of the means of production, but as mere civil participation in a planned economy. Likewise, the Social Democrats reduced their idea of »industrial democracy« from the proletariat's take-over of the factories to worker co-participation in decision-making. They even practically dropped the theme of »industrial democracy« after 1924.¹¹⁵ Hansson's famous parliamentary speech in 1928 also mixed radical and moderate rhetoric. During his plea for national fellowship under the banner of a »people's home« (*folkhem*), the SAP leader proclaimed that »political democracy should be supplemented by a social and economic democracy«.¹¹⁶ Hansson added egalitarian societal and economic dimensions to the current idea of democracy, but still included the existing parliamentary institutions in his wide definition of »democracy«. Hansson expressed the same notion when he glorified »Nordic Democracy« in the 1930s.¹¹⁷

The fluctuations in the SAP's usage of the term »democracy« in the 1920s and 1930s were caused by shifting power relations in Sweden. During the global revolutionary threat between 1917 and 1919, Branting had adopted a moderate course which allowed him to demand the complete introduction of universal suffrage. After that success, the SAP used its position in government to pursue further democratisation. In the second half of the 1920s, however, the party lost power and had to curb its Marxist rhetoric. The Social Democrats started to talk about »democracy« in more moderate terms in order to gain support from the bourgeois parties for their democratisation agenda. This strategy bore fruit in the 1930s. Thanks to the SAP's moderate course and senior role in the government, other parties accepted its pursuit of a combination of the existing parliamentary regime with moderate social and economic reforms. This redefinition of democracy was part of the reform of the SAP from a worker's party to a people's party. At the same time, the SAP

114 Cited in: *ibid.*, p. 41.

115 *Sassoon*, *One Hundred Years of Socialism*, pp. 44 and 46; *Friberg*, *Towards Total Democracy?*, pp. 227–233.

116 Cited in: *ibid.*, p. 227. See also *Sejersted*, *The Age of Social Democracy*, pp. 98 and 161f.

117 *Jussi Kurunmäki/Johan Strang*, Introduction. »Nordic Democracy« in a World of Tensions, in: *id.*, *Rhetorics of Nordic Democracy*, pp. 9–36, here: p. 14; *Kurunmäki*, »Nordic Democracy« in 1935, pp. 70–71, 74–76.

was bold enough to demand some form of »social democracy«, unlike the SDAP and SPD. Hansson even confidently stated in 1935 that his concept of »democracy« served as an international model.¹¹⁸

Swedish Social Democrats were also familiar with the notion of »disciplined democracy«, thanks to the writings of the Finnish nationalist Urho Kekkonen in 1934. Like Loewenstein, he associated democracy with coercion and leadership. The SAP felt more sympathy, however, for the notion of »moral democracy«. The best-known Swedish defender of this democratic way of life was the liberal professor and publicist Torgny Segerstedt. He argued in 1933 that the twin pillars of democracy were tolerance and freedom of opinion. SAP members also included these elements in their definition of democracy. Hansson's idea of the »People's Home«, for example, not only referred to social equality, but also to national solidarity. Hitler's rise to power urged the SAP even more to emphasise the value of democratic ideals. This rhetoric was part of its rapprochement with the bourgeois parties, which made it possible for Hansson to govern throughout the larger part of the 1930s and to lead a common front against fascism. Again, it becomes clear that the moderate course of the SAP enabled it to influence the national debate about democracy, provided it used a wide, inclusive definition of the concept.¹¹⁹

V. CONCLUSION

This conceptual analysis has tried to enrich our understanding of the social democratic attitude towards democracy by focusing on the contemporary meaning and use of this concept. Earlier authors have examined how much Social Democrats appreciated the notion of democracy. By contrast, this article has shown that the Dutch, German and Swedish Social Democrats did not share one single understanding of »democracy«. To begin with, they viewed it from three distinct perspectives. The most basic understanding of democracy referred to a state form, often based on parliamentary representation. The social dimension of democracy was connected to economic equality and worker cooperation. The last aspect of democracy, often neglected in historiography, was moral in nature. In this view, democracy is a harmonious way of life. The first two perspectives have received the most scholarly attention because they fit in the historiographical focus on the ideological debate between revolutionaries and reformists. And yet, the SDAP, SPD and SAP also frequently thought about the ethical side of democracy as one of the first political movements in the twentieth century.

