CHAPTER 1

European Socialists and the State: A Comparative and Transnational Approach

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Many political observers in Western democratic countries equate socialism with statism.¹ Surprisingly, from the late 1970s onwards, many socialist elites and experts have helped to nurture this widespread belief, according to which West European socialist parties relentlessly put their faith in the state to solve political problems. In many cases, their proclaimed hostility towards the “big” or the “nanny” state, supposedly adored by their predecessors, is part of a broader strategy aimed at convincing the socialist electorate and activists about the need to redefine the role of the state and roll back its frontiers—albeit in a very different sense (but not radically so) than the project promoted by their right-wing adversaries. The former leader of the British Labour Party, Tony Blair, was thus undoubtedly one of the most radical and successful supporters of this kind of re-engineered

¹ The authors warmly thank Jenny Andersson, Alain Chatriot, Michele Di Donato, and Gerassimos Moschonas for their insightful comments on earlier versions of this text.

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M. Fulla, M. Lazar (eds.), European Socialists and the State in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries, Palgrave Studies in the History of Social Movements,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-41540-2_1
approach to the state, which emerged from the 1980s under Neil Kinnock’s leadership, and culminated in New Labour’s articulation of the Third Way in 1994. In 2003, Blair’s Chancellor of the Exchequer, Gordon Brown, offered a clear and unnuanced narrative of the relationship between the British left and the state that was both clear and historically dubious: “for nearly a century the left in Britain wrongly equated the public interest with public ownership, and at times came near to redefining one means—public ownership—as a sole end in itself.” In the same speech delivered to the Social Market Foundation at the Cass Business School, a prominent institution for training future financial global elites, he then urged New Labour’s supporters to revert “to the left’s old, often knee-jerk, anti-market sentiment, to assert with confidence that promoting the market economy helps us achieve our goals of a stronger economy and a fairer society” (Brown 2003).

This volume aims to dispel this reductive, indeed incorrect, account of the relationship between West European socialism and the idea, form, and use of the state. It challenges what remains a dominant interpretation of the left’s propensity for state intervention in political and journalistic debates. The collection of chapters gathered herein promotes a comparative and transnational approach over the longue durée, which is likely to produce a better understanding of West European socialism. In so doing, it also casts an original light on the history of the contemporary state in Europe and its intersections both with the social movements of socialism and trade unions and the organised parties of the left, their intellectuals and experts. It is striking that these two topics have rarely been studied together. States are constantly subject to pressure from groups, lobbies, and political parties that strive to control, influence, and shape them. Conversely, they have an impact on these different organisations, and socialist parties are not immune to this influence; confrontation with the Leviathan has led to sometimes extensive transformations and reconfigurations within them. Each of the chapters in the volume dealing with a national case highlights reciprocal influences, transfers of experience, and the circulation of ideas, practices, and actors, but also oppositions between one party and another in relation to the state—because socialism is unique and many-layered, unified and diversified, homogeneous and heterogeneous. Parties claiming allegiance to it have both points in common and differences, which may have faded over time without disappearing for all that. Socialist parties have been exposed to many similar issues in their management of state relations across time but have also come up with a
variety of different solutions to the theoretical, strategic, and ideological problem of the state.

A workers’ movement activist born in the first half of the nineteenth century (very presumably a male person) would probably have been surprised if he knew that his successors would invest so much energy in order to take control over the state, and so much effort at transforming an institution that by early worker’s movements was identified as one of the main causes of his exploitation. This was so since the conservative Europe of the Vienna Congress (1814–1815). From the French Revolution to the 1848 Year of Revolution, at a moment in time when labour was becoming globalised and industrialisation was taking off, organisations of international working-class solidarity sprang up despite the hostility of counter-revolutionary states (Bensimon 2014). Socialists and trade unionists, many of them in exile, were the principal actors in these mutual aid organisations that were central in the early socialist movement and whose main centres could be found in London, Paris, and Brussels. They provided valuable support to the workers’ fight against capitalism, the repressive state, and “the moral authority of established Christianity” within the nation space (Eley 2002). The revolutionary period of the 1840s was a major turning point in this history of confrontation between the working class and the nation-state. The famous maxim of the Communist Party Manifesto, published in 1848, according to which “the proletariat has no country” should not be interpreted as an unconditional ode to the internationalist cause; indeed, Marx and Engels immediately made clear that “the proletariat must first conquer political power, must rise to be the dominant class of the nation, must constitute itself as the nation and is so far national itself, though not at all in the bourgeois sense” (quoted in Weill 2005). From the 1860s onwards, the European left started to wonder what to do with the modern state. This problem sparked heated debate within the International Workingmen’s Association (IWMA), with which the names of Marx and Bakunin are associated. Some of its members, while denigrating the imperial and bourgeois state, supported the foundation of a transnational “state of workers”, which would have induced a significant degree of centralisation and co-ordination of their organisation; others, among them the anarchist groups but also the British trade unions, continued to deny the state any legitimacy and argued for an international association based on decentralisation and self-help principles (Delalande 2019).
This seminal controversy continued throughout the twentieth century. Although feelings of distrust towards the state never disappeared within socialist and social democratic parties that were increasingly an integral part of their respective national politics, the dominant aim among ruling elites as well as activists was to make the conquest of power an essential goal. The contributions collected in this volume address three crucial issues through which to grasp this phenomenon and its limits: What were the different ideological approaches to the state developed within the socialist and social democratic parties, and how can one explain their early acculturation to the modern state? What have they done with the state and what has the state done with socialists? And finally, how do the reconfigurations of the state, which is no longer the repository but rather the principal administrator of political authority (Genshel and Zangl 2011), affect European socialists, and how do socialists in their turn deal with them?

