

Left Catholicism, 1943-1955. Catholics and Society in Western Europe at the Point of Liberation

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SOCIALISM OUT OF CHRISTIAN RESPONSIBILITY. THE GERMAN EXPERIMENT OF LEFT CATHOLICISM (1945-1949)

Andreas Lienkamp

1. In the Beginning

In his article, “Vergessene Brückenschläge”, the Catholic socialist Walter Dirks recalls that after the Second World War Christianity and socialism, the two “powers of the soul”, initially felt a close bond. “Both had survived persecution at the hand of the inhumane dictatorship, strengthened in their cause and in the certainty of their future, and weakened through the death or emigration of significant individuals. However, as life in the Federal Republic normalised itself, the former fronts were restored”.¹ Immediately following 1945, similar to the post-World War I period, an initial atmosphere of fundamental change emerged in which no antagonism between Christianity and socialism could be detected in the political arena. “On the contrary: it was precisely these two powers that were regarded as the decisive, forward-looking factors shaping the reform of economic and social relations”.² Yet spring did not last for long. Under the sign of the Cold War the militant antisocialism of the Adenauer Era hindered the growth of the fragile buds of Left Catholicism, which did not blossom until the 1960s.

Like Walter Dirks, the Left Catholic *Bensberger Kreis*, co-founded by Dirks himself, looks back at the “forgotten bridges” between socialism and Catholicism in its memorandum, “Antisozialismus aus Tradition?”. Thereby, the verdict concerning the significance of precisely that movement, which moved the issue of rapprochement in the first half of the 20th century forward the furthest, proves to be rather sobering: “After 1945 religious socialism revived, but only briefly. It did not survive the emergence of the Federal Republic of Germany”.³ This lapidary assessment seems to render a further preoccupation with German Left Catholicism unnecessary, since at first glance this assertion does not give any doubt as to the historical ineffectiveness of this movement, at least as far as the German context after 1949 is concerned.

In his analysis of the “idea of a Christian socialism within the Catholic social movement and in the *Christlich Demokratische Union (CDU)*”, Franz Focke affirms that neither in the Weimar Republic nor in the post-World War II period did the “Catholic socialists” possess a distinct social and political influence. “Inasmuch as they once again began to work towards the

1. Dirks, “Vergessene Brückenschläge”, 239-240.

2. See Dirks, Schmidt and Stankowski, “Einleitung: Christen für den Sozialismus”, 7.

3. *Antisozialismus aus Tradition?*, 25.

same goal after 1945, they remained confined to smaller groups, like Steinbüchel, Michel and Mertens. They were called upon to provide inspiration, but they were neither willing nor capable of politically organising themselves and fighting for the acquisition of power”.⁴ Therefore, there is no place for Left Catholics in a historiography of victory and success.⁵ Is it still worth examining them closer?

Despite his verdict concerning Left Catholics, it is evident that Focke makes an exception for Walter Dirks, who was closely associated with Steinbüchel, Michel and Mertens. His stance is justifiable, since Dirks is one of the key figures of Left Catholicism in post-World War II Germany.⁶ He plays a significant role in the various efforts within Catholicism, not only on the party-political (co-founder of the “Christian socialist” CDU in Frankfurt), the theoretical (advocate for “socialism out of Christian responsibility”), the journalistic (co-editor of the Left Catholic *Frankfurter Hefte*), but also on the practical level (co-initiator of the demand for co-determination at the Catholic Convention in Bochum). These levels shall construct the framework for the ensuing attempt to reconstruct the German experiment with Left Catholicism in the second half of the 1940s and in the early years of the 1950s.

The term “Left Catholicism” shall be used as an after-the-fact label for those Catholic movements, thinkers and organisations, who understood themselves to be devout and crucial members of the Catholic Church, yet who also opted to take a socialist route (however individually natured). According to Stankowski, the term was not accepted as common linguistic usage until the beginning of the 1950s, when the differences between a majority and minority Catholicism became much more pronounced. In the immediate postwar period, the expression is to have been used in connection with progressive Catholicism in France⁷, although even in Germany at this time it occasionally functioned as a way to identify either oneself or others as being socially oriented Catholics⁸, in the latter case often with the intention to bring the others into disrepute.⁹ Unlike structurally and institutionally organised social Catholicism, the quantitatively smaller Left Catholic milieu is much more difficult to identify. Left Catholicism was pub-

4. Focke, *Sozialismus aus christlicher Verantwortung*, 292.

5. See Dirks, Schmidt and Stankowski, “Einleitung”, 8-9: Since Christians for whom socialism was not just a temporary fashionable movement “were politically defeated, memory of them was suppressed or destroyed. That history books ordinarily recount historical events from the victors' point of view is a well-known fact”.

6. See Stankowski, “Katholiken für den Sozialismus”, 10.

7. See Stankowski, *Linkskatholizismus nach 1945*, 12. He refers to Kogon, “Georges Bidault. Frankreichs Ministerpräsident”. In this profile, Kogon portrays Bidault “as the most prominent man of the new Left Catholic party, the MRP”. *Ibid.*, 665.

8. See Stankowski, *Linkskatholizismus nach 1945*, 12 and 304 footnote 27. As an example of such self-identification he refers to Dirks, “Rechts und links”. In this passage Dirks opts for a “socialist rebuilding of the economy and society” as a “Left Catholic” and out of “political love of one's neighbour”. *Ibid.*, 26, 35 and 24. The *Rheinischer Merkur*, in its 15 July 1950 issue, characterises Dirks in an intentionally critical manner as the head of a trend “that tends to be called 'Left Catholic' or 'Christian socialist’”. Citation in: Stankowski, *Linkskatholizismus nach 1945*, 319 footnote 120. Stankowski could not find an example for the application of the term in the Weimar Republic.

9. See Dirks, “Ein 'anderer' Katholizismus?”, 250.

licly represented by individual people and publication projects¹⁰, by “partisans without the support of the masses”, as Dirks so appropriately writes.¹¹

2. The Pre-History: Left Catholicism in the Weimar Republic

Just as the moment of liberation from the tyranny of National Socialism through the efforts of the Allies did not truly represent the “zero hour” in terms of social, economic, political or ideological developments, but rather a multi-layered conglomerate of historical continuity and discontinuity¹², so also does Left Catholicism in post-world war Germany not begin as *tabula rasa*. For the most part, it were the same individuals, those with a “known record”, those who already in the Weimar Period acted in the interest of Left Catholicism, who then, particularly in the last phase of the Second World War, once more began working with ideas and concepts linked to their previous preoccupations.

Associating the Catholic socialists of this era, who were in many ways quite different from each other, with one particular movement is not quite so unproblematic. At first glance, there appears to be more which separates than unites them. Included in this group are: the pastor and scholar Wilhelm Hohoff (1848-1923), who had attempted to use Thomas Aquinas’ ideas to support the theories of Karl Marx and was basically isolated from the Catholic camp, referred to himself as a socialist, and yet viewed social democracy with a critical eye; the priest, philosopher, moral theologian and social philosopher from Cologne, Theodor Steinbüchel (1888-1949), a student of Hohoff, who interpreted “socialism as an ethical idea” and who acted as a mentor to the Catholic socialists¹³; the social scientist, adult educator and committed “lay-theologian” Ernst Michel (1889-1964) who was active in the Frankfurt trade union-run *Akademie der Arbeit* and like Hohoff considered himself to be a socialist independent from the *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (SPD); the political commentator and theologian Walter Dirks (1901-1991), a student of Steinbüchel, who, educated by Romano Guardini and the Catholic youth association *Quickborn*, became an editor of the Left Catholic *Rhein-Mainische Volkszeitung* in the Weimar Republic and who published the *Frankfurter Hefte* together with Eugen Kogon after the Second World War - he, too, saw himself as a Catholic socialist dissociated from social democracy; and finally, there is Heinrich Mertens (1906-1968), the only representative of this group to join the SPD, who came from Anton Orel’s romantic Viennese school of thought, founded the association of Catholic socialists along with their publication, the

10. Ludwig and Schroeder, “Einleitung”, 9.

11. Dirks, “Ein ‘anderer’ Katholizismus?”, 250. See also *ibid.*, 253 and 256-257: “On the whole, an unorganised and only in part interdependent complex of readers, friends, informal and formal groups, impossible to organise”.

12. See Focke, *Sozialismus aus christlicher Verantwortung*, 275: “The *tabula rasa* syndrome, meaning the belief that one could completely rebuild from the ground up, was...more likely the product of political wishful thinking than a reasonable assessment”.

13. In my dissertation, I am attempting to paint a more complete picture of Steinbüchel in the context of, above all, Catholic discussions of socialism in the first half of the 20th century. See Lienkamp, *Theodor Steinbüchels Sozialismusrezeption*.

Rote Blatt, and who was associated with the Protestant religious socialists. These five individuals did not comprise an actual group, but were set apart from contemporary Catholic antisocialism by an “option for socialism”, an affinity of ideas, which bound them together despite all their differences. Klaus Kreppel formulates the common goal of the Catholic socialists as follows: they wanted “to politically refute, in the same manner as Wilhelm Hohoff, on whose ideas they had based their theoretical arguments, Bebel’s popular thesis that Christianity and socialism stood opposed to one another like fire and water”.¹⁴

The congenial thinkers Steinbüchel, Michel and Dirks cultivated the most intense personal and scholarly exchange of ideas - at least during the Weimar period but also after 1945 - although, as far as the reception of Marx and socialism is concerned, one can assume that Steinbüchel probably possessed the greatest influence. If, according to Ulrich Bröckling, Walter Dirks “evidently (belongs) to the few authors who already prior to 1933 had familiarised themselves with the early writings of Marx”¹⁵, then one must - according to the opinion of Jürgen Habermas¹⁶ - also include Steinbüchel in this group. It is even possible that it was Steinbüchel who inspired Dirks to read and analyse Marx’ early writings. Dirks himself confirms this assumption: “Theodor Steinbüchel, who had opened the discussion within Catholic circles after the [First] World War in a positive and thorough manner with his book, *Der Sozialismus als sittliche Idee* (1921), had as the altogether first Catholic thinker thereupon recognised the philosophical and historical potential of early marxist ideas”.¹⁷ Despite the strong philosophical emphasis in Marx’ work, Steinbüchel does not belong to those individuals, who clearly distinguish between the early *philosophical* Marx and the later *economist*. On the contrary: in his publications of the 1920s, as in his literature of the 1940s, Steinbüchel underscores the *abiding* synthesis of Marx’s philosophy and socialism, the *combining* of economics and philosophy, as constituting the *essence* of marxism as well.¹⁸

14. Kreppel, “Feuer und Wasser”, 5.

15. Bröckling, *Katholische Intellektuelle in der Weimarer Republik*, 144. See also Dirks, *Der singende Stotterer*, 19: “At that time, the two-volume Kröner edition of the early writings of Karl Marx was published, read with passion and discussed among friends, just like the brand new work of Lukács, *Geschichte und Klassenbewußtsein*”.

16. See Habermas, “Zur philosophischen Diskussion”, 167.

17. Dirks, “Christen zum Marxismus”, 176, emphasis added- A.L.

18. See the interpretation, which heads in the same direction, of Landshut and Mayer, “Einleitung. Die Bedeutung der Frühschriften von Marx”, XIII: “We make it our duty to dispose of a certain prejudice, which has its own history and which underlies not only the anti-marxist interpretation of Marx, but also marxist interpretations of Marx. This misunderstanding is that Marx, in his younger years, was ‘still’ oriented towards philosophy only, that he eventually freed himself from philosophical ‘captive’ - first from Hegel himself, then from the young Hegelians (Bauer, Ruge), and eventually also from Feuerbach - and that towards the end of the forties he struggled to establish his final, purely economical interpretation of the historical world and its ‘necessary’ development. This view of Marx, which is still generally accepted today [1932- A.L.], can be much less sustained, however, now that the manuscript [meaning the Paris manuscript, ‘Nationalökonomie und Philosophie’ from 1844- A.L.], which until now remained completely ignored, has been published for the first time, revealing its straightforwardly and fundamentally philosophical basis of his economic theory. In a certain sense, this study is Marx’s most central work”.

