

The Eugenic Temptation in Socialism: Sweden, Germany, and the Soviet Union

ALBERTO SPEKTOROWSKI

Tel Aviv University

In recent years, eugenics has emerged as a major topic in the history of science. As a mixture of science and policy, as a discipline and social movement, eugenics lies at the interface of biological science and society. The primary feature of “eugenics,” a term coined by Francis Galton in 1883, is the conviction that human traits of character, for good or evil, are genetically transmitted. This so-called science, therefore, seeks to regulate human procreation by encouraging the fecundity of allegedly genetically superior groups in society, while discouraging “defectives” from producing children since they would replicate their deficiencies.

Understandably, eugenics is associated with conservative and racist views. Conservatives, for example, would agree with Darwin’s assertion in *The Descent of Man* (1871) that “. . . we civilized men . . . do our utmost to check the process of elimination: we build asylums for the imbecile . . . we institute poor laws . . . thus the weak members of society propagate their kind.”¹ Conservative political elitists would concur that the task of social policy should reverse this social decline, not through health or educational programs but by preventing the birth of future inferior generations.² A complementary idea is promoted by racist theories, which endorse those eugenicists that identify feeble people with a specific race or social group

However, not only conservative and racist regimes have succumbed to the lure of eugenics. A wide variety of intellectuals and political regimes, including socialists of the democratic school of socialism, have also flirted with eugenic ideas.³ One reason behind democratic socialism’s attraction to eugenic

Acknowledgements: My thanks to Elisabet Mizrachi for her dedication and aid in the research on Swedish Social Democracy. My special thanks also to the anonymous *CSSH* readers and to David Akin for his excellent editing work.

¹ S. Trombley, *The Right to Reproduce. A History of Coercive Sterilization* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1988), p. 6.

² *Ibid.*, p. 9.

³ Of other countries that implemented similar laws, we might mention the United States, Great Britain, and Japan. The proposals both for mass segregation of the “feeble minded” under the Men-

politics was the inherent link between eugenics and productivity. Indeed, socialist regimes as well as conservative ones had to deal with economic efficiency and pondered the question of whether a higher quality national stock might contribute to productivity. Socialists, however, claimed not only social and economic superiority over capitalist productivity; they also claimed moral superiority. As could thus be expected, eugenic policies pursued in the name of social progress raise serious difficulties.

Motivated by some of the moral dilemmas engendered by these difficulties, this study tests the approach towards eugenics developed by Swedish social democracy, one of the most progressive and humanistic examples of democratic socialism. In order to fully explore this problematic area, Swedish social democracy will be compared with two different types of non-democratic social regimes: Nazi Germany, representing the worst type of racial social communitarianism, and the Soviet Union, the most extreme form of proletarian totalitarianism. This comparison will show how a progressive and humanist type of socialist welfare loses moral ground when it adopts productivity views of society. Indeed, Sweden, the most benign type of socialism, and Nazi Germany, the most reactionary type of collective regime, shared similar or seemingly similar approaches towards eugenics and towards the idea of a productive society. Despite ideological and political differences, both the Nazis and the Swedes used "eugenics" to define two different types of social exclusion. For the Nazis, it contributed in defining society in racial terms, while for the Swedes it contributed to an exclusionist idea of social welfare. While the Nazis promoted a racially productive society, the Swedes promoted a productive welfare, one in which concepts such as efficiency, productivity, and social peripheries set the frame for what could be defined as a eugenic welfare state of "the fittest." In contrast to both Sweden and Germany, during the peak of Stalinist rule in the Soviet Union the role of eugenics was downplayed. While I do not strive to absolve the Soviet regime from its oppressive features, I do suggest that in one field of human progress the ideological tenets of Marxist-Leninism set an important barrier against the notion of socio-biological manipulation of human advancement. This analysis attempts to shed a new light on the ideology of welfare socialism by examining the coexistence of two opposing trends within it. One trend encourages efficiency and national productivity, and the other, universal moral values. When productivity is the dominant value, even a humanitarian type of socialism like Sweden's social democracy was capable of en-

tal Deficiency Act of 1913, and for sexual sterilization of mental defectives in the 1930s in Great Britain, are examples of measures that may shake our views of a "liberal" Britain in the early century. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, the European theory of degeneration began to take root also in the United States. The first explicit eugenics legislation was enacted in Connecticut in 1896, and Indiana, Washington, and especially California would follow. In 1913 the state of California was empowered to sterilize any inmate of any institution diagnosed as suffering from hereditary insanity.

dorsing eugenic policies in order to resolve “population problems.” In contrast, one of the most perverse totalitarian regimes in history forestalled that type of “scientific” perversity.