**Understanding Socialism Through the State and the State Through Socialist Parties**

As all the authors involved in this work demonstrate, the socialist relationship to and with the state is dense, complex, ambiguous, contradictory, and constantly evolving over time. This represents a challenge to bring together the literature on socialism and that on the state, which have largely ignored each other. A considerable number of academic books and articles by historians, political scientists, and sociologists have been devoted to European socialism—to its origins, development, progress, successes, and crises—either by juxtaposing national case studies or by making comparative studies or offering a global approach (Delwit 2005; De Waele et al. 2013; Eley 2002; Grunberg 1997; Lazar 1996; Moschonas 2002; Sassoon 2014 [1996]; Schmidt 2016). In a new preface to the 2014 edition of his history of twentieth-century socialism, however, Donald Sassoon rightly pointed out the centrality of the “capture of the state” in the social democratic project: “Having correctly identified the state as the principal regulator of the capitalist economy, socialists sought, successfully, to democratize it and use it” (Sassoon 2014 [1996]). But neither historians of socialism (Donald Sassoon’s book included) nor their colleagues dealing with the history of the modern state ever really addressed this astute comment.

In the 1980s, political scientists started contributing elements of a solution to this puzzle. In the wake of Theda Skocpol’s famous call to “Bring
the state back in”, scholars questioned the neo-Marxist theory of a radical autonomy of the state from organised social interests (among them political parties) in policymaking. Many of them argued that political parties (and other societal organisations), even when they were not in office, succeeded in influencing policymaking by mobilising multiple resources and networks. But this methodological approach to the relationship between parties and the state remained extremely macropolitical. The former were generally apprehended as monolithic blocs, thereby precluding any detailed study of the strategies their members or sympathisers initiated to penetrate the Leviathan. Since the 2000s, a substantial number of publications in sociology and political science deliberately left aside political parties to focus on the question of the state—its construction in the national context, its development, its public policies, and its profound changes in the more recent period (Hay 2014; King and Le Galès 2017; Le Galès and Vezinat 2014; Levy, 2006; Manow et al. 2018). No research in these fields aims systematically to theorise socialism and the state together, even though these two entities are at the heart of Europe’s political history in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. In their important work devoted to the reconfigurations of European states, whose crisis they diagnose, political scientists Desmond King and Patrick Le Galès deliberately leave aside the study of relations between public authorities and state institutions such as courts of justice, parliaments, and political parties. They felt that applying such an approach would have opened up so many new questions that it would have required a second volume. The recent team research coordinated by political scientists Philip Manow, Bruno Palier, and Hanna Schwander does, however, underline the interest of a combined approach to politics and the state in order to gain an understanding of the changes in the different types of welfare state on the European continent over the recent period. They highlight the burden of change in party systems in the return to a more favourable perception of the welfare state in Western Europe at the turn of the 2000s, after two decades during which it had been subject to fierce criticism. This turnaround is explained by the decision of anti-system parties (Capiocca 2002) on the radical left and right to prioritise the welfare state on their political agendas—even

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2 A detailed presentation of this debate does not fall within the scope of this introduction. For a clear explanation of its key issues, see, for instance, Heclo 1974; Orloff and Skocpol 1984; Hall 1993.
though the welfare chauvinism promoted by the radical right completely subverts the original ideal of universality.

Relying on the body of works on socialism mentioned above, the perspective we offer considers socialist and social democratic parties not as homogeneous and united entities but as competitive organisations with profound ideological divergences, fierce struggles for control of the party apparatus, and continuous confrontations over the correct strategy with which to win power at local and/or national levels, as well as how to exercise this very power. We pay attention to the sociological realities of these parties by discussing their membership and electorate and by considering the way they are embedded in society. Unlike some—including recent—research which has essentially focused on the party structure only to the detriment of its broader relations with the labour movement (Imlay 2017), the complexity of party reality and its connections with non-political organisations has been taken into account as far as possible. Parties are systems for action which, in most cases, maintain relations with trade unions and associations but also with larger networks of international, national, and local influence. Municipal socialism appears in many countries as a testing ground for training officials who gradually took over the tools necessary for exercising responsibility on the local and national levels. From the late nineteenth century to the post-1945 period, running a town hall was a very effective means for socialist elites of becoming familiar with the language and practices of the state. After several years spent exercising local responsibilities, many town councillors came to think of government authority not as a tool of the dominant class or a system of repression but as a lever enabling social reforms implemented in their towns and cities to be realised on a grand scale (Chamouard 2013; Dogliani 2018). The local experience was thus key for the development of a statist strategy.

To fully understand the socialist acculturation to the modern state in the twentieth century, particular attention should also be turned to the groups of experts who, to a far greater extent than previously, played a key role as intermediaries in the process of accelerated interpenetration between socialism and the state, mainly after 1945 (even though this process started earlier in the Nordic countries). Through contact with these experts or under their impetus, socialist leaders and officials acquired the codes, skills, and language of government which they had mostly lacked in the preceding period. Nowhere else than in Western Europe was this trend so intense. Within this space, the contributors have focused on a certain
number of case studies involving France, Italy, Spain, Greece, Austria, Germany, Belgium, the United Kingdom, and Scandinavia, with particular attention to Sweden. In this way, without being exhaustive, our study acquires real pertinence. It includes the diversity of parties within European socialism, thus recapturing, here too, an ideal-typical distinction between socialist parties with relatively lightweight structures and fairly loose links and social democratic parties founded on a solid apparatus and an organic relationship with the trade unions. However, as the French, West German, Austrian, Swedish, and British cases show, these structural differences did not bring about strong divergence in the way of viewing the modern state. From 1945 to the late 1970s at least, all these parties shared pro-statist inclinations, even though they gave rise to vigorous debate. Western Europe here is considered in its widest geohistorical and geopolitical sense. It is in fact where socialism originated, and its organisations were established sooner and more firmly than anywhere in the world.