Yet, the efforts of Steinbüchel, Michel, Dirks and Mertens encountered tremendous opposition within the Church as well as without. There were specifically two events that brought the Left Catholic projects and the Christian-socialist dialogue to an abrupt end on the eve of the Weimar Republic: the appearance of the encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno* and then, above all, the National Socialists' takeover of government control. As the fortieth anniversary of the first social encyclical, *Rerum Novarum* (1891) written by Leo XIII, drew closer, the unsolved problem, "Christianity and socialism", once again forced itself onto the agenda. Apparently the previous efforts of the Church authorities had not achieved the desired successes in this respect. Yet (not only) German Catholics still sympathised with socialism and participated in its specific movements, not least of all encouraged by the cautious opening of a dialogue between German social democracy and parts of Catholicism. Both sides began to relax their boundaries. Because of this situation, Pius XI saw it necessary to state his fundamental opinion clarifying his earlier, rather specific comments. On May 15, 1931, his encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno* appeared, whose goal was, among other things, to (re-) establish "a unified course for social Catholicism"¹⁹, which the Catholic socialists had consciously abandoned primarily because of their stand on capitalism and socialism.

Addressing the social Catholics, the Pope clearly explained: "Whether considered as a doctrine, or a historical fact, or a movement, socialism, if it remains truly socialism... cannot be reconciled with the teachings of the Catholic Church because its concept of society itself is utterly foreign to Christian truth" (QA 117). Franz Focke is right in his judgement, when he writes that the passage in the encyclical on socialism may have ended the discussion in the Catholic camp for the time being regarding the possibility of a "Christian socialism".²⁰ The Left Catholic activities that still remained after the publication of *Quadragesimo Anno* were swept away when the National Socialists came to power on 30 January 1933.

3. German Left Catholicism in the Second Half of the 1940s and in the Early Years of the 1950s

"The jointly suffered persecution of the Protestant and Catholic churches, the terror practiced against communists, socialists and Christians, as well as the fight of these so differently constituted groups against the same totalitarian regime, were among the unforgettable experiences many people had during the national socialist tyranny. These experiences became the chief motive for a new form of political cooperation between Protestant

19. Schasching, *Zeitgerecht - zeitbedingt*, 9. That the encyclical did indeed effect social Catholicism in this way is substantiated by, for example, the commentary by Brauer, *Der soziale Katholizismus in Deutschland*, 6: "Whatever questions or doubt or differences of opinion were still remaining shall be settled here". Mertens, "Bilanz. Unser Ursprung", 69.

20. See also the title of the corresponding chapter in his work: "The Preliminary End of Christian-Socialist Discussions". Focke, *Sozialismus*, 173.

and Catholic Christians and for the attempts at a common journey of socialists and Christians immediately after the war".²¹

These initial circumstances caused political Catholicism and the Catholic socialist movement in Germany to completely reorganise. Yet, even though the Centre Party (1945) and quite a bit later the Christian trade unions (1955) were re-established, they did not manage to regain their previous strength in membership numbers and socio-political significance. The Catholic workers' associations did not escape a similar fate, despite their revival (tolerated by several bishops only as a result of the pressure from the Vatican). Even they could not attain to the same influence they had possessed in the 1920s after years of socio-political abstinence which had been forced upon them by the Nazis.²² Instead of restoring the organisational framework used in the Weimar Republic, a large part of political Catholicism merged with the interdenominational CDU / CSU²³, and large parts of the Catholic workers' movement joined the party-politically and ideologically neutral *Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund* (DGB).²⁴

That which the DGB accomplished, namely the unification of Christian and socialist powers under the same institutional roof, was *not* achieved in the party-political sphere, although there were attempts at unification, even if only very weak and intermittent. At this point it would be appropriate to recall the (futile) efforts of Walter Dirks to create a *Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands* as the recognised heir of the SPD and the *Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands* (KPD), that was to unite workers, left wing democrats and social Christians.²⁵ In the first of his twelve theses which he drew up in May 1945 and presented to a group of Frankfurt antifascists, Dirks recognised an effective escape from the German and European chaos "only in a German and European socialism".²⁶ To accomplish this, "an unambiguous socialist theory" would be needed that would supplement and revive "the fundamental elements of marxism from the experiences of the last thirty years" (6th thesis).²⁷ Dirks identified the goal of this democratic socialism as "the organisation of the highly diversified

21. Stegmann, "Geschichte der sozialen Ideen im deutschen Katholizismus", 484.

22. See Focke, *Sozialismus*, 18, as well as Klönne, "Arbeiterkatholizismus", 42.

23. Regarding the formation and the program of the *Christlich Demokratische Union* (CDU), see my next subchapter 3.1. In the German parliament, the CDU joined up in a parliamentary bloc with its closely allied Bavarian sister party, the *Christlich-Soziale Union* (CSU).

24. See Focke, *Sozialismus*, 17-18. At the founding congress of the DGB in Munich on 12-14 October 1949, sixteen previously independent trade unions united under one roof. Adherence to the self-imposed principle of party-political neutrality was disputed from the beginning. Eventually, the DGB's relatively close association with social democracy led to the formation of the *Christliche Gewerkschaftsbewegung Deutschlands* in 1955 (since 1959: the *Christlicher Gewerkschaftsbund Deutschlands*) and thereby to the division of the Catholic workforce into two organisations.

25. See Dirks, "Vorwort", 7. In this context, see also Dirks, *Der singende Stotterer*, 26. Besides the resemblance of the name, Dirk's conception had nothing in common with the *Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands* (SED), which emerged in April 1946 in the Soviet occupation zone as a result of the forced merger between the KPD and the SPD. After its second party conference (20-24 September 1947), the SED was converted into a "party of a new type", modelled after the Soviet Communist Party.

26. See Dirks, "Thesen zu einer 'Sozialistischen Einheitspartei'", 33.

27. *Ibid.*, 34.

national economy along socially responsible lines”, yet not a “total collectivism in which personal identity, freedom, morality and dignity of the individual would be lost” (9th thesis).²⁸

However, this plan to establish a “radical socialist Labour Party that was also influenced by Christians” was hindered by representatives of both traditional workers’ parties, whose primary objective was the reestablishment of the former organisational structures. Whether or not Christians would have indeed traversed this path towards a Christian socialist party is questionable and in retrospect seems more than doubtful”.²⁹

3.1. *The Chance to Realise a “Christian Socialism” in the CDU (1945-1949)*

The idea of a social, even socialist, but not marxist “party of labour”, modelled after the English Labour Party, had arisen already during the war.³⁰ Among these advocates of such a party was Walter Dirks³¹, along with the Christian trade unionist and former Centre Party politician Jakob Kaiser (1881-1961) in Berlin; the former president of the federation of Christian trade unions and Vice-President of the German Centre Party, Adam Stegerwald (1874-1945) in Würzburg; Wilhelm Elfes (1884-1969), former editor of the *Westdeutsche Arbeiterzeitung*, the voice of the Catholic workers’ association, and at that time chief mayor of Mönchengladbach³²; Carl Spiecker (1881-1953) in Westphalia, who returned after having emigrated to Canada, a former assistant to Reich Chancellor Heinrich Brüning, as well as the former Reich Chancellor Joseph Wirth (1879-1956) in Freiburg. According to Franz Josef Stegmann, groups in Mannheim, Paderborn and with particular vigor the *Frankfurter Kreis* were to have also pursued the same goal.³³

In Focke’s view, Frankfurt, Cologne and Berlin belonged not only to the strongholds of the most important CDU regional or zonal parties. “Efforts were also made – based on very different ideological points of departure and based on equally different political conditions in each region or zone – to establish a socialism out of Christian responsibility (as in Frankfurt, but partly also in Berlin), or rather a Christian socialism (as in Cologne and Berlin). In Cologne these efforts were exemplified by an appreciation of natural right embedded in Catholic social philosophy. In Frankfurt they unmasked the nefarious admixture of traditional Christianity and bourgeois ideology through the confrontation of a new religious understanding with marxism. In Berlin these efforts took root as an attempt to theoretically establish the integration of various versions of socialism, in the context of an already sig-

28. Ibid., 35.

29. Bröckling, “Einleitung”, in: Dirks, *Sozialismus oder Restauration*, 14.

30. See Stegmann, “Geschichte der sozialen Ideen”, 484.

31. See Schmidt, *Zentrum oder CDU*, 162. Yet, at the same time, Schmidt points out the special nature of Dirks’ political interpretation: “Walter Dirks’ initial attempt, which was to lead to socialism in a roundabout way, tended...much more radically towards a thorough renovation and reorganisation of society than the concept of the Labour Party”.

32. Until 1950 it was called München-Gladbach.

33. See Stegmann, “Geschichte der sozialen Ideen”, 485.

nificantly more identifiable political constellation, and to proclaim this new vision as the basis for economic, domestic and foreign policy strategies”.³⁴

3.1.1. The *Kölner Leitsätze*: the “Original Programme of the CDU” (1945)

Through contact with his Father Superior Laurentius Siemer (1881-1956), the Dominican Eberhard Welty (1902-1965) became a member of the *Köln-Walberberger Widerstandskreis* in 1941, which grew out of the Catholic workers’ movement and for which he developed fundamental principles for a new organisation of the state and of society. Then, in June 1945, his concepts served as a basis for discussion at the talks regarding the *Kölner Leitsätze*, “in which, for the first time amidst the CDU of the Rhineland then beginning to emerge, there was talk of a ‘Christian socialism’... From the time of the *Kölner Leitsätze* in 1945 until the *Ablener Programm* in 1947, at whose deliberations Welty played a significant role, [his ideas] acquired decisive influence upon the foundation of the Christian Democratic Union’s program”.³⁵

Rudolf Uertz identifies the following as central elements of this “Christian socialism”, closely related to the Dominican teachings on the common good: an economy providing for the needs of its people based on a self-administration of employers and employees; socialisation of large scale industries; a broad distribution of non-productive private property; an equitable distribution of manufactured goods; as well as an all-encompassing system of social justice.³⁶ The right to private ownership was to remain guaranteed, while property relationships were to be reformed according to the “fundamental principle of social justice”.³⁷

Consciously opposing a marxist-oriented socialism, the *Kölner Leitsätze* upheld a “true Christian socialism that had nothing in common with false collective objectives that fundamentally contradict the nature of human beings”.³⁸ Behind this new abstract interpretation stood a strategic experiment “to introduce an antimarxist concept of socialism and thereby to create a Catholic social doctrine that was more appealing and that would

34. Focke, *Sozialismus*, 297. It was not the term but the idea of a “Christian socialism” that was already present in the first programmatic document of the CDU, “Aufruf an das Deutsche Volk”, issued in Berlin on 26 June 1945. See Heimann, “Christlicher Sozialismus in der CDU”, 113.

35. Ockenfels, “Welty”, 957. *The Kölner Leitsätze*, which are known as the “original programme of the CDU”, are based primarily on Welty’s work, *Was nun?*, that summarises the discussions of the *Widerstandskreis*. The expanded version of this book appeared in 1946, entitled *Entscheidung in die Zukunft*. See Uertz, *Christentum und Sozialismus*, 27-29 and 205, as well as Ockenfels, “Eberhard Welty”, 244.