SOCIALISM AND EUGENICS: PRODUCTIONISM VS. PROLETARIAN SCIENCE

The origins of productivist socialism have been attributed by several scholars to a shift in socialist political thought from Marxist socialism to national socialism. Zeev Sternhell, Mario Sznajder, and James Gregor,⁴ among others, have focused on the fact that one of the most dramatic revisions of Marxist political thought, the one launched by the school of revolutionary syndicalism of Georges Sorel in France and Arturo Labriola in Italy, set the stage for the creation of a new type of productivist socialism, which contrasted with Marxist socialism. This “new socialism” was characterized by its abandonment of the universal class struggle and universal welfare while celebrating the productivist and mobilization power of the nation as a whole. As noted by Sternhell, this new type of revolutionary-syndicalism found a common language with integral or organic nationalists and together they outlined the underlying principles of the future fascist state, which blended nationalism and syndicalism.⁵ It is no wonder that several of the most important ideologues of fascism were socialists who had shifted from leftist Marxism to productivist socialism, especially during the period between the World Wars. Socialists such as Henrik de Mann in Belgium, Marcel Déat in France, and Oswald Mosley in England all followed the path already established by Mussolini. Each one in his own way promoted a type of corporatist organization of society in the name of a new, virile, and productive socialism, which they considered to be the socialism of the future. While old Marxist socialism promoted dialectical materialism as a liberating science, the task of which was to eliminate the false consciousness created by objective science, productivist socialism uncritically adopted objective scientific developments and embraced ideas of social engineering. While old-style Marxism explained social conflict in the confrontation of the bourgeoisie and proletariat, one feature of productivist socialism was that it moved from the conflict that characterized Marxist thought to a new dichotomy, setting the productive and healthy segments of society—namely workers and productive capitalists—against the parasitic elements—namely corrupt political parties, fi-

⁴ See Z. Sternhell, “Fascist Ideology.” In, W. Laqueur, *Fascism: A Reader's Digest* (New York: Pelican Books, 1979); Z. Sternhell, Mario Sznajder, and Maia Asherri, *The Birth of Fascist Ideology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994) James Gregor, *The Young Mussolini and the Intellectual Origins of Fascism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979).

⁵ Sternhell has pointed out that fascist ideology resulted from the convergence of an integralist and conservative right and an anti-Marxian socialist left. Both revolutionary syndicalists followers of Georges Sorel and national integralists followers of Charles Maurras come together in *Cahiers du Cercle Prohodon*, in 1910. They found a common ground in their attack on the Third Republic and on the theoretical creation of a new type of national socialism, the basis of the national syndicalist state.

nancial capital, and feeble people. This new socialism promoted a new type of social solidarity among the productive sections of society, said to be a precondition to national productivism.

I suggest that while Fascism and Nazi national-socialism were the authoritarian and racist offspring of this productivist type of socialism, Fabian socialists and Swedish social democracy should also be considered the offspring of productivist socialists. Rather than representing the democratic face of Marxist socialism, they revealed the democratic face of productivist socialism.

The Fabians, led by Sydney and Beatrice Webb, as well as Bernard Shaw, were the ideologues of British trade unionism and laid the foundations of the modern welfare state in Britain. Their socialist convictions were entirely influenced by sociological positivism. As claimed by Sydney Webb, “the essential contribution of the century to sociology has been the superimposition of the individual by the community as the starting point of social investigations.”⁶ In contrast to Marxists, the Fabians considered themselves above class interests and, as noted by Eric Hobsbawm, they formed the basis of a scientific socialism, whose protagonists “. . . would be ‘middle class theorists’ representing the interests of . . . the trained, impartial, and scientific administrators.”⁷ The most important point, however, is that their aim was to promote the ascendance of a model of industrial democracy, composed of “the healthy and fittest.” Social health, in the view of Fabian socialism, means the encouragement and improvement of the healthy parts of society, namely, the productive parts, while the sick and the parasites should be removed. Sydney Webb, for example, saw the growth of joint stock companies as the growth of the productive side of society and, therefore, as a step in the direction of socialism.⁸

The Swedish Social Democracy promoted a middle way between German Social Democracy, which gave priority to theory over practice, and the English absence of theory.⁹ Indeed, the most important ideologues of Swedish Social Democracy, Hjalmar Branting, Axel Danielsson, Frederik Sterky, and later on Ernst Wigforss, despite differences among themselves, all proclaimed their adherence to Marxism. At the same time, differently from German Social Democracy, the Swedish were quite united in their concept that politics should be adjusted to the needs of the day, and they admitted that their party represented the interests of the whole people rather than the proletariat. Beginning in 1890, Axel Danielsson argued that the Swedish social democrats must evolve from ideological support for the working class and come close to the “people,” a concept that included the peasantry and low middle class.¹⁰ This ideal could be im-

⁶ S. Webb, *Socialism in England* (London: London School of Economics and Political Science, 1987), p. 10.