A second reason prompting us to focus on Western Europe is the prominent role played by the state in this space. As the sociologist Alan Scott rightly pointed out, there is an “agreement [among social scientists] that the state—conceived as an impersonal authority—is both product and motor of European modernity” (Scott 2018). In the late nineteenth century, Western Europe was the cradle of the welfare state, which was the component of the modern state apparatus that mobilised most socialist efforts to transform it. As Sassoon convincingly noted in the aforementioned preface, the socialist struggle to improve the welfare state profoundly influenced their ideas and practices by gradually reducing “the importance of the older goal of abolishing capitalism” (Sassoon 2014 [1996]).

Looking at the state through the prism of socialist parties appears thus as an insightful means to improve our knowledge of the West European state, especially the welfare state, without claiming to have learned all there is to know about it. As mentioned earlier, contributors to this volume view the state as a modern state. They define it as a political entity based on the rule of law and the plurality of competing elites struggling for (temporary) control over the state apparatus. Furthermore, as Alan Scott reminds us, “the dominant model is that of the ‘modest’ nation-state that does not seek to govern, regulate, or define all aspects of society” and does not question capitalism (Scott 2018). Following Max Weber, Joseph Schumpeter, Gianfranco Poggi, and Michael Mann’s research on the state in contemporary Western societies, this analytical approach prompts the different contributors presented herein to speak of
the state in both singular and plural. By state they mean, in its most functional sense, a set of specialised, interdependent, and lawful government institutions exercising their authority over a given territory, and a set of administrative and bureaucratic structures that are sometimes rivals, sometimes allies, depending on the public policies being implemented. Far from being a monolithic entity the modern state is criss-crossed by many actors and institutions. It has many levers with which to establish authority and legitimacy (Morgan and Orloff 2017). Simultaneously, in line with Max Weber’s work and that of many others after him, the modern state is also apprehended in its abstract and symbolic dimension. For socialists, it is not only an apparatus over which to gain control and to transform but also a myth laden with ambiguities. The multiple uses public discourse makes of it highlight this relationship of fascination-repulsion maintained by socialists towards the state. At one moment the proclaimed objective of gaining victory over the Leviathan and transforming it serves to mobilise masses of supporters, while at another—and often in the same action—a considerable number of members or sympathisers, particularly those also engaged in trade-unionism, express their anxiety about extending state prerogatives too far in social and economic areas, and even more in the domain of surveillance and repression. From the 1980s onwards, socialist (minoritarian) elites and grassroots activists expressed vigorous opposition to the pro-market state policies implemented by their parties in office. Hostility towards pro-business policies implemented by Gerhard Schröder in Germany, and more recently by François Hollande in France, even led to splits in their parties.

More widely, no reflection on the state can disregard the intrinsic plurality of the concept. The national histories of the state differ; it is not defined in the same way; it does not express the same reality; its political institutions and government authorities are not organised in the same way. There are major differences, for example, between centralised and decentralised states, between states considered to be strong and those said to be weak.3 They do not always play the same role in the economy or in the social sphere understood in the broad sense (welfare state, professional relationships, etc.) and do not enjoy the same legitimacy. Neither are they bearers of the same mythologies, particularly in relation to two basic

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3 This dichotomy has given rise to many debates in the recent literature. For a critical exchange based on the example of the US federal government, see Novak 2008, and Orren and Skowronek 2017.
entities—nation and people—which are both sources of intense mobilisation within the history of the left.

Put differently, national historical backgrounds exert considerable influence on the parties being studied, just as the parties’ own conceptions of the nation and people rebound on to states. As for the socialist and social democratic parties, their relation to the state varies not only according to country but also on whether they are speaking of the state when they do not control it or whether they are acting upon it (or trying to do so) when they are in power. They comprehend the state in its institutional and political dimensions—in the conceptual sense of the word (polity)—as well as in terms of public policies for economic and social matters, education, and culture. They also see it as a bureaucratic machine that has personnel (civil servants, public sector workers) who might share some of their ideals, and who may or may not vote for them, especially in recent times marked by mounting criticism of the state coming from socialist or social democratic ranks epitomised by Tony Blair and Gerhard Schröder.

For these reasons, the present volume dismisses any top-down approach to socialist and social democratic parties and the state, because some parties may declare themselves in favour of weak state intervention in the economy and yet defend its role in the welfare state, education, and culture, and champion a large administration and powerful state or para-state personnel. Others on the contrary may advocate cultural liberalism while supporting vigorous intervention by the public authorities to regulate capitalism. There is a broad spectrum of socialist positions with regard to the state across time and space. Therefore, a major issue addressed here is to what extent does Western socialist relationship to the state, beyond national peculiarities, appear exceptional when compared with those developed by its political adversaries?