36. See Uertz, *Christentum und Sozialismus*, 205.

37. Citation in Heimann, “Christlicher Sozialismus”, 114.

38. “Kölner Leitsätze”, 10.

attract the working classes to the Catholic Church”.³⁹ However, these attempts proved unsuccessful, suffering a fate similar to the tactically motivated Christian socialist endeavours of Heinrich Pesch, Max Scheler and Theodor Bauer immediately following the First World War. According to Ockenfels, these earlier efforts diminished with equal speed as did Welty’s “Christian socialism”⁴⁰ which survived only briefly in the CDU of the British zone, i.e. until the *Ahlerner Programm*.⁴¹

However, according to Focke’s analysis, the failure of “Christian socialism” can be traced back to a time before the economic and foreign policy conflicts between Jakob Kaiser and Konrad Adenauer (1876-1967) in 1946. This process started “already with the offensive of the bourgeois forces and their immediate demand for leadership in the summer of 1945. The concept “warding off a left bloc” won precedence over the view expressed by the authors of the *Kölner Leitsätze* that fascism had been the result of “militarisation and capitalist armament tycoons” and that a system based on ‘true Christian socialism’ would need to be created. The founding generation eventually withdrew into the background and the antisocialist impulse became integrated into the new socially heterogeneous party”.⁴² The term “Christian socialism” had already been deleted from the party program in September 1945, when the revised version of the *Kölner Leitsätze* was published.⁴³ It was rarely ever used in public after Adenauer was elected chairman of the CDU of the Rhineland on 5 February and chairman of the British zone on 1 March 1946.⁴⁴

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39. Ockenfels, “Welty”, 957. Even Lothar Roos regards the attempt of the *Walberberger Kreis* associated with Welty “to portray the ethical and economic guidelines of Catholic social doctrine (essentially built on the principle of solidarity) as ‘Christian Socialism’”, as a mere “terminological baptism” which eventually had to be given up as the term “socialism” had a distinct “connotation” deriving from prior use in the history of ideas and party politics. Roos, “Kapitalismus, Sozialreform, Sozialpolitik”, 130. Similarly, Uertz, *Christentum und Sozialismus*, 20, who believes the choice of terminology to have been motivated by its stronger appeal to the public.
40. See, for instance, Ruhnau, *Der Katholizismus in der sozialen Bewährung*, 240-242. See also Ockenfels, “Eberhard Welty”, 245: Welty’s “Christian ‘socialism’ was strictly anti-marxist and was supposed to serve the sole purpose of an engaging catch-phrase for the description of his thomist social doctrine”.
41. See Ockenfels, ed., *Katholizismus und Sozialismus in Deutschland*, 145.
42. See Focke, *Sozialismus*, 299. See *ibid.*, 265: A militant anticommunism, according to Adenauer, was “much more likely to [serve] as a factor of integration for the socially heterogeneous party, which largely consisted of the former Centre Party and conservative voters”, than the “Christian socialism” of Jakob Kaiser.
43. *Guiding Principles of the Christian Democratic Party (CDU) in Rhineland and Westphalia*, Second Edition of the *Kölner Leitsätze*.
44. See Uertz, *Christentum und Sozialismus*, 206. Of prime importance were the interventions of the Protestant members of the Union favouring a laissez-faire economy, who rejected a theological and ethical legitimisation of socio-political models of the social order. See also Heimann, “Christlicher Sozialismus”, 112.

3.1.2. The *Frankfurter Leitsätze*: The Program of “Indirect Socialism” (1945)

Contrary to the *Kölner Leitsätze*, which despite all the socialist semantics essentially described a rebirth of a Christian solidarism⁴⁵, the programmatic development in Hessen initially took a radically different course. In 1945, Eugen Kogon, Karl Heinz Knapstein, Walter Dirks and others endeavoured, with the creation of the CDU, to establish a Left Christian party in Frankfurt and to give it a specific theoretical foundation. “We called it the party of ‘indirect socialism’, because already in May 1945 we considered direct socialism – via the SPD and the KPD – fairly narrow-minded ... These two parties could not reach Catholics, peasant farmers, the petty bourgeoisie, including white collar employees. We wanted to bridge these gaps, specifically with an appeal to the Christian conscience. At that time we were convinced – as I still am today – that only a socialist reform could destroy the root of misery and injustice”.⁴⁶ As always, the biblical basis that Dirks used was the parable of the Good Samaritan, which he transferred into the realm of politics.

After the above-mentioned failure of his illusionary advance in the direction of a socialist unity party, this “detour” was substituted for the desired solution.⁴⁷ “We wanted to offer a third party that was to have a socialist program. We hoped that these three parties together could be more powerful than the bourgeois parties which we expected to emerge”.⁴⁸ With these goals, Dirks and his comrades distinctly separated themselves from the Christian Democratic mainstream. Therefore, the *Bensberger Memorandum* notes that “of all the many initial local programs of the CDU ... the *Frankfurter Leitsätze* were the first to display socialist tendencies”.⁴⁹

The section entitled “Socialism and Property” affirms an economic socialism built on a democratic foundation. The purpose was to strive for the conversion of the large scale producers of raw materials, industries and banks into collective property as well as a central management of the national economy, through which a reconstruction based not only on free enterprise but on the consideration of overall societal goals would be made possible. The attainment of the highest possible prosperity rate for the general population was supposed to be the essence and purpose of all the “socialist measures”, in the long run also the establishment of ownership for the non-property owning classes. “As in its goals, so also should the methods of socialism be democratic and not dictatorial”. Socialism would therefore have to be sustained by the people and their institutions and enough opportunities would have to be provided for the development of personal initiatives and for the competition of top-level performances. “It is therefore our

45. In this context I understand the term “solidarism” to mean the social-philosophical and social reform-oriented conception of Catholic social doctrine, basing itself on Heinrich Pesch (1854-1926), which believed itself to be a counter-movement opposing individualistic liberalism as well as collective socialism. See also Ruhnau, *Der Katholizismus in der sozialen Bewährung*.

46. Dirks and Glotz, “Jenseits von Optimismus und Pessimismus”, 21. In addition, see also Dirks, “Umwegiger Sozialismus”, 12.

47. Bröckling, “Einleitung”, in: Dirks, *Sozialismus oder Restauration*, 14.

48. Dirks and Glotz, “Jenseits von Optimismus und Pessimismus”, 21.

49. *Antisozialismus aus Tradition?*, 25-26.

socialist goal to secure a life of freedom from misery, of human dignity and of personal responsibility, for as many people as possible".⁵⁰

However, in German society at that time, the idea of a leftist CDU with a socialist program was everything but capable of gaining majority support. "Opposition against the socialist programme developed rapidly within the CDU. The group that gathered around Walter Dirks and Eugen Kogon could not gain acceptance".⁵¹ According to Walter Dirks, Konrad Adenauer, along with the majority of Catholic as well as Protestant Christians, destroyed his plans.⁵²

3.1.3. The *Ahlener Programm* of the British Zone CDU (1947): The Last Chance for a "Christian Socialism" within the CDU?

The CDU's first declaration of its principles, the *Ahlener Wirtschafts- und Sozialprogramm*, drafted 3 February 1947, strictly speaking was only of regional significance, since the CDU and CSU were originally created on a zonal level. It was "neither recognised nor accepted by the governing bodies of the combined CDU".⁵³ Nevertheless, it had achieved supra-zonal respect and significance. At the first British zone CDU party conference on 14-15 August 1947, even Konrad Adenauer publicly described the *Ahlener Wirtschafts- und Sozialprogramm* as a "milestone in the history of German economic and social life"⁵⁴, although this recognition was probably more or less tactically motivated.⁵⁵

The evident points of conformity with the *Kölner Leitsätze* are grounded in the fact that the main theoretical features of the *Ahlener Programm* were also conceptualized by the *Walberberger Kreis* under the leadership of

50. "Frankfurter Leitsätze vom September 1945", 11-12. Also in: Dirks, Schmidt and Stankowski, eds., *Christen für den Sozialismus*, 45-49, citation on pp. 47-48.

51. Bröckling, "Einleitung", in: Dirks, *Sozialismus oder Restauration*, 16.

52. See Dirks and Glotz, "Jenseits von Optimismus und Pessimismus", 21. Uertz believes that the main reason for the insignificant and only temporary influence of "Christian socialism" in Frankfurt on the Hessian party can be found "in the American occupational authorities' refusal to accept Karl-Heinrich Knapstein, who was nominated by the Christian socialist founding members as chairperson of the party. Instead, the American authorities appointed the conservative Jakob Husch. Thus, from the very beginning, the CDU in Hessen followed a path that was not desired by its founders. For this reason Dirks and Kogon, dissociated themselves quite early from the CDU". Uertz, *Christentum und Sozialismus*, 63, footnote 153.

53. Mommsen, ed., *Deutsche Parteiprogramme*, 576.

54. Deuerlein, *CDU/CSU 1945-1957*, 78, citation in Mommsen, ed., *Parteiprogramme*, 576.

55. See Uertz, *Christentum und Sozialismus*, 191-193, 211, as well as Focke, *Sozialismus*, 265 and 286: "Among other things, but in particular with the help of his flexible utilisation of programmes (*the Neheim-Hüstener* and *the Ahlener Programm*) - while carrying out a politics of moderate reforms -, Adenauer managed to obstruct the fundamental economic and social reorientation towards which the Christian socialists strove. Yet at the same time Adenauer, with the help of the Christian socialists, managed to attract a large number of workers into the party.

Eberhard Welty.⁵⁶ Like its forerunner, the *Ahleener Programm* possessed distinct anticapitalist features, which above all are revealed in its well-known preamble: “The capitalist economic system does not do justice to the vital interests of the German people pertaining to matters of state and civil society”. A fundamental reform would be needed, whose content and intent could no longer be the “capitalist striving for profit and power”, but only the welfare of the population.⁵⁷ Thus, the goal of the *Ahleener Programm* is an economy that provides for the needs of the people, which even “in normal times ... to a certain extent” requires planning and management of the economy. This planning and management would be carried out through self-governed corporate bodies controlled by parliament.

As indicated in the anticapitalist preamble, the program proposes the breaking up of big companies and an anti-trust legislation; the distribution of economic power and the “workers’ right of co-determination regarding fundamental issues of economic and social planning”, the socialisation of the coal mining industry and the iron producing big industry; the enlargement of the cooperatively-run sectors of industry; as well as profit sharing among workers.⁵⁸ However, at the same time, the document cautions against substituting a private capitalism with capitalism governed by the state, “which would be even more dangerous to the political and economic freedom of the individual”.⁵⁹

According to Franz Focke, it seemed imminent that the *Ahleener Programm* would make “Christian socialism” “the official program of the CDU, which in turn prepared itself to develop into the most powerful political party in Germany”.⁶⁰ Yet, already when looking at the terminology employed, it becomes obvious that the term “Christian socialism” does not even occur once in the programme, as opposed to the case of the *Kölner Leitsätze*. In fact, the terminology associated with “socialism” appears only in a negative connotation.⁶¹ Altogether, the document consists of three heterogeneous parts. First, the preamble which, according to Focke, may be traced back to the workers’ leader Johannes Albers (1890-1963). Second, a section of the fundamental principle, which stands opposed to the preamble and takes up the central economic points of Adenauer’s *Neheim-Hüstener Programm* of February 1946.⁶² And third, the actual *Ahleener Wirtschaftsprogramm*, “which must be explained as a reaction to the demand for socialisation by the English government as well as the German

56. See Uertz, *Christentum und Sozialismus*, 207, as well as *ibid.*, 97-99. Focke calls Adenauer the author of the first draft. See Focke, *Sozialismus*, 255. According to Uertz, *Christentum und Sozialismus*, 101, Adenauer’s proposal was created as an alternative to the Walberberger draft. The informal *Walberberger Kreis* - to which, among others and in addition to Welty, belonged former Christian trade unionists, such as Johannes Albers (1890-1963) and Karl Arnold (1901-1958) - was, according to Uertz, “the actual group of people which had prepared the intellectual and theoretical ground in regards to its programmatic intent”. See Uertz, *Christentum und Sozialismus*, 98.

57. “Das Ahleener Wirtschaftsprogramm”, 576-577.

58. *Ibid.*, 579-581.

59. *Ibid.*, 579.

60. Focke, *Sozialismus*, 18.

61. “Das Ahleener Wirtschaftsprogramm”, 578, where the economic system of the years 1933 until 1945 is twice characterised as “state socialism in disguise.”