⁷ See E. Hobsbawm, “The Fabians Reconsidered.” In, *Labouring Men* (London 1964).

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 112.

⁹ Sheri Berman, *The Social Democratic Moment. Ideas and Politics in the Making of Interwar Europe* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998), p. 51.

¹⁰ Axel Danielsson, *Om revolutionen i Sverige* (Stockholm: Arbetarkultur, 1972), pp. 28–29.

plemented by transforming Sweden into an industrial democracy as promoted by Ernst Wigforss.

The question is to what extent eugenics contributed to the elaboration of this productivist society. Could a welfare “national home” be implemented only by enhancing the quality of the “right” population and by restricting the number of non-productive people? Furthermore, by contrast, was there a reformist view of eugenics that fit the Marxists ideals of a world proletariat revolution?

To explore this point it is important to stress that since its early beginnings eugenics had developed both a reformist and a racist face. The reformist face can be traced to the French evolutionist Jean Baptiste de Lamarck (1774–1829), who suggested that changing conditions create new needs, which animals alter their habits to satisfy. This view was challenged by the German cytologist August Weismann (1834–1914), who rejected the principle of acquired characteristics becoming genetic. That stance was preceded by Gregor Mendel in 1865 and continued in the 1900s by the American T. H. Morgan, who shunned eugenics as vulgar and nonscientific. Mendel’s famous mechanism of heredity, “The continuity of the germ-plasm,” first articulated in 1883, challenged environmental assumptions by claiming that genes maintain their integrity and do not become altered by blending.¹¹ The theoretical conclusion was that “natural selection” was considered to be the sole agent of social progress. However, progress was not inevitable because under certain conditions the “unfit” might prosper, posing a challenge to any further evolutionary development.¹²

One of the first socialists to endorse this last view was Havelock Ellis, who in his book *The Task of Social Hygiene* (1912) argued that in order to progress a socialist society must eliminate its nonproductive elements. However, the most noteworthy exponents of this trend were the Fabians. The Fabians attacked old socialism because it rested upon ideas such as the right to live and the right to work, “ideas of retrogressive rather than progressive selection.”¹³ That is the reason why they criticized the poor laws in England. They felt that these laws had regressive rather than progressive effects since they improved the economic situation of the inhabitants of the urban slums, thereby encouraging childbirth.

However, whether Fabian socialism led to the promotion of eugenic policies of sterilization is open to debate. According to Weeks, eugenics might have been relevant for the Fabians in eliminating the biologically feeble. However, in his opinion, the Webbs were concerned with social rather than biological engineering.¹⁴ Trombley, in contrast, claims that the leading Fabians with their

¹¹ Sheila Faith Weiss, “The Race Hygiene Movement in Germany 1904–1945.” In, Mark Adams, ed. *The Wellborn Science. Eugenics in Germany, France, Brazil and Russia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 13.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 14.

¹³ See S. Ball, *The Moral Aspects of Socialism* (1896), in Trombley, *The Right to Reproduce*, p. 37.

¹⁴ J. Weeks, “The Fabians and Utopia.” In, Ben Pimlott, ed. *Fabian Essays in Socialist Thought* (London: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press), p. 76.

general commitment to the notion of a planned society were attracted by “genetic planning.”¹⁵ I endorse the second thesis and claim that the dramatic point in eugenic development came when the biological and the social became intertwined and the distinctions between them blurred. This lent scientific legitimacy to social exclusionist policies. Indeed, when eugenics became the basis of social engineering, it broadened the range of those destined to be excluded. One of the most famous Fabians, H. G. Wells, argued in *A Modern Utopia* (1905) that in an ideal socialist society the state would forbid the procreation of those judged to be below the national minimum of “physical efficiency.” Bernard Shaw added the “positive” side, and proposed a system of breeding outside marriage. A similar problem occupying the Fabians was that of the “differential birth rate.” The proliferation of the unfit was related especially to Catholics, Jews, and immigrants, who “bred freely.” The way to alter this condition was, according to H. G. Wells, to provide free medical care for the “childbearing women of the appropriated classes.” Without these measures, which he outlined in *Socialism and the Family*, Britain would be heading for race deterioration.¹⁶

In contrast to this vision of eugenics as a tool to promote a productive society, a different version of eugenics as a tool to proletarian emancipation was inspired in different interpretations of the role of science for Marxism. Roland