**A Not-So-Special Relationship**

From the late nineteenth century onwards, following Engels’s recommendations, socialist and social democratic parties began a long process of acculturation to the nation-state as built by their political opponents. In the 1880s, during plans to create a new International to replace the defunct IWMA, a choice was made in favour of a structure based on labour movements that were firmly embedded in national-state contexts and represented mass parties with the firm ambition to influence the parliamentary process in order to control the state. The Second International was
thus an organisation dominated and structured by the great socialist parties in the United Kingdom, France, and especially Germany (Haupt et al. 1974; Dogliani 2017; Alayrac 2018). The socialist elites could not ignore the process of nationalisation of the European working classes. This led them to develop a growing interest in the machinery of the modern state. The latter was increasingly seen as an effective tool with which to initiate a transition towards a socialist society. Was not one of the principal objectives shared by socialist parties at the turn of the twentieth century the building of a "welfare state avant la lettre" (Moschonas 2017), distinct from a Bismarckian conservative social state? Animosity towards repressive state institutions—the police, the army, the judiciary, and the fiscal authorities—and regular denunciation of state collusion with private capitalists certainly remained a key concern in pre-1914 socialist circles, especially at their national and international congresses. But in actual fact socialist elites were already demonstrating a desire to take control of the state so that its formidable power could serve the interests of the workers’ movement, as the journalist John Rae, one of the best observers of the international left during this period, already noticed in 1901:

Revolutionary socialism, growing more opportunist of late years, seems losing much of its old phrenzy, and getting domesticated into a shifty State socialism,4 fighting a parliamentary for minor, though still probably mischievous, changes within the line of existing society, instead of the old war à l’outrance against existing theory in whatever shape or form. (Quoted in Mazower 2012)

This analysis led the socialist elites to regard the modern state designed by their adversaries as a legitimate polity within which to do politics and elaborate public policies aiming at democratising it, notably by permitting the integration of the working class and relentlessly calling for the introduction of (male) universal suffrage. They dealt with the “colonial question” at the turn of the twentieth century in the same way. The matter therefore deserves particular attention—especially since the various contributions herein do not focus on this issue. In their introduction to a pioneering study on the relationship between socialism and colonialism before 1914, the French historians Madeleine Rébérioux and Georges Haupt noted three types of position with regard to colonialism, positions which

4 Our italics.
crystallised—and hardened—during the Stuttgart Congress of the Second International in 1907 (Rebérioux and Haupt 1963). The right-wing position, defended by a minority faction but united around the German socialist deputy for Mainz, Eduard David, justified the colonialist project and, by so doing, accepted the almost total integration of socialism into the imperial state. Much more tempered, the majority of the congress—including most of the great leaders such as Jaurès, Vandervelde, MacDonald, Bernstein, and Bebel—rallied around the “reformist” approach supported by the Dutchman Henri Van Kol. While leaving plenty of room for the denunciation of “colonial barbarism”, Van Kol defended a motion acknowledging that colonisation was difficult to reverse. The document demanded the development of a “socialist colonial program” that would allow progress to be brought to the colonies and would lead them (very) gradually towards self-determination. The anti-colonial left was in a minority at the congress and, despite Kautsky’s support, its unconditional condemnation of imperialism appears barely to have been heard. From the First World War to post-1945 decolonisation, the call to reform the imperial state—and not to destroy it—remained broadly supported by the majority in European socialist circles, even if the two other trends previously referred to did not disappear. In the inter-war period, the positions adopted by the Labour and Socialist International (LSI), created in 1923 and dominated by West European parties, presented many features in common with those prevailing in the international liberal political spectrum, which strongly supported the principles of Wilsonianism (Manela 2007; Laqua 2015). Although with some qualifications and without really admitting to it, socialists and liberals therefore shared the same conception of what the post-war international order should be like: a world organised by democratic nation-states where colonisation could not disappear in the short term. The motion voted by the LSI at its 1928 congress in Brussels was symbolic. In the colonies which they considered to be “primitive”, the socialists defended the preservation of the colonial state, judged to be necessary on pain of leaving colonised populations “at the mercy of a ‘minority of white settlers or… native despotism’” (quoted in Imlay 2017). With the advent of decolonisation, their reluctance to let go of such positions made French, British, Belgian, and Dutch socialists ill-equipped to understand the aspiration of Asian, North African, and African nationalists to build a nation-state unfettered by foreign control (Imlay 2013). From 1945 onwards, however, decolonisation aroused fierce debates within the socialist and social democratic parties,
thereby bringing on internal fractures that sometimes led, like in the French case, to a scission between the socialists remaining firmly convinced that colonial empires could be still reformed, and those supporting nationalist demands for independence. National and colonial issues thus had significant consequences for socialist thinking about the state. From the 1900s onwards, the exacerbation of nationalism and imperial rivalries between European powers dealt a severe blow to the internationalist ideal. Far from putting an end to patriotic attitudes the war accentuated the divisions within the European labour movement. At the international socialist conferences at Zimmerwald (1915) and Kienthal (1916), those demanding a “revolutionary social democracy”, personified particularly by Lenin, Trotsky, and Rosa Luxemburg, berated the “social chauvinism” and “opportunism” of social democratic leaders who had supported their country’s participation in the war, going against the commitments made at Basel in 1912.