62. See Focke, *Sozialismus*, 235-241.

working class and in which were included the demands of the small-industry-oriented CDU of the Wuppertal region for sponsorship of private entrepreneurial activity and the protection of legally acquired property".⁶³ The indecisiveness, ambiguity and even contradictions within the document can be explained by the fact that this document was a compromise, which also contributed to the controversy that arose later along with diverging interpretations within the CDU.

After the western powers paved the way for the creation of a West German Federal Republic in the summer of 1948, the Frankfurt economic administration of the *Vereinigte Wirtschaftsgebiet* (i.e. the three western zones) under the leadership of Ludwig Erhard (1897-1977), who later became the Federal Minister of Economic Affairs and then Chancellor of the Federal Republic, introduced economic liberalisation, which strongly influenced the monetary reform of 20 June 1948.⁶⁴ In light of the socio-economic upswing that took place after 1950, the assertions of the *Ablener Programm* now seemed outdated. "It had been the intention of the *Ablener Programm* to let the social Christian trend influence the CDU. In times of a seemingly perpetual prosperity, allowing reformed Christian social ideas to become tradition or cultivating Christian worker movement's traditions seemed more and more unnecessary".⁶⁵ In the time to come, under the leadership of Adenauer, the CDU/CSU increasingly developed into a modernised conservative bourgeois political party⁶⁶, primarily by surmounting the fragmentation of the bourgeois non-socialist camp and by means of the dissolution of the denominational division between Protestants and Catholics. Only the CDU social commissions kept the Christian social ideas of the *Ablener Programm* alive, "yet without exercising any major influence upon the economic organisational policy of the Federal Republic".⁶⁷ Instead, the neo-liberal *Düsseldorfer Wirtschaftsprogramm* gained much more influence, becoming the CDU platform in the first federal election campaign in 1949. The CDU emerged from this campaign, along with the CSU, as the most powerful party. According to Uertz, this officially confirmed "the end of Christian socialism in the CDU".⁶⁸

63. Ibid., 257.

64. See Hildebrand, "Erhard", 355, as well as Uertz, *Christentum und Sozialismus*, 211.

65. Klönne, "Arbeiterkatholizismus", 43.

66. See Schmidt, *Zentrum oder CDU*, 345. See Focke, *Sozialismus*, 273: "As a result of the absence of a party on the political Right and the enforced move towards a few large parties as a result of the experiences in the Weimar Republic, the conservative groups automatically gathered within the CDU, where they activated the traditional antisocialist potential of Catholic social doctrine in order to prevent cooperation between Christian socialists and social democrats".

67. See Uertz, *Christentum und Sozialismus*, 211. From 1945 onwards, social Christian workers consolidated into "social commissions" that perceived themselves to be "transmission belts" of the CDU within the proletariat and at the same time representatives of the workers' interests. See Schroeder, *Katholizismus und Einheitsgewerkschaft*, 285.

68. Uertz, *Christentum und Sozialismus*, 202.

3.1.4. “Christian Socialism” in the CDU of the Soviet Occupation Zone and the Role of Jakob Kaiser

Already during the Weimar Republic, Jakob Kaiser acted as a functionary of the Christian trade unions and member of the Reich Executive Committee of the Centre Party. Then, during the period of National Socialism, he became actively involved in the resistance movement. Later (as of 1949), he became chairman of the CDU social commissions as well as Federal Minister for All-German Affairs (1949-57). After the death of Stegerwald on 3 December 1945, Jakob Kaiser was not only promoted to become a leading Christian trade unionist, but also to become chairman of the CDU in Berlin and the Soviet occupation zone (SBZ), a position which he held from 20 December 1945 until his dismissal by the Soviet military administration on 20 December 1947.⁶⁹ Unanimously supported by the CDU of the eastern zone, he managed in February 1946 to make “Christian socialism” the foundation of the party’s program.⁷⁰ Kaiser’s originality, according to Focke, was notable in that Christian socialism “for the first time seemed to have been given a real political chance”.⁷¹

Because of the key position that the CDU assumed within the German party system in the post-world war period, the dissension within the Union regarding “Christian socialism” – Focke refers to an actual “class struggle”⁷² – carried more than simply an internal party significance. “As the most prominent Christian socialist, Jakob Kaiser was not just one among other opponents of Adenauer, but an advocate of what his fellow party members already at that time believed to be the sole recognised major alternative concept to the ideas of the later chancellor. Yet again, this would not have been possible, had Kaiser not been able to base his ideas on a Christian socialist tradition”.⁷³

At the CDU convention in Berlin from 15-17 June 1946, when the efforts to create a German Labour Party had already been made history, Jakob Kaiser spoke of “the conventional bourgeois social order belonging to a lost generation, an order that will be replaced with an age belonging to working people, by the era of socialist forms of existence”. More important than the security of the individual and his property, a “fundamentally new construction of our social and economic structure” would be needed. Kaiser therefore summoned the German nation to take “the step toward socialism” out of a Christian and democratic responsibility. “Considering the overwhelming misery of the people, all attempts to re-establish the obsolete past appear inappropriate. Let us recognize what is needed: socialism has the floor”.⁷⁴

69. See Kosthorst, “Kaiser”, as well as Schroeder, “Katholizismus und Einheitsgewerkschaft”, 375.

70. See Focke, *Sozialismus*, 235, 295 and 297 as well as 283-284: “While Adenauer had to fight against strong opposition within his zonal party, the CDU of the Soviet occupation zone gave Kaiser 100% support.”

71. *Ibid.*, 297.

72. *Ibid.*, 296.

73. *Ibid.*, 18.

74. Kaiser, “Um Deutschlands Schicksal”, 9 and 11. Citation in Stegmann, “Geschichte der sozialen Ideen”, 485.

According to Focke's interpretation, Kaiser had always believed the economic and social reform of Germany to be part and parcel of the acquisition of German unity, established with the help of an agreement between the political parties based on a broad socialist consensus. As the attempted agreement as well as the restoration of German unity became increasingly hopeless, even the goal of a "Christian socialism" faded more and more into the background. Since July 1947 at the latest, when a convention of the enlarged CDU executive of the eastern zone and Berlin took place, Kaiser and his political comrades no longer referred to the term "Christian socialism".⁷⁵

Since Kaiser was finding himself under increasingly strong pressure in the eastern zone from the SED and the Soviet military administration, which ultimately dismissed him from his position as the CDU chairman of the SBZ, he attempted to find support within the party in the western zones. Yet his attempts failed hopelessly, despite the strong encouragement from the organised Christian trade unionists within the party. In response to his petition not to ignore the "socialist trend of the times", he was told at the first zonal party convention of the British zone CDU in August 1947 that there was a "certain fear of a marxist socialist thought process intruding" into the party.⁷⁶ Sharing this fear, Adenauer responded to Kurt Schumacher's observation that the CDU had given up its socialism, contending that the SPD chairman's assertion was totally illogical, since the CDU had never advocated a socialism in the first place.⁷⁷ With Kaiser's dismissal from the office of CDU chairman of the SBZ, the CDU of the British zone under Adenauer's leadership lost their most powerful opponent and could therefore rise unhindered to become the dominant zonal branch of the CDU.⁷⁸

"Christian socialism may have been conceptualized in 1945 by academic and religious circles (the Frankfurt group of intellectuals, the Dominicans in Walberberg), but only after these circles had been pushed aside was it adopted by the party's social commissions and by certain individuals within the party leadership structures - primarily by former Christian trade unionists and friends of Jakob Kaiser, such as Johannes Albers, Karl Arnold and Heinrich Strunk".⁷⁹ From the beginning, the position of these individuals within the Union had been too weak to give the CDU, which considered itself a people's party, distinct socialist features. Although Kaiser's concept found some support within the party in the western zones, he was still incapable of gaining majority support either inside or outside the party boundaries. According to Uertz, his influence remained largely restricted to Berlin as a result of the peculiar situation in the Soviet occupation zone and "Adenauer's clever resistance".⁸⁰

75. See Focke, *Sozialismus*, 269.

76. Ibid.

77. As stated in the course of a rally in Eutin. See *ibid.*, 270.

78. See Uertz, *Christentum und Sozialismus*, 200.

79. Focke, *Sozialismus*, 271-272.

80. See Uertz, *Christentum und Sozialismus*, 206-207.

3.2. *The German Centre Party – A Left Catholic Alternative to the Union?*

On 14 October 1945, former Centre Party parliamentarians founded a new *Deutsche Zentrumspartei* (DZ) in the Westphalian city of Soest, an organisation that defined itself as a Christian “party of the creative center and of social balance”.⁸¹ Initially, they wanted to find their place between the groups that were expected to develop within the conservative Christian and the left socialist factions. Yet, as the spectrum of political parties developed in an entirely different fashion than originally expected, strong forces under the influence of Carl Spiecker soon pressed to “establish the DZ to the left of the CDU as an ideologically neutral power (*Essener Richtung*), similar to the British Labour Party”.⁸²

According to the analysis of Ute Schmidt, even after 1945 Spiecker’s vision reflected the goals of the left republican wing of the Weimar Centre Party. These objectives included political independence from the clergy, social reform, willingness to form a coalition with the SPD, a strengthened republican-democratic mentality and a foreign policy oriented towards *détente*. In September 1946, Spiecker published a summary of his plans for a post-capitalist federal Germany in a federal Europe. In this summary he stresses that property ownership should be established primarily to benefit the public, instead of promoting the ownership rights of individuals. The most recent war had made the inequality of property distribution intolerable. Therefore the misery resulting from the war “inevitably” demanded that the distribution of burdens be staggered according to individual ability to perform. Spiecker contended that socialisation was no longer a fear-inspiring word. But it by no means solely implied state control, but instead the transformation of private into common property, “either of the state, communities, cooperatives or of the workforce”. Therefore the Centre Party supported the demand for the inclusion of employees in running their businesses and benefiting from these businesses’ profits.⁸³

Spiecker’s efforts to commit the whole party to this programme, located somewhere between the CDU and the SPD, was nonetheless frustrated by the resistance of the traditionalist majority. Through disputes within the party during the years 1946-1947, it became apparent “that the ideas of Spiecker’s group were not to be adopted”, Ute Schmidt contends.⁸⁴ In view of the CDU/CSU’s increasing influence, the *Zentrum* was collectively destined to rapid disintegration in the time to come and remained hardly more than a marginality in the German federal party system.⁸⁵

81. Morsey, “Deutsche Zentrumspartei”, 17-18.

82. *Ibid.*, 18.

83. Carl Spiecker, “Das neue Zentrum”, *Tagesspiegel*, 19 September 1946, citation in Schmidt, *Zentrum oder CDU*, 242.

84. Schmidt, *Zentrum oder CDU*, 242-243. Spiecker himself joined the CDU in 1949. See *ibid.*, 353.

85. See Schmidt, *Zentrum oder CDU*, 344. At the first parliamentary elections the percentage of votes cast for the *Zentrum* sank from 3.1% in the year 1949 down to 0.8% in the year 1953. Even in North Rhine-Westphalia, which was the Centre Party’s stronghold, the party continually lost ground in the state elections. Their voter return in this most populous state of Germany shrank from 9.8% (1947), 7.5% (1950), 4.0% (1954), 1.1% (1962) to finally under one percent. See *ibid.*, 361.

3.3. *The Catholic Socialists after 1945*

Following the discussion of a variety of attempts to establish “Christian socialism” within the party political spectrum, now Ernst Michel, Walter Dirks and Theodor Steinbüchel, three of the Left Catholic theorists already active in the Weimar Republic, move to centre stage.