Although the three perspectives on democracy have been distinguished here for analytical purposes, they were not completely separated. In Marxist theory, the political side of democracy was merely a starting point for the process of social democratisation. Radicals argued that the existing »bourgeois democracy«, in preparation for »social democracy«, should be replaced by a »dictatorship of the proletariat« after the socialist take-over. Moderates countered that parliamentary democratic institutions could be used both before and after the removal of the capitalist order. Thus, they tried to reconcile »political democracy« and »social democracy«. In practice, they prevailed over the radical wing of the SDAP in the second half of the 1920s. The reformists also had a less ambitious view of »social democracy«. Instead of reserving the term for a socialist utopia, they used it to refer to the more humble aim of democratising capitalist society. The same applies to social

118 *Berman*, *The Social Democratic Moment*, pp. 107–121; *Kurunmäki*, »Nordic Democracy« in 1935, pp. 14 and 76f.

119 *Kurunmäki/Strang*, Introduction, p. 26; *Kurunmäki*, »Nordic Democracy« in 1935, pp. 38 and 74–77.

democratic ideas about democratic mores. The moderates felt that it was already possible to educate the masses to live their lives democratically, before a socialist utopia provided equality and solidarity. This became especially urgent in the face of the extremist threat in the 1930s.

The three dimensions of democracy can be further subdivided into different variants of democracy, although again the distinction was not always rigid. »Political democracy«, for example, was an umbrella term for all democratic states. Most of the time, Social Democrats used this term to refer to the existing parliamentary system, but sometimes they belittled it and referred to it as »bourgeois democracy«. The Austro-Marxist Adler saw the »dictatorship of the proletariat« as a form of »political democracy«. A last variant of »political democracy«, especially popular among the conservative adversaries of the Social Democrats, has been called »disciplined democracy«. »Social democracy«, too, consisted of multiple forms of democratised society. The term could refer to a socialist utopia, but could also apply to the first steps in the domain of economy towards that socialist dream. The latter were often linked to the concepts »economic democracy«, »industrial democracy« and »corporate democracy«. The term »democratic socialism« was sometimes meant as a synonym of »social democracy«, but could also have a moral connotation. The term »democracy«, too, could refer to an ethical interpretation of a democratic way of life. I have called this »moral democracy«. Social Democrats could clearly choose between more options than only »political democracy« and »social democracy«, which are most frequently mentioned.

The choice between so many types of democracy caused many differences of opinion within the social democratic movement. Especially the SDAP and SPD were internally split over the true meaning of democracy. The radical and moderate wings of both parties used different linguistic strategies to claim the concept of democracy. The advocates of revolutionary action embraced a vocabulary that would convince the masses that there was more to be gained after the introduction of universal suffrage. With phrases like »social democracy«, »bourgeois democracy« and »dictatorship of the proletariat« they entered in a polemic with their reformist opponents. These rejected the most radical terms and preferred »democratic socialism«. If they talked about »social democracy«, they only did so in combination with »political democracy«. They could also refrain from using adjectives at all when they wanted to emphasise the political aspect of democracy.

It is interesting to see that the debate about democracy was not solely an intellectual affair. Instead, social democratic leaders did their best to teach their followers, including the youth, what democracy was and should mean. This suggests that these leaders also tapped into the vocabulary of their followers. In addition, Social Democrats debated the meaning of »democracy« with outsiders. Especially when they discussed the extremist threat with their bourgeois opponents, the moral and political aspects of democracy became the topic of debate. The SDAP stressed its preference for the democratic code of conduct in the hope that the authorities would start to trust them. However, they still felt forced to attack the conservative notion of »disciplined democracy«.

There were also important differences in the meaning and use of the concept of democracy between the SDAP, SPD and SAP. These can be explained by the varying political circumstances. Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden all gained universal suffrage at the same time and all coped with the international rise of anti-democratic movements. Still, the position of the SPD, SDAP and SAP in their respective political landscape and the background of their internal factions influenced their definitions of »democracy«. The struggle of the SDAP with the concept of democracy was determined by Troelstra's revolutionary attempt in 1918. The radical wing grasped the opportunity to clamour for further democratisation. The moderate majority was more careful and downplayed its Marxist

rhetoric in order to waylay the suspicion of the conservative parties. The SDAP members combined »political democracy« and ›moral democracy‹ to show that they were loyal to the democratic cause. They could not convince the conservative government until the end of the 1930s, however, and suffered some repression in the name of the dreaded ›disciplined democracy‹.

The German moderate party leaders embraced parliamentary democracy from a completely different background. They had to spend a lot of their energy on defending their new parliamentary system. That raised the question whether they should reform the existing »political democracy« into a more repressive ›disciplined democracy‹. The Swedish Social Democrats had the strongest influence on the national and international debate about democracy. Their moderate course and their position in power allowed them to make a humble beginning with »social democracy« within the existing »political democracy«. More than the German and Dutch parties, the SAP was moderate enough to be accepted and radical enough to use its power to successfully redefine »democracy«. This was an important asset in the interwar period, when the discourse on democracy was more fluid than the historiographical image of a dichotomous struggle between democrats and anti-democrats suggests.