By the end of the war, the socialist movement had to face a greater challenge from the birth of communism. The Third International established in 1919 was actually resolutely against—in words and in deeds—the two principles which were the backbone of post-war social democratic internationalism, namely the defence of the democratic nation-state. These antagonistic positions adopted towards the state contributed to the increasing divergence between socialist and communist ideologies during the inter-war period. Socialist parties remained highly suspicious towards the Bolshevik experience—even if socialist economists demonstrated genuine interest in economic planning set up under Stalinism in the 1930s. The experience of planning led them to moderate their ambition to radically change the administrative apparatus when they (occasionally) seized power in the 1920s, for instance in Great Britain and Germany. Distrust towards a strong state in economic matters, whose effect was most visible in the refusal to make a clean break with capitalism, drastically increased during the following decade due to the threatening rise of fascism. Strong fascist and communist states were clear counter-models for any socialist government seizing power after the Second World War. Their aversion to Stalin and Hitler’s totalitarian states reinforced their attachment to the liberal democratic state. Although they regularly pointed out its shortcomings, failures, and supposed betrayals, Western European socialists have since considered that this entity was unsurpassably preferable to any other. Throughout the Cold War, while remaining interested in the experiences of economic planning carried out in Eastern and Central Europe,
especially in the 1950s–1960s (Christian et al. 2018), they never really attempted to initiate a radical transformation of the modern state when they held office at the national level.

Nordic social democracy is, however, an interesting counter-example to this general trend. As shown by several authors in this volume, the Swedish Social Democratic Party (SAP), owing to an extended period in power at national and local levels, shaped an original welfare state in a democratic regime. The differences between this model and the continental or British experience were considerable, especially regarding the design and principles ruling the welfare state, as Gøsta Esping-Andersen convincingly demonstrated almost thirty years ago (Esping-Andersen 1990). But the Nordic parties, like their counterparts, did not break with capitalism. They used the state to implement their own public policies, for instance on fiscal and social issues (progressive taxation, universal social rights, etc.). However, they guaranteed the rule of law and the primacy of liberal democracy in much the same way as their centre-right and conservative opponents.

A crucial cause explaining this “not-so-special” relationship between Western socialism and the state resulted from the absence of any clear blueprint designed by socialist experts to radically change its functioning, including after the Second World War. The reflections about the state in European socialist parties are actually not the result of pure intellectual speculation. It is primarily a political affair, determined by several factors—for example, whether the party is in opposition or in power, with this latter situation frequently causing an ideological aggiornamento. It is common to stress the influence of Marxism on socialist parties and therefore on their perception of the state, but this assertion demands many qualifications. First, Marxism does not occupy the same place in all parties: it has a prominent place in Germany—or at least did until the celebrated Bad Godesberg Congress of 1959—as well as in Austria, France, Italy, and in Spain until relatively recently; but Marxism was less influential in Scandinavia where local interpretations of functional socialism prevailed. Furthermore, Marxism was not identical from one party to another, being little more than rhetorical in France and more sophisticated in Germany and Italy.

What is more, Marxism was not the only doctrinal reference for socialists when they thought about the state. The members of the Fabian Society were one of the main intellectual influences on the British Labour Party in the late nineteenth century, but that influence extended well beyond the borders of the United Kingdom, to France and Spain, for example, in the
1930s. Socialists were also occasionally inspired by the thinking and practices developed by the Christian Socialists, as the French historian Jacques Droz already noted in his work on democratic socialism (Droz 1966). Then, after the Second World War, Keynes replaced Marx in economic theory and action, leading to considerable changes in socialist relation to the state in a capitalist regime. Furthermore, in many countries, there was very little theorising about the idea of the state; perception of it was based mainly on political practice, as in Sweden and the United Kingdom. Last but not least, by the end of the twentieth century, socialists were being influenced by neo-liberal theories, which they did not embrace unreservedly, but which they brought them back into an agonistic relationship to the state and particularly the welfare state. Critical thinkers of this neoliberal orthodoxy, such as Norberto Bobbio, Michael Walzer, Jürgen Habermas, and even Amartya Sen, each in his specific way, have also influenced some socialist intellectuals.

Moreover, the socialist relationship with the state is far from being limited to its theoretical aspect. In parallel with these debates, the socialist parties underwent an important sociological change, which contributed in no small measure to marginalising the tendencies within them that were passionately hostile to the state following the First World War. From the inter-war period and to a still greater extent after 1945, these parties, which were or wished to be parties of the working class—and therefore very suspicious of civil servants—started to penetrate those social classes that were dependent on or close to the state. The comparison is difficult since the ideas, status, and existence of civil servants and public employees vary so much historically and by country, but in many instances this proved decisive. In the twentieth century, socialist and social democratic parties wanted to move away from their traditional class base and appeal to the middle classes, among them those linked to the public sector, because society was changing and it was necessary to adapt to these changes, but sometimes also because of the presence of powerful communist parties that were firmly embedded in the working classes. This was the case in France during the 1930s and after the Second World War, in Italy—mainly from 1945 until the early 1980s—and in Spain just when it was emerging from the Franco dictatorship. Among these categories of public employees, teachers occupied a crucial place. On the other hand, forming a relationship of trust with the senior administration proved somewhat more delicate. In most cases, it was not until after 1945 that the socialists were
able to truly penetrate it and assimilate some of its behaviour, habitus, and vision of society.