3.3.1. Ernst Michel: “The Christian in the Socialist Movement”

In his study on Ernst Michel, Peter Reifenberg objects to “all reductionist and narrow-minded interpretations which only focus on the political Michel of the Weimar Period”, and he believes Michel’s main focus to be much more theologically, anthropologically and ethically oriented.⁸⁶ Yet a distinction between the political Michel and the theological, anthropological and ethical Michel does not seem to carry much credibility - at least if one interprets this dichotomy to mean that the publications during the Weimar Period did not possess a theological, anthropological, and ethical foundation and the publications after 1945 did not have a political basis nor a political aim. Nonetheless, it is certainly correct that Ernst Michel “did not resume his political activities (with the exception of his late *Sozialgeschichte* [of 1947- A.L.] after the interruption of the Nazi Period”.⁸⁷ However, this does not mean that Michel had abandoned or even denied his former views. Here it is helpful to glance at Michel’s 1947 work, *Renovatio – Zur Zwiesprache zwischen Kirche und Welt*.

With respect to the church authorities’ determination to ward off the socialist movement, Michel contends in this study that the question had been posed time and again in past decades, whether a Christian could also be a socialist and join the socialist movement, even if it meant rejecting certain doctrines and a certain narrow-mindedness due to the political conjuncture. “Natural law” and a religious social doctrine based on this law were regarded as criteria by which to evaluate the answer to this question and by which to examine the socialist movement. The requirements and boundaries for a “church-approved or even ‘Christian’ socialism” developed out of these criteria. As a result of the abandonment or moderation of certain heretical doctrines that originated in the early days of the socialist movement and the neutralisation of socialist antireligious slogans, the church authorities seemed to have achieved a “certain tolerance for socialists among the congregation”, even if “socialism” continued to be in practice rejected.

Yet, Michel’s critical attitude towards a “‘Christian’ socialism” that can be gleaned from some of his passages should not be misunderstood as abandonment of his previous support for Catholics in the socialist movement. He

86. Reifenberg, “Ernst Michel”, 499.

87. Dirks, “Vorläufer Ernst Michel”, 71. The object of discussion is Michel, *Sozialgeschichte der industriellen Arbeitswelt*, which, according to Dirks, is a belated fruit of his intensive educational work at the *Akademie der Arbeit*. This work is a compilation of his lectures, primarily from the years 1929 to 1933. See also Haunhorst, “Selbstbestellte Vermittler”, 262-264, where Haunhorst views Michel’s defence of socialism as “merely an episode” (263).

very clearly shares the opinion “that the historical circumstances urged the realisation of socialism and that a Christian in his responsibility to the world owes his efforts to this movement”. Therefore, no objections should be made against attempts to obtain a space for socialist activism on the basis of natural law, Catholic social doctrine and the teachings of the Church. Such attempts would only be suspect if they would develop into a “religious” or “Christian socialism”. For this special form of socialism cannot exist legitimately, just as little as a “Christian state”.⁸⁸ A Christian is simply called upon to place himself squarely in the middle of proletarian misery and to take responsibility for the mission towards socio-economic revolution and reform. Thereby the possibility “that he will become a socialist out of principle, for doctrinal reasons”, is eliminated. Such a possibility would necessarily result “in a self-glorifying dictatorship of the spirit over life, a rape of living history and of the differently structured organs of public and private life”.⁸⁹ Michel believes that a Christian can and should not become a “follower of ‘socialism as an ideology’”.⁹⁰ Operating as a Christian in the socialist movement has “purpose and justification”, not as a fundamental response but as a conjunctural action with purposeful intent”.⁹¹ Even after the Second World War it is obvious that Michel holds firmly to the views of the “political Michel of the Weimar Period”. Thus, Reifenberg’s preoccupation with the alleged “theological, anthropological, and ethical Michel” stands in danger of prohibiting other aspects of Michel’s arguments to be expressed and of misinterpreting Michel’s ideas.

3.3.2. Walter Dirks: “Socialism out of Christian Responsibility”

With the benefit of hindsight Walter Dirks describes the social, political and economic situation in the year 1945 in an evocative manner: “The liberal economic powers ... appeared to have been compromised once and for all through their pact with National Socialism. Its representatives either sat in some allied prison cell or secluded in the countryside. Industry was set in motion much more by the influence of municipal and regional politicians and the trade unions than by mandates of property owners. Even banks were without power and influence during the near-total inflation. Capitalist society seemed to be ruined. We acted on that assumption. We expected and wanted not the reconstruction of the system that had been used in the Weimar period, but that a new societal structure would develop out of it”.⁹²

Walter Dirks believed it to be a matter of course that Catholics would have a crucial part in this discussion, although at that time the expectations within Catholicism of their objectives differed quite radically. According to Dirks, most people expected a reformed capitalism freed from the predominance of capital, as expressed in the social encyclicals *Rerum Novarum* and *Quadragesimo Anno*. “Only a minority hoped for what they called ‘social-

88. Michel, *Renovatio*, 65.

89. *Ibid.*, 65-66.

90. *Ibid.*, 66.

91. *Ibid.*, 116, footnote 9.

92. Dirks, “Das gesellschaftspolitische Engagement der deutschen Katholiken”, 73-74.

ism out of Christian responsibility”.⁹³ Dirks makes no secret out of the fact that he also belonged to that minority. The Catholic socialists, with whom he identifies himself, recognised the approaching opportunity to manage key industries and banks as common property. In addition, they favoured the idea of cooperatives, although they did not fundamentally object to private ownership of the means of production.

Without confusing the model of society for which they were striving with the kingdom of God, they believed “that a people purified in times of affliction would want to and would have the ability to rebuild the social structure amidst the wilderness of ruins according to fundamental standards of social justice”. However, Dirks’ summarising remark bears an unmistakable tone of resignation: “Socialism out of Christian responsibility did not result in anything at all, and not much resulted from other versions, in any case not the restructuring of society”.⁹⁴

But what did Dirks’ program consist of? Ulrich Bröckling, a friend and co-worker of Dirks, primarily stresses the concept of a socialist “Third Way” and the notion of Europe as a “Third Power” between the blocs. “Those were the two elementary central points of that ‘productive utopia’, which Dirks postulated in April 1945 as the goal and path of the German republic”.⁹⁵ In October 1946 Dirks summarised his thesis in an article defending the word “socialism”. “At the centre...lies the idea of the ‘socialised planned economy’; we describe it as ‘socialist’, because its essential prerequisite contains something that all socialisms have in common: the socialisation of the principal means of production. We call it socialist in order to identify and proclaim the ‘leap’, that qualitative difference which exists between the old and the new order, between a socially reformed capitalism that is restricted at every turn, yet fundamentally free, and a social economy dedicated in principle to public welfare and administered by society but given as much freedom as possible”.⁹⁶

Bröckling asserts that with this statement Dirks sets himself apart from the social reform-oriented concepts of Oswald von Nell-Breuning as well as from the antisocialist “Christian socialism”, which Eberhard Welty based on natural law. With a strong emphasis on economic democracy, the concept of cooperatives, federalism and the European idea, Dirks’ point of view clearly distinguished itself from the Schumacher SPD’s decidedly anticommunist and nationalist perception that aimed at nationalisation, central planning and state centralised power.⁹⁷ “Like many intellectuals after 1945, who based their interpretations on Marx, Walter Dirks aimed to expose the humanist truths of marxism and to separate it from the reality of stalinist terror”.⁹⁸ However, his goal to establish a coalition between Christians and socialists as a foundation of the second German republic, a goal towards which he strove “with the antifascist pathos that was a hallmark of the ini-

93. *Ibid.*, 75.

94. *Ibid.*, 75-76.

95. Bröckling, “Der ‘Dritte Weg’ und die ‘Dritte Kraft’”, 71-72. Bröckling relies on Dirks, “Die Zweite Republik”.

96. Dirks, “Das Wort Sozialismus”, 642.

97. See Bröckling, “Einleitung”, 18.

98. *Ibid.*, 21.

tial postwar period”, proved to be illusory. “Christians simply did not form a political group nor even a coalition comparable to the socialists”.⁹⁹

3.3.3. Theodor Steinbüchel: “Socialism as an Ethical Idea”

Theodor Steinbüchel died on 11 February 1949, leaving him barely four years after the disintegration of National Socialism and the close of the Second World War. Yet one must take into account that Steinbüchel was able to build on the preliminary research he had carried out prior to 1945. After the National Socialists shut down the Munich Catholic Theology Department at the end of the winter semester of 1938-1939, and until he assumed the position of visiting professor of moral theology in Tübingen in the summer of 1941, Steinbüchel was forced to take a leave of absence, though with pay. In addition he was released from “military duties” due to his status as a theology professor.¹⁰⁰ During this time he was able to devote himself wholly to scholarship, apart from his pastoral duties. His brother Anton writes: “One might observe that he published very little during the period between 1938 and 1941. Yet those were exactly the years of his politically forced retirement in Munich. These years are definitely among his most fruitful, since Theodor Steinbüchel used them all the more intensely to prepare for his literary projects in an anticipated near and better future”.¹⁰¹ However these preliminary studies would most likely not have touched upon the range of themes relating to Marx and socialism, since Theodor Steinbüchel after 1938 burned all those documents which he believed to be dangerous. He did this “because it was important to him to survive those times for the sake of scholarship, which was then very much under assault”.¹⁰²

This short final period of his life and of his career in Tübingen became increasingly stressful as a result of additional duties: dean of the Department of Catholic Theology; then, above all, president of the university and finally its vice-president. This demanding workload allowed Steinbüchel “only limited time to devote to his scholarly work”.¹⁰³ Therefore both his planned and his completed projects deserve all the more respect. Among the first of these projects is Steinbüchel’s intended new edition of his theological dissertation, *Der Sozialismus als sittliche Idee*. In 1929 he had refused to authorise a new print-run of his unrevised dissertation, “since he considered a thorough revision necessary”, probably as a result of the publication of the complete works of Marx and Engels begun in 1927.¹⁰⁴ Apart from Alfons Auer¹⁰⁵, Marcel Reding confirms that Steinbüchel stuck to this plan for a

99. Focke, *Sozialismus*, 272-273.

100. Nachlaß Theodor Steinbüchel, at the chair of Prof. Dr. Gerfried W. Hunold, Department for Theological Ethics, Tübingen, folder 10, document 4.

101. Anton Steinbüchel, Theodor Steinbüchel. ‘*Sein eigenes Menschenbild*’, *Zur 75. Wiederkehr seines Geburtstages am 15.6.1963*, in Nachlaß Steinbüchel.

102. *Ibid.*, 227.

103. Auer, “Vorwort”.

104. Letter from Paul Böhringer (Druckerei und Verlag L. Schwann, Düsseldorf) to Anton Steinbüchel dated 13 April 1949. Nachlaß Steinbüchel, folder 13, document 6.

105. Interview with Prof. Dr. Alfons Auer, Biberach/Riss (Oberschwaben), 23 February 1995.

revised edition until his death. Reding was a student and co-worker of Steinbüchel in Tübingen, who even after Steinbüchel's death took part in the deliberations for a new edition.¹⁰⁶ According to Reding, this work would have "needed to be reworked using the new material as a foundation". However, the early death of Steinbüchel prevented these plans from coming to fruition.¹⁰⁷ Aside from his lectures, Steinbüchel offered "courses on moral theology" (*Moraltheologische Übungen*) at Tübingen in the winter semester of 1946-1947 and in the following semester, entitled "Socialism as an Ethical Idea".¹⁰⁸ The fact that Steinbüchel thus picked up the thread that had been severed by National Socialism suggests, in addition to the planned revision of his theological dissertation, that socialism and the ethical concepts related to it were ongoing themes with which Steinbüchel concerned himself all his life.