Although the socialists influenced the state and helped to change it, they were also themselves affected by the state. They made incursions into the state, using it for their own ends, but they were in turn exploited by the state and deeply marked by their statist experience. This is one of the central points highlighted in this collective research. As partners in power, socialists, like other political parties, were integrated into the state system and sometimes fell prey to the same vices that afflicted conservative or Christian democratic parties as a result of occupying the bureaucratic machine: clientelist politics, which for example, explain Pasok’s refusal to embark on fiscal reform in Greece (however essential it was due to the country’s situation), or sometimes the practice of corruption, particularly in France, Spain, and Italy and, once again, in Greece. Socialist parties gradually became dependent on the state and reliant on the expectations, aspirations, and interests of state employees, who came to form an essential pillar of their electoral base, much more decisively so than workers by the end of the twentieth century. In the 1960s and 1970s, these groups were able to press the parties to take measures in favour of extending public sector prerogatives, but in the decades after, the reform of the state by socialists also left these groups embittered. After 1945, the growing affinities with the senior bureaucracy—sometimes bordering on collusion—could hamper plans to radically reform the state machine. In some parties, such as the British Labour Party, the prestige and authority of senior civil servants led Harold Wilson’s governments in the 1960s to quickly abandon the democratisation of Whitehall (Theakston 1992). From being independent organisations coordinating social and societal representation in the political arena, socialist and social democratic parties became increasingly a part of state structures, even “cartel parties” to borrow the notion of Richard Katz and Peter Mair (1995). This trend was a part of a more general one for Western European parties of government, such as German, Italian, Belgian, or Dutch Christian democratic parties, to take a striking example. In Katz and Mair’s opinion, the parties of government, whatever their political hue, gradually changed from the 1970s onwards into semi-public, centralised agencies, increasingly cut off from their electoral and membership base, which was itself gradually diminishing. Their survival depended mainly on “state resources and, in particular, public financing” (Aucante and Dézé 2008), which put them in danger in the event of resounding electoral defeat.
However controversial, to some degree it was a fitting description for social and social democratic parties which were less present on the ground but became powerful machines linked to the state, particularly where matters of finance were concerned. This dependence was also sociological, as these parties had been reduced to being appendices of social groups that were closely linked to the functioning of the state. The consequences of these theoretical and sociological changes on the practices of socialist governments and the attitude of their elites to public authorities are crucial.

**AN INCREASINGLY COMMON DESTINY**

What emerges over time is a five-stage development that was followed by most socialists, albeit at slightly different paces. These sequences are roughly outlined here with an indication of their dominant characteristics, certainly at the risk of oversimplifying them, whereas in fact each one gave rise to lively debate among socialist officials. From the late nineteenth century until the First World War, and against liberal thinking, the state was generally considered to be at the service of the dominant bourgeois class. It therefore had to be radically transformed, just as capitalism had to be overturned, in order to achieve a socialist order. However, attempts to render more complex the understanding of the state were voiced inside socialist parties: Jaurès in France, Bernstein in Germany, and Vandervelde in Belgium were its most prominent spokesmen. From the First World War, a decisive turning point, the question of the state and national political issues outweighed any other consideration. This focus on it was not confined to socialism, as Lenin had already noted in 1919: “Nearly all political disputes and differences turn upon the concept of the state, and more particularly upon the question: what is the state?” (quoted in Abrams 1988). Of course, not all of Lenin’s analyses were equally germane. This one, however, proved to be particularly astute, especially for understanding changes in the European socialist movement.

In the inter-war period, most socialists came to accept the state. They considered they could occupy it or even gain control of it to make it serve their ends; in fact these ends themselves were being redefined and were no longer limited to socialisation of the means of production. The state was then thought of as a tool at the service of the political, economic, and social changes they wished to promote. Here too, some minorities refused this prospect and socialists were divided on how far state prerogatives should go. This first great change was the result of several factors: the
experience of the First World War with socialist participation in the govern-ments of belligerent countries (with the exception of the Italian socialists); the effects of the 1929 crisis; the mounting power of Fascism and Nazism, as well as Stalinism and state planning; the early achievements of the Swedish social democrats but also the lessons learned from Roosevelt’s New Deal in America; the fact that Keynesian ideas were starting to infuse and that socialism was beginning its breakthrough into new social catego ries, notably state employees—a composite whole that included public sector manual workers but also office workers and middle-grade managers, who had long been unmoved by socialist discourse. While expressing their fascination with the efficiency of the state machine, many socialists became aware of the difficulty of bringing about radical change, especially in challenging political, economic, and social circumstances.

A third phase began after the Second World War: the modern state was now seen to increase its scope of activities as well as its boundaries and prestige almost everywhere. The socialists were carried along on this wave and helped to boost it (Callaghan and Favretto 2006; Callaghan et al. 2009). At the same time, many of them, particularly the German Socialist Party (SPD) and the Austrian, Belgian, and Scandinavian parties, redefined the basic tenets of socialism and also their understanding of capitalism, which led them to speak more about the market economy that could be regulated. They also played an important role in developing and implementing the post-war planning consensus: it was a time of great faith in the state and the competence of its technocrats to provide “technically correct solutions to the social and economic problems” of the moment (Müller 2011). Large-scale planning was perceived as the appropriate means to guarantee growth and stability in a political context that had been deliberately mollified, so enthusiasm for it was rife within government parties of both left and right (Christian et al. 2018). Contrary to a received idea, however, their main contributions did not fall within the area of economics. While exercising responsibility during this period, the British, German, Austrian, and Scandinavian social democrats did not in fact ever implement a “democratic plan” for capitalism that was specifically socialist. The inertia of central administrations, which were generally resistant to any large-scale reform proposed by a socialist government, only partly explains this phenomenon. It also—perhaps mainly—resulted from the firm conviction of many socialist leaders that private enterprise was more efficient than public authorities in producing market goods and services; this was allied to the fear that too much economic planning could
lead to a drift towards authoritarian regimes along the lines of those in the Eastern bloc. On the other hand, social democratic decision-makers left their mark on the transformations and reinforcement of the social and cultural state at national, regional, and local levels. A more sombre side of this “social democratic moment” was that they also supported the unfortunate initiatives of public authorities in spatial and urban planning (Sanyal 2005), which according to Tony Judt contributed to a disfigurement of the living environment that was hard for some West European populations, especially younger ones, to accept (Judt 2005).