During the summer semester 1948, the university in Tübingen organised a lecture series with the title, "The Year 1848", honouring the one-hundredth anniversary of the revolution. As vice-president, Steinbüchel was called upon to hold two lectures, entitled "Catholicism and the Catholic Social Concept in 1848" and "The Idea of Socialism in 1848".¹⁰⁹ But likewise in discussions outside of the lecture halls, Steinbüchel promoted a more open relationship between Christians and Marx and between Christians and socialism. Two important talks dealing with Karl Marx constitute something like a framework for this final period of his career. A few months before his death, Steinbüchel gave a lecture on "The Nature of the Proletariat According to Karl Marx".¹¹⁰ In this lecture Steinbüchel states that "it is *marxist* socialism which determines the views of the workers to a large degree. And if it is another kind of socialism, then it cannot survive unless it *originates* from *Marx*. For this reason, the thorough and intense study of marxism is important to Catholic thought, especially in France. *We* can learn much from the intensity and depth with which French Catholicism carries out this research even today!"¹¹¹ In Steinbüchel's words, in which he commends French Catholicism's reception of socialism, one can recognise simultaneously an implicit criticism of German Catholicism's reception of socialism, whose considerations on marxism, according to his interpretation, pale in comparison to efforts in neighbouring France.

106. However this plan was never carried out. In 1956-1957 Dirks still considered *Der Sozialismus als sittliche Idee* topical: This "significant book" is "still almost as important today ... as it was 33 years ago". Dirks, "Der Sozialismus als sittliche Idee", 18. Reding, in 1970, thought similarly. See Reding, "Theodor Steinbüchel", 151.

107. *Ibid.*

108. Apparently these lectures were in high demand, for in the published schedule for the summer semester 1947 one finds the supplemental remark: "pre-registration required; numbers limited." See Eberhard-Karls-Universität Tübingen. Namens- und Vorlesungsverzeichnis. Sommer-Semester 1947, 20. Archive of the Eberhard-Karls University in Tübingen.

109. On 3 and 24 June 1948. The first lecture served also as a draft for a subsequent presentation, which Steinbüchel gave on 7 July 1948 in Stuttgart, entitled "Catholicism and the Catholic Social Concept in 1848". This version is published in the posthumous anthology: Steinbüchel, *Sozialismus*, 234-271.

110. Walberberg, 10 October 1948. Posthumously published in Steinbüchel, *Sozialismus*, 99-123.

111. Steinbüchel, "Das Wesen des Proletariats nach Karl Marx", 116. Similarly, see Dirks, "Ein 'anderer' Katholizismus?", 256.

Of even more significance is a lecture that Steinbüchel gave only one year after the conclusion of the war and that likewise concerned itself with Marx. “After the years in which research on Marx was banished, Steinbüchel derived a new view of Marx from the publication of the early philosophical manuscripts in the 1930s. He introduced this new idea in his presentation on ‘Karl Marx, Person –Work –Ethos’, which he gave at the occasion of the *Sozialethische Arbeitstagung christlicher Studenten* in July 1946”.¹¹² Perhaps it was this international, ecumenical and interdisciplinary conference, which caused Franz Focke to observe that Steinbüchel continued the discussion of socialism after the war “among student circles”.¹¹³ In a conference report, probably written by Walter Dirks, the goal of the conference was said to be “the pursuit, from an ethical point of view, of the question whether and, if appropriate, how a dialogue between Christianity and socialism would be possible, i.e. a true synthesis and not just a cheap compromise”.¹¹⁴ Among other things, the detailed discussions focused on the possibility “to infuse Christian moral standards into the everyday life of society”. This led “to a renewed emphasis on the obligation for responsible cooperation, even in the realm of politics. Only with this consideration does it become possible to come closer to a solution of the social problems of the present in a manner that the conscience dictates: the principle of a ‘personalist socialism’, in which the individual and the community are equally important”.¹¹⁵

In her dissertation, *Die Katholischen Sozialisten*, Susanne Hedler refers to Steinbüchel’s lecture, which portrayed “the revolutionary and philosophical Marx in a completely new light”.¹¹⁶ She uses this lecture to support her thesis that Steinbüchel “was the *only one* of the mentioned individuals, who resumed his efforts to foster *understanding* between the Church and socialism in a similar fashion after the war”.¹¹⁷ She even supports the interpreta-

112. Reding, “Theodor Steinbüchel”, 151. Steinbüchel’s essay was published in the following year in a collection, *Zur sozialen Entscheidung*, edited by Nikolaus Koch. In the Archiv der sozialen Demokratie of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung in Bonn, one may consult a seven page type-written report of this conference that Dirks himself most likely wrote. “From 27-29 July [1946], an interzonal workshop of Christian students, sponsored and supported by the French military government, took place in Tübingen at which delegates from most of the universities in Germany as well as French and Swiss guests were present. Only representatives of the eastern zone were unfortunately unable to attend, although invitations had been sent to them as well. Also attending the conference was [Theophil] Wurm, a provincial bishop of the Protestant Church, and [Direktor Dr. Solter- A.L.], an authorised representative of the bishop of Rottenburg. The conference (was) organised by the *Sozial-Praktische Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Katholischen und Evangelischen Studentengemeinde Tübingen* under the direction of Dr. Nikolaus Koch”. Dirks, *Sozial-ethische Arbeitstagung christlicher Studenten*, [1]. Nachlaß Dirks, shelf mark 358 (*Sozialismus aus christlicher Verantwortung 1945-1949*). Steinbüchel’s talk is an expanded and revised version of his 1928 article. See Steinbüchel, “Karl Marx. Gestalt und Ethos”, 27-46. The far-reaching convergence of his views on Marx as ‘person’ and Marx’ ‘ethos’ in both versions is proof of the continuity present in Steinbüchel’s position.

113. See Focke, *Sozialismus*, 265, footnote 1091.

114. Dirks, “Sozial-ethische Arbeitstagung”, [1]. Next to and above the word “synthesis” there are alternative suggestions noted, which possibly originate from Dirks: “produkt. Auseinandersetzung”. (“productive dialogue”) and “posit. Ergebn.” (“positive outcome”).

115. *Ibid.*, [6].

116. *Ibid.*, [1].

117. Hedler, *Die katholischen Sozialisten*, 129.

tion that, except for Theodor Steinbüchel, *not one* of the representatives of the Catholic socialist movement during the Weimar period – this includes Ernst Michel, Vitus Heller, Heinrich Mertens and Otto Bauer – “acted politically as a Catholic socialist after 1945”.¹¹⁸

But it would be hasty to conclude that Steinbüchel specifically expresses his views on Marx and socialism only in *those* speeches that explicitly name these themes in their title. Steinbüchel’s presidential speech, *Europa als Verbundenheit im Geist*, delivered on 2 May 1946, is a notable counterexample. In this programmatic presentation¹¹⁹ given almost precisely one year after the end of National Socialism and the conclusion of the Second World War, Steinbüchel strove to demonstrate intellectual and cultural European unity - including Russia and America! - and dedicated a notably lengthy section to socialism. As if wanting to justify this detailed preoccupation, he explains that it was necessary, “in view of the tremendous significance of marxism for Europe”¹²⁰, to emphasize the “*ethical idea*”, the “*meaning*” of marxist socialism, in order to identify a spiritual side of this movement of European dimension that connected the various parts of Europe at that time. Once again the issue for Steinbüchel is the ethical idea of socialism, its humane ethos of liberation, which to him embodies one of the intellectual bonds uniting Europe.¹²¹

In this speech, Steinbüchel repeatedly referred to the Catholic French philosopher Jacques Maritain (1882-1973), who in his critique on culture exposed the insufficient utilization of “the social possibilities of Christianity”.¹²² Steinbüchel found it surprising, yet understandable considering the situation and given the issue, that Maritain granted marxism “considerable attention”. In this way, Steinbüchel argued, the French thinker meets up with German theology, ethics and philosophy of history.¹²³ Yet, to support this argument Steinbüchel only refers to his own studies of socialism. Similar to Maritain’s work, which criticises Marx’s positivism and atheism as well as the lurking danger of the loss of individuality in marxism, his studies reveal the anthropological and ethical idea present in marxism. “By denouncing the inhumanity and loss of individuality that results from an economic and social order in which a person, as Kant would say, is regarded as a means to an end rather than the end in itself, Marx’s critique of capitalism found favour with humanist socialism and Christian social ethics”.¹²⁴

It is particularly worth emphasizing that in this speech Steinbüchel still supports his early research of socialism dating from the 1920s.¹²⁵ The positive reference to these writings, without any restrictions, can be interpreted as a further proof of the continuity in Steinbüchel’s view of socialism.

118. *Ibid.*, 18.

119. See Hunold, “Theodor Steinbüchel”, 232.

120. Steinbüchel, “Europa als Verbundenheit im Geist”, Presidential inaugural speech delivered at the University in Tübingen (Universität Tübingen 36) (Tübingen, 1946) 15.

121. *Ibid.*, 18.

122. See *ibid.*, 14.

123. See *ibid.*, 15. He felt a close affinity with Maritain on account of his similar “insight into the secularised-messianic, eschatological-chilastic character of Marx’ interpretation of history”. *Ibid.*, 19.

124. *Ibid.*, 18-19.

125. *Ibid.*, 18, footnote 2.

This continuity originated during the time when he worked as a chaplain in the Rhineland during and after the First World War and continued up through his later pronouncements as president of Tübingen University immediately after the Second World War.

On the whole, it becomes apparent that Steinbüchel developed a special interest for the “underground” representatives of socialism, the thinkers going against the grain and the “dissenters”, including the democratic socialist Eduard Bernstein, whose revisionist views were officially condemned by his party; Georg Beyer, who was heavily reproached as a result of his connections with Catholicism;¹²⁶ the ethical socialists of the Marburg school, whose attempts to establish a synthesis of Kant and Marx were rejected by the orthodox socialists; or the nonconforming “moral philosopher” Georg Lukács, whose most important work was officially accused of leading a revisionist attack on marxism.

Steinbüchel also developed an especially pronounced interest in the early writings by Marx, viewed unfavourably by the official Soviet line.¹²⁷ The connection between the early Marx and Marx as the author of *Das Kapital* was clearly seen by Steinbüchel, but was disputed by the guardians of “orthodoxy”. When reading Steinbüchel’s writings one gets the impression that Steinbüchel wanted to liberate Marx from narrow interpretations and the various marxist attempts to use and abuse Marx for ulterior purposes. In 1948 he noted that “Marx himself was simply not a dogmatic marxist. Marx’ disparaging comment addressed to the popularisers and systematizers, ‘I am not a marxist’, is well-known”.¹²⁸ In Steinbüchel’s view, Marx himself becomes a “dissident”, whom Steinbüchel intends to defend from the machinations of his epigones, who want to appropriate Marx and distort him.

Not only during the Weimar Republic, but with equal vigour after 1945, Steinbüchel worked towards creating an atmosphere in which a discussion of modernity, including a dialogue with Marx and with socialism, could find voice and vote in the Church, even if with some delay and in a too hesitant form. He helped to create an atmosphere in which Oswald von Nell-Breuning was allowed to comment that “we all ... [are standing] on the shoulders of Karl Marx”¹²⁹ and in which political theologies and liberating theologies could develop that, unlike their opponents, seriously regarded “marxism as a challenge to theology”.¹³⁰ Steinbüchel is one of the architects not only of the reorganisation within the Catholic Church and its the-

126. With his work, *Katholizismus und Sozialismus* (Berlin, 1927), Georg Beyer (1884-1943), the cultural editor of the *Rheinische Zeitung*, gave expression to the attempt at a rapprochement between social democracy and Catholicism that was widely noticed at that time. See Haunhorst, “Katholizismus und Sozialismus”, as well as Lienkamp, *Theodor Steinbüchels Sozialismusrezeption*, Part B, Chapter 1.1.3., “Georg Beyers Vermittlungsversuch”.

127. See Landshut, “Vorwort”, VI: “It did not happen by chance that the official Soviet interpretation of Marx never took notice of these writings”.

128. Steinbüchel, “Existenzialismus und christliches Ethos”, 139. This quote from Marx is also referred to by Dirks, “Marxismus in christlicher Sicht”, 126.

129. Von Nell-Breuning, “Wir alle stehen auf den Schultern von Karl Marx”.

130. Metz, “Marxismus als Herausforderung an die Theologie?”, as well as Lienkamp, “Die Herausforderung des Denkens”.

ology, but also of the bridge built across the “abhorrently” wide gap between Christianity and socialism, between Christian and socialist ethics.

3.4. *The Frankfurter Hefte: The Most Significant Periodical of German Left Catholicism in the Postwar Period*

The *Frankfurter Hefte*, edited by Eugen Kogon starting in April 1946 together with Walter Dirks and (between 1948 and 1950) Clemens Münster, with its 50.000 to 75.000 subscribers must be regarded as one of the political and cultural periodicals with the highest print-run in the immediate postwar period.¹³¹ In order to evaluate the influence of the *Frankfurter Hefte*, one must take into consideration that the number of people who read this periodical was significantly higher - a poll in 1947 revealed three to four readers per copy - and that at times up to 150.000 subscription requests could not be granted as a result of the fixed quota for paper.¹³² Following the monetary reform, the circulation of the *Hefte* decreased, “although the *Frankfurter Hefte* remained the most widely-distributed cultural-political monthly into the 1950s”.¹³³ According to the visions of the editors, the *Frankfurter Hefte* were not only to give running commentaries on political events, but above all also to contribute programmatic suggestions for the new construction of Germany.¹³⁴ Therefore, contrary to many other periodicals that emerged in postwar Germany, the *Hefte* were characterised by a more consistent position and a more precise conception of that which was to come.¹³⁵

A clearly recognisable plea for “socialism out of Christian responsibility” was part and parcel of this plan. Already in their original prospectus, Kogon and Dirks ascribed a particular role in the creation of a new Europe under socialism to the working class and to Christians. According to Kogon and Dirks the periodical’s task was to work “on the theoretical and practical rapprochement between workers and Christians, between Christianity and socialism”.¹³⁶ In a similar manner Karl Heinz Knappstein, the cofounder of the “socialist” CDU in Hessen, emphasises in an article entitled “The Hour of Social Reform”, published in the June issue of the first

131. Bröckling, “Der 'Dritte Weg' und die 'Dritte Kraft’”, 71.

132. See Stankowski, *Linkskatholizismus nach 1945*, 81.

133. See Bröckling, “Einleitung”, in Dirks, *Sozialismus oder Restauration*, 12.

134. See Bröckling, “Der 'Dritte Weg' und die 'Dritte Kraft’”, 71.

135. Prümm, “Entwürfe einer zweiten Republik”, 330. In addition to the *Frankfurter Hefte*, the journal *Ende und Anfang*, which was in circulation since April 1946 (appearing every two weeks), should also be mentioned. It was published by a group of young Left Catholics from the youth movement *Quickborn* which a number of “Christian socialists” from Munich joined, including Theo Pirker. “Of all the Left Catholic groups of the immediate postwar period, *Ende und Anfang* engaged in the most intensive dialogue with marxism”. After the monetary reform and in the course of the increasingly pervasive climate favouring restoration, the journal found itself in economic difficulties and was forced to discontinue its publication in February 1949. Editor’s note in Dirks, *Sozialismus oder Restauration*, 283. See also Stankowski, *Linkskatholizismus nach 1945*, 27-63, as well as Schmidt, “Linkskatholische Positionen nach 1945 zu Katholizismus und Kirche im NS-Staat”, in particular pp. 134-140, who refers to the intensive contacts between this journal and French Left Catholics (*ibid.*, 135).

136. Citation in Stankowski, *Linkskatholizismus nach 1945*, 72.

volume, that “political cooperation between Christians and the workers’ movement would lead to concrete realisations of socialist demands” and that this was not only possible, but historically desirable. “Socialism out of Christian responsibility is no empty slogan, no unrealistic whim but neither is it deceiving bait. Rather, it is a system of practical economic policy measures”¹³⁷, the most important being the following three: first, the *socialisation* of privately owned big businesses and key industries for reasons of public welfare, i.e. the transformation of these properties into cooperative property (nationalisation only in a few unavoidable cases); second, *indicative planning* of the overall contours of the economy, serving the interests of the “little man”, above all in the area of investment, with sufficient room for self-initiative and personal responsibility (not state bureaucracy, but sensible self-management of the economy by the people composing its workforce); third, co-determination of workers over the uses of capital funds on which their economic existence depends (genuine economic equality and co-determination also regarding the business decisions of workplaces, profit sharing and the sharing of economic risks) and in all institutions of the planned economy and in the directing of the overall economy.

This would, according to Knappstein’s prognosis, “return millions of proletarians back home to society after many decades of division and ostracism. These masses would then no longer be objects or raw materials of the economy, but rather its responsible co-leaders”. Only in this way could the social question be truly solved and class struggle overcome, not only in word but in deed. The author is convinced that “the path to such a goal is called socialism. If we proclaim ourselves adherents of this path, then we do so out of a Christian responsibility for the masses – our neighbours”.¹³⁸ It becomes evident that the *Hefte* took a wholly different approach from that of the prominently antisocialist representatives of a “Christian socialism”, such as Welty and Siemer.

In the commemorative volume written particularly for Walter Dirks’ 80th birthday, Eugen Kogon gives a retrospective account of the *Frankfurter Hefte*’s programme. “Never again racism, tyranny and exploitation; no more cowardly conformity; freedom in responsibility”. With these words Kogon described the editors’ intentions.¹³⁹ The general purpose of the periodical was devotion to ethical pursuits, to fundamentally innovative reflections, education in the sense of the conveyance of values, and information. The lesson from Nazi barbarism was to be a radically consistent humanism as a standard for thought and deed. Therefore, according to Kogon, the editors had decided to pursue political journalism - in the sense of observation, analysis, criticism and advice - instead of engaging in party politics.¹⁴⁰ But the editors of the *Hefte* also wanted to influence politics and to utilise the opportunity, “reminiscent of the Old Testament”, “to allow politics to develop out of ethical concerns, which rarely ever happens”.¹⁴¹

137. Knappstein, “Die Stunde der Sozialreform”, 1.

138. *Ibid.*, 3.

139. Kogon, “Fragende Erinnerung”, 255.

140. See *ibid.*, 255-257.

141. *Ibid.*, 255.

In numerous fundamental articles, Dirks in particular outlined the spiritual framework of the anticipated new German republic. According to Kogon, “we have co-drafted the concept of a ‘socialism in liberty’, a libertarian socialism”.¹⁴² Yet, in the end the efforts to create a different Germany west of the Elbe failed. The decisions opposing all that the editors of the *Hefte* deemed right, desirable and realistically possible were already made early on. “It began with the strictly capitalist currency reform in 1948, which permitted the former property relationships to persist unchanged, and which was carried out against all those of us who were expropriated except for forty marks”. Rearmament marked the second major defeat, which was to be followed by many others.¹⁴³ Thus, according to Kogon’s pessimistic conclusion, the potential of the unique historical opportunity for a genuine new beginning was not even close to being utilised, much less successfully realised.¹⁴⁴

Despite these misfortunes, the *Frankfurter Hefte*, “as an independent Left Catholic periodical beyond social democracy and official communism”, still performed “an important function within the intellectual environment of the Federal Republic of Germany”, as Ute Schmidt summarised it in her analysis of Left Catholic activities after 1945. “The periodical created a space, or rather a niche, that could provide a solid base for a civil, peace-promoting and enlightened way of thinking”.¹⁴⁵

3.5. *The Demand for Co-Determination at the 1949 Catholic Convention in Bochum – the Swan Song of Left Catholicism?*

Soon after its establishment, the socialist and Christian powers within the trade union movement that had united to form the DGB made economic co-determination their primary objective.¹⁴⁶ Yet their demand did not remain uncontested within the Catholic realm. The majority of Catholics, according to Bröckling, feared infringements upon the right to property, the influence of “non-business elements”, or even steps towards socialism based on economic democracy.¹⁴⁷ It was not an unfounded concern, at least as far as Left Catholic intentions were concerned. That is why Walter Dirks, one of their advocates, concurred with those employers who recognised “the right to co-determination as a ‘step towards socialism’”.¹⁴⁸

142. *Ibid.*, 259.

143. See *Ibid.*

144. See *ibid.*, 261.

145. Schmidt, “Linkskatholische Positionen nach 1945”, 146-147.

146. “Co-determination” means the institutionalized participation of employees or their representatives (factory committees, trade unions) in the administration and organisation of businesses and enterprises, as well as in all social, economic and socio-political decisions in a broader sense. See Rütters and Kleinhenz, “Mitbestimmung”, 1176.

147. See Bröckling, “Einleitung”, in: Dirks, *Sagen was ist*, 33.

148. Dirks, “Der Kampf um die Mitbestimmung”, 688.

The parliamentary elections in 1949 resulted in the *Kleine Koalition* (namely the CDU/CSU, the FDP and DP), favoured by Adenauer, taking control of government duties.¹⁴⁹ Shortly thereafter, from 31 August to 4 September 1949, the 73rd German Catholic Convention took place in Bochum attended by five hundred thousand participants, which proved to be one of the largest mass meetings in the postwar period. At this second Catholic Convention following the end of the Second World War¹⁵⁰, the social and Left Catholic forces succeeded in standing their ground against their rivals within the Catholic Church¹⁵¹ and established a counterpoint against the neo-liberal orientation of economic politics that was officially implemented by the government.¹⁵² So it happened that the Catholic Convention at that time adopted a sensational resolution of the workshop on “Employers and Workers”. This resolution called for the statutory establishment of the “right to co-determination of all workers regarding social, personnel and economic issues”.¹⁵³ Up until this point, this summons had never been presented so clearly and with such impact upon the public by forces emanating from within Catholicism. According to Wolfgang Schroeder, however, the real “scandal” was the fact that the resolution declared the right to co-determination as a natural right (“a divinely ordained natural right”), thereby putting it on an equal level with the right to own property.¹⁵⁴

Yet the Bochum resolution assumed the establishment of co-determination based on the principles of corporatism and the autonomy of each individual business, with “non-business elements”, such as trade unions, not welcome. All the same, the resolution was gladly welcomed by the DGB and its chairperson Hans Böckler as an important starting-point for the democratization of the economy.¹⁵⁵ “At the same time, however, the representatives of the trade unions overestimated the significance ‘of this swan song of Left Catholicism in Germany after 1945’ (Theo Pirker) and failed to recognise the corporate idea, stressing the notion of the workplace as a performance-oriented community of employers and employees, which the demand for co-determination coming out of Catholic circles reflected. Walter Dirks saw things differently. He recognised co-determination as the field in which at least initial steps toward economic democracy had been achieved – even if on a much lesser scale than anticipated between 1945 to 1948”.¹⁵⁶

149. An influential group under the leadership of Jakob Kaiser had pleaded in vain for the Grand Coalition consisting of the CDU/CSU and the SPD. The *Freie Demokratische Partei* (FDP) emerged in December 1948 as a result of a merger of West German liberal parties. After 1947 the *Deutsche Partei* (DP), which emerged out of the *Niedersächsische Landespartei* (founded in 1945), supported a federal and national-conservative programme.

150. The first Catholic Convention after the war took place on 1-5 September 1948 in Mainz and had as its theme “The Christian in Times of Misery”. It was also the first Catholic Convention after the National Socialists’ accession to power.

151. See Bröckling, “Einleitung” in: Dirks, *Sagen was ist*, 33.

152. See Schroeder, *Katholizismus und Einheitsgewerkschaft*, 112-113.

153. *Gerechtigkeit schafft Frieden*, 114.