In the years 1960–1970, this socialist state-centrism was therefore strongly criticised by parties and personalities situated not only to their left and right but also within the party’s own ranks. In the British case, the rise of state socialism, symbolised by the post-war Labour government of Clement Attlee, did not prevent socialist alternatives persisting. These claimed to represent a pluralist liberalism following in the wake of those—among whom G.D.H. Cole was unquestionably the main figure—who propounded decentralised socialism (Ackers and Reid 2016). On the continent, the anti-authoritarian and anti-bureaucratic culture espoused by 1960s protesters affected the margins of socialist groupings, particularly their youth movements, even though the party elites remained very largely impervious to this new political culture (Sassoon 2014 [1996]).

The late 1970s saw a fresh onset of censure condemning state power. This time the accusations coming from neo-liberal circles. They repeated certain elements and concepts developed by 1960s left-wing protesters, but now putting them at the service of their own political aims. The welfare state was the favourite target of these criticisms; the socialists were accused of being totalitarian, dependent on entitlements, and conservative. Other accusations against the “strong state” emerged from their own ranks in the name of solidarity with dissident movements harassed by the communist surveillance states in Central and Eastern Europe. On the defensive, the socialists were divided among several viewpoints: those wishing to maintain the welfare state of the preceding period and even to extend it, and those whose intention was to modernise the state, accepting some of the liberal criticisms while advocating a regulatory, strategic, and organising state.

This observation leads to evoke a permanent feature of socialist parties. Each of the phases previously described marks a turning point, an adaptation, or a reconversion, without the previous dominating position disappearing completely. Having now become a minority position, this continues to exist in the form of malleable residues and remnants, ready to
spring into life again as a resurgence. The changes in democracy and capitalism in Western Europe since the late 1970s seem, however, to have created a tendency for homogenisation in the way socialist elites think about and engage with the state, at least with regard to the economic and social policies pursued since the 1980s.

**IN THE ERA OF THE “NEO-LIBERAL TURN”: WHAT SOCIALISM AND WITH WHAT STATE?**

When in power, in the era of the “Thatcher-Reagan revolution”, the socialists proved to be pragmatic. They were able to reject economic state control and, at the same time, use the state to bring pressure to bear on social, educational, and cultural domains or to see through social reforms. However, more fundamentally, their situation of near-subjection to the state put socialists in an insurmountable contradiction throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Most socialist parties, again with considerable differences according to their national situation, were moving towards an economic and social policy in which the state no longer had the same central role. This was due, among other things, to globalisation, Europeanisation, and the “relative permeability” of public policies (European Union and national) to the neo-liberal paradigm—an “amorphous and malleable set of ideas” based on a belief in the undisputed superiority of the market over state intervention as a mechanism for allocating resources (Crespy and Ravinet 2014). This change was perfectly symbolised by Lionel Jospin’s reaction to the closure of a Michelin factory on September 13, 1999.

Although he was critical of Tony Blair’s Third Way, the French prime minister, loyal to the realist approach he had defended since the 1997 electoral campaign, announced on television that people should not expect everything from the state. The remark triggered a violent controversy and caused real turmoil within the left-wing coalition then in power: this doctrinal change of direction, which affected the whole of European socialism, struck at the heart of state employee and public sector interests, as well as those of their trade unions on which both governments and socialist parties depended. The result was disengagement on the part of militants and voters, which landed these parties in difficulty. The partial disaffection by public sector workers was one of the factors in the present crisis of European social democracy which, furthermore, lost its popular and working-class support (Rennwald 2015).
This crisis has been the subject of much research and many interpretations (Andersson 2010; Bailey et al. 2014; Cronin et al. 2011; Escalona 2018; Evans and Schmidt 2012; Rueda 2007). It appears inseparable from the reconfigurations of European states which had begun in the mid-1970s. As Desmond King and Patrick Le Galès have shown, states have less autonomy, and their room for action is limited by European rules and pressures, and even the injunctions of financial markets, multinationals, and rating agencies. Modern states appear to be more fragmented, less characterised by overall coherence, and often disconnected from society, which itself is becoming fractured. They have lost what the Italian sociologist Gianfranco Poggi calls their “unifying energy” (Poggi 2001) which, during the post-war growth years, was expressed in a series of measures to reduce inequality—particularly in matters of taxation (Piketty 2013). In the 1950s and 1960s, West European Welfare state thus ensured a certain level of prosperity, though for all that it does not mean this period should be held up as an irenic golden age. The internal divergences of European Socialists about the state crystallised around the turn of the twenty-first century with the controversy opened by the so-called Third Way proposals, of which Tony Blair made himself the champion, and those of the “new centre” (Neue Mitte) promoted by Gerhard Schröder. In June 1999, the two men published a common declaration, which went down in history as the “Blair-Schröder Manifesto”. This document promoted a new approach to the state which was largely inspired by—but not reduced to—the work of the sociologist Anthony Giddens, one of Tony Blair’s close advisers. The British prime minister, like his German counterpart, unambiguously espoused a “social-liberal approach”—to the great displeasure of their French comrades. Although they did not call for the state to disappear, since it had to continue guaranteeing certain public benefits, they refused any broadening of its remit or its bureaucracy and claimed that certain tasks that socialists traditionally considered to be the domain of public services could be carried out by non-state actors, the role of the state then being to ensure that everyone had access to these services (Giddens 1998; Crowley 1999; Faucher-King and Le Galès 2010). In the theory as in the practice of those advocating the Third Way, the state thus played a lesser role, or rather a different role, with regard to the economy and the welfare state. The latter had to be “modernised”—meaning reduced—but not “dismantled”. In their view,