154. Schroeder, *Katholizismus und Einheitsgewerkschaft*, 113.

155. See *ibid.*, 113-114.

156. Bröckling, “Einleitung”, in: Dirks, *Sagen was ist*, 34.

Schroeder contradicts Pirker's thesis, which referred to the resolution as "the product of Left Catholic powers". Schroeder claimed that the different social and Left Catholic trends had goals regarding the politics of trade unions that were too diametrically opposed and that the intentions of the participants in drafting the resolution were too different. Participants included a whole spectrum of individuals ranging from the conservative head of the *Katholische Arbeiterbewegung* (KAB), Hermann-Josef Schmitt, to the Left Catholic Walter Dirks.¹⁵⁷ As a result, in the post-Convention period, marked by sharp internal attacks against the Bochum resolution, social Catholic groups increasingly withdrew their support of the resolution. This was illustrated in a letter from the Left Catholic entrepreneur Wilhelm Haurand to Hans Böckler, dated 9 November 1949, in which he states: "In the meantime, the struggle opposing the decision made in Bochum concerning the right to co-determination of the worker has developed into a true witch-hunt that takes on ever more grotesque forms everyday. One cannot help but wonder how those individuals expect to be taken seriously, who after long and tedious deliberations proclaimed to the whole world the clear, unmistakable decision in Bochum and today do everything possible to sabotage the realisation of this decision".¹⁵⁸ According to Haurand, the fate of the Bochum resolution now lay solely in the hands of the trade unions. The Catholic critics of the decision for co-determination not only received support from Archbishop Joseph cardinal Frings from Cologne¹⁵⁹, but also from Pope Pius XII, who, in his speech delivered 3 June 1950, emphasised the fundamental importance of the right to own property while declaring out of bounds the defense of the right to co-determination based on natural law. "Neither the nature of the employment contract as such nor the nature of an enterprise logically calls for such a right".¹⁶⁰ However, according to Lothar Roos, when examining the context of the Bochum resolution more

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157. Schmitt was the former secretary-general of the *Reichsverband der Katholischen Arbeiter- und Arbeiterinnenvereine Deutschlands*, which was rather influential during the Weimar Republic. In 1946 he was instructed by Archbishop Joseph Frings of Cologne to take charge of the reconstitution of the *Westdeutscher Verband der Katholischen Arbeiter- und Arbeiterinnenvereine*, which included Welty and Nell-Breuning amongst their advisers. In 1947, the founding of the *Werkvolk - Süddeutscher Verband Katholischer Arbeitnehmer* came about, which stood in the tradition of the *Verband Süddeutscher Katholischer Arbeitervereine*. Not until 1971 was a *Bundesverband der Katholischen Arbeitnehmer-Bewegung Deutschlands* created.
158. Citation in Schroeder, *Katholizismus und Einheitsgewerkschaft*, 114. Haurand was a friend of Wilhelm Hohoff. See Haurand, "Wilhelm Hohoff". Along with Chaplain Joseph Rossaint of Düsseldorf and Theo Pirker, the latter belonging to the group around *Anfang und Ende*, Haurand belonged to the *Bund christlicher Sozialisten* that was established in Oberhausen, consisted mainly of Catholics and whose history remains largely unexplored to this day. See Dirks, Schmidt and Stankowski, eds., *Christen für den Sozialismus*, 11, 29-34.
159. See Schroeder, *Katholizismus und Einheitsgewerkschaft*, 114. For Frings, "the enemy [stood] on the Left", reversing Joseph Wirth's famous expression. Letter from Joseph Frings to Wilhelm Hamacher dated 29 March 1946. Citation in Schmidt, *Zentrum oder CDU*, 240.
160. See Pius XII, "Ansprache an die Teilnehmer", 3266. Highly suggestive is the title of this section called "The Threat to Private Property Through Economic Co-Determination by Wage-Earners". This danger was seen as similar to the socialist threat.

closely, it becomes evident that the Catholic Convention never actually made such a claim.¹⁶¹

Even if the co-determination of the coal, iron and steel industries, which was legally established in 1951 and which guaranteed co-determination in economic issues, was not achieved until the trade unions threatened to go on strike, it can perhaps still be considered as a consequence of the Catholic Convention in Bochum.¹⁶² Yet, as Eugen Kogon notes in a sobering remark, already one year later, the constitutional law governing the administration of private enterprises, called for more significant limitations of the rights of employees.¹⁶³

4. The 1950s: An Epoch Marked by Restoration

In September 1950, Walter Dirks published a widely read article entitled “Der restaurative Charakter der Epoche”, in which, according to Peter Glotz, he captured the spirit of the times.¹⁶⁴ “The restoration of the old world”, the article stated, “is so complete that one must, first of all, accept it as a fact”.¹⁶⁵ Dirks discovered symptoms of restoration not only in the CDU¹⁶⁶, but “in all parties, in the economy and everyday life, in city planning, in literature, philosophy and theology ... Actual blame must be placed on those indistinct Christians and socialists, who had been called upon to actively participate in a renewal, but have failed to take up this responsibility due to complacency and lack of vision”.¹⁶⁷ According to Walter Dirks himself, this article marked the conclusion of the period in which the *Frankfurter Hefte* had attempted to oppose the movement towards restoration led by Adenauer and had hoped “to realise the concept of European socialism, of a socialist Europe”.¹⁶⁸ Now the only task remained “to recognise and to proclaim what has become reality today”.¹⁶⁹ For Bröckling, this

161. Roos, “Kapitalismus, Sozialreform, Sozialpolitik”, 115, footnote 112.

162. Co-determination of the coal, iron and steel industries, established 21 May 1951, guarantees the fully proportional representation of workers' delegates on the board of directors. Moreover, it ensures that the interests of the workers in these industries are brought to the attention of the board of directors through a “director of labour”, who cannot be appointed nor voted out without the support of a majority of the workers' representatives on the board of directors. See Rütters and Kleinhenz, “Mitbestimmung”, 1178.

163. See Kogon, “Fragende Erinnerung”, 259-260. The constitutional law governing the administration of enterprises, enacted 11 October 1952, was passed after a sometimes bitter fight, in which the supporters of economic democracy lost out to the supporters of free enterprise. See Naendrup, “Betriebsverfassungsrecht”, 739.

164. Dirks and Glotz, “Jenseits von Optimismus und Pessimismus”, 21. According to Focke, *Sozialismus*, 275, Dirks “was amongst the first to recognise and identify the process of restoration in West Germany.”

165. Dirks, “Der restaurative Charakter der Epoche”, 942.

166. *Ibid.*, 948: This union of Christians did not develop into “a force that [would] renew the face of the earth”, a goal intended by those who founded it, among them Dirks himself. “Even today, reading the *Frankfurter Leitsätze* and the *Ablener Programm* is a painful process”.

167. Bröckling, “Einleitung”, in: Dirks, *Sozialismus oder Restauration*, 29.

168. Dirks, “Vorwort”, in: Dirks: *Sozialismus oder Restauration*, 8.

169. Dirks, “Der restaurative Charakter der Epoche”, 943.

line of reasoning was equivalent to an acknowledgement of defeat. In addition, this line of reasoning reflected Dirks' continued refusal to reconcile himself with the status quo.¹⁷⁰

A shift in the trend began to manifest itself, not only on the political level, but also within the Church. The Catholic Convention in Bochum had promoted the motto "Justice Creates Peace". Already in the selection process of a theme for the Catholic Convention in Passau and Altötting in 1950, a counter movement evolved and the Convention took place under the motto "First the Kingdom of God".¹⁷¹ Out of the controversy over co-determination that erupted as a result of the meeting in Bochum, a monolithic Catholic view regarding society, economy and politics emerged in which "everyone who did not accept or even denied this course stood in danger of being rejected".¹⁷²

By contrast, continues Schroeder, a relative openness regarding fundamental social and economic reforms was present in social Catholicism for the first few years following the war, despite all scepticism towards new political developments. Left Catholics were regarded as well-liked conversation partners within the CDU and within Catholicism. Socialism, communism and the Church's view of these ideologies were discussed in Catholic publications, and even the project of the Catholic worker priests in France was closely followed.¹⁷³ Stankowski maintains that the influence from France should not be underestimated, a country where German Left Catholics, "out of curiosity and maybe even with jealousy, observed a natural cooperation between Christians and communists and whose theological and political projects they became aware of through the Allied press and soon by means of personal contacts".¹⁷⁴ Primarily the groups associated with the most widely distributed Left Catholic publications, *Frankfurter Hefte* and *Ende und Anfang*, nurtured active contacts with Left Catholics in neighbouring France.¹⁷⁵

"Even if the sceptics and the open-minded formed two different groups, a combination of them, both favouring economic and social renewal, constituted a force that was not to be underestimated. The exclusive orientation of the Catholic camp on the CDU/CSU, the latter becoming dominant in the 1950s, had not yet come about. Yet in the years 1949-1950, this relative openness turned into fixed positions and exclusivity".¹⁷⁶ All socio-political motives and measures which were not solidly anchored in "the middle" were attacked in the name of anticommunist doctrine. According to Schroeder, this phase initiated the "shift of German Catholicism towards the Right".¹⁷⁷

170. See Bröckling, "Einleitung", in: Dirks, *Sozialismus oder Restauration*, 29.

171. See Schroeder, *Katholizismus und Einheitsgewerkschaft*, 115.

172. See *ibid.*

173. See *ibid.*, 116.

174. Stankowski, "Katholiken für den Sozialismus", 11.

175. *Ibid.*

176. Schroeder, *Katholizismus und Einheitsgewerkschaft*, 116.

177. *Ibid.*

5. Last But Not Least

The “restoration”, however, was not the final word and neither did it mark the end of Left Catholic activities in Germany. Running parallel to the international political and social developments of the 1960s and 1970s - decolonization, the Cuban revolution, the Prague Spring, as well as the student and women’s movement, to name a few key events -, new openings began to emerge within the Church. Soon after the succession of Pope Pius XII by Pope John XXIII, who introduced the *aggiornamento* into the Church, Left Catholicism in Germany experienced a certain renewal, despite the repeated instances of resistance and losses incurred from various frictions. This opening was marked by many progressive steps including: the creation of the Second Vatican Council and the opening of the Church to the “world”, especially encouraged by *Gaudium et Spes*; the Christian-marxist conversations (starting in 1965), inspired by the *Paulusgesellschaft*; the *Bensberger Kreis*, which was co-founded by Walter Dirks (in 1966), along with his ringing plea for anticapitalism out of socialist conviction; the journals established in 1968: *Internationale Dialog-Zeitschrift*, *Publik*, as well as *kritischer Katholizismus* - publications in which Dirks repeatedly published his articles¹⁷⁸; the establishment of theologies of liberation, hope, revolution, and the new political and feminist theology; the creation of the German branch of *Christen für den Sozialismus* (1973); and the common synod of the dioceses of the Federal Republic of Germany in Würzburg and, above all, their resolution *Kirche und Arbeiterschaft* (1975).

Although the thesis purporting direct connections between Left Catholicism of the immediate postwar period and its corresponding movement in the 1960’s and 1970’s is controversial, nonetheless ideological and personal continuities, for which Walter Dirks is a prime example, can be found. In addition, scholars and political commentators began a historical and literary assessment of the history of Left Catholicism¹⁷⁹, in part also serving the purpose of confirming the authors’ own concealed roots, and contributing to the Christian socialist rediscovery of its own identity.¹⁸⁰

Last but not least, we should return to the question posed initially, whether it is still worthwhile to examine German Left Catholicism of the 1940s and 1950s, despite its relative failure. In a response to this question, we shall let Ulrich Bröckling have the final word: “Historiography tends to portray the past in such a way as if everything that happened, had to happen the way it did. The disregard of all defeated alternatives avoids the danger that arises from memories of past battles: There are alternatives, and future struggles have the potential to end differently”.¹⁸¹

178. See Bröckling, ed., *Walter Dirks Bibliographie*.

179. See the comments made by Stankowski, *Linkskatholizismus nach 1945*, 3-4, as well as by Focke, *Sozialismus*, who sees his book as a contribution to the historiography of “German Left Catholicism”. *Ibid.*, 11.

180. See Walter Dirks, “Nachbemerkung”, 160: “Whoever does not want to give up faced with the second period of impending restoration in the mid-1970s should remember the forefathers and history”.

181. Bröckling, “Einleitung”, in: Dirks, *Sozialismus oder Restauration*, 11.