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Tony Blair and Gerhard Schröder’s Manifesto, “Europe: The Third Way/Die Neue Mitte”, June 8, 1999, http://miroirs.ironie.org/socialisme/www.psinfo.net/dossiers/gauche/3voie/blairvo.html [Accessed September 12, 2018].
socialists and social democrats had to accept this evolution in the mission of public authorities on pain of disappearing from the political scene. To the promoters of the Third Way the twenty-first-century social democratic state should focus its efforts on forming a culture of enterprise and continue—even intensify—the state’s regulatory activity in sectors other than economic and social ones, such as human resources, research, education, culture, surveillance, or social mores. In the economic and social spheres, the Blair and Schröder governments carried out deregulatory policies which, without being entirely similar, shared a common ideological filiation. Like the right-wing West European parties, social democracy so directly contributed to the transformation and reconfiguration of the modern states in democracy.

These profound changes have directly affected socialist and social democratic parties—the political coherence of which, gradually developed after 1945, was already shaken during the 1980s and even more so with the financial and economic crisis of 2008. Socialists have therefore no longer been able to build the welfare state within the framework of the nation-state only, and those belonging to the European Union have not succeeded in developing common social policies. Their perception of the state has been profoundly affected by this. The present migration crisis also partakes of the feeling of disaffection or at least a declining attachment of European populations to the welfare state. Socialist groups too are affected by this phenomenon. As Tony Judt pointed out in 2009, in a context where migrations were less topical than they are today, “where immigration and visible minorities have altered the demography of a country, we typically find increased suspicion of others and a loss of enthusiasm for the institutions of the welfare state” (Judt 2009). However, socialist parties, like their political opponents in fact, do not passively resign themselves to these crises. As in the late 1990s with the Third Way, they attempt to participate in reconfigurations of the state by offering proposals and initiatives when they are in power or in opposition. Some of them have expressed the desire to return to a strong state, as exemplified by the (electorally unsuccessful) project developed by the leader of the British Labour Party, Jeremy Corbin. This kind of posture expresses the willingness manifested by some socialists to remain loyal to what they saw as an accepted part of their history, that being the existence of a privileged relationship with the state. It also highlights a political strategy. Since the financial crisis of 2008 and the generalisation of austerity policies all across Europe (Schäfer and Streeck 2013), voicing their faith in a strong state in
economic and social matters has appeared to some socialist elites and activists to be all the more necessary, given that new social movements, such as, among others, the anti-austerity Spanish 15-M (Indignados) Movement, have sprung up and are demanding, inter alia, state protection against widespread deregulation. The Covid-19 pandemic once more illustrates for the socialists (and not only them) the importance, not to say the centrality, of the state in hard times. The big question is whether the socialist parties are still in a position to really influence these processes, given that they have been weakened electorally, lost a substantial number of their members, and no longer have the cultural sway they once had.

The present period is therefore one of incomplete transition, for states but also for the socialists, who are confronted with an extremely serious identity crisis. According to some of them, socialism is finished. It has a glorious history but has been overtaken by current political, economic, and social changes, by the new divisions emerging between pro-Europeans and Eurosceptics and between advocates of an open society and those crusading for a closed society. Changes in the tools for state action, and indeed the rise of populism, make the socialist idea obsolete. They therefore describe themselves as belonging to the centre left or to a so-called progressive movement. Against them are those socialists who consider that social democracy still has a future. This camp, which is keen to maintain a state with influence over the affairs of the nation, is divided into two strands: those who, while proclaiming their loyalty to social democracy, accept the need for it to evolve and also for the state to be modernised; and those who strongly support maintaining the tasks of the state just as they were set out in the aftermath of the Second World War.

This book is divided into three parts, each one illuminating a particular aspect of the problematic relationship between socialism and the state, as described above. Each part is introduced by a short text raising common issues addressed by the contributors and their main findings. The first consists in a study of the ways by which West European socialist and social democratic parties conquered and acculturated to the modern state. It therefore reflects upon the fuzzy goal of “democratising the state and society”, relentlessly expressed by socialist elites and activists from the early twentieth century at least until the late 1970s. The second part of the book is dedicated to the relations between socialists and state personnel in the longue durée. It notably shows how civil servants engaged in socialism as activists and/or experts playing a crucial role as intermediaries between socialist parties and the state machinery. It is nearly impossible to
understand the success of socialist acculturation to the state without focusing on the penetration of civil servants in these organisations from the inter-war period onwards. It is also difficult not to consider their current divorce as a significant cause of the decline of socialism in Western Europe. The third part of this volume deals with what is most contemporary, that is the crisis and changes in European socialism in the context of the transformation of the state and of states in Europe, especially their economic and social prerogatives. Currently, the fate of European socialism depends on the parties themselves but also on any new configurations that states may assume. The future of states will also depend partly on the choices made by socialists—if they still exist and still have the means to shape decisions and make their voices heard.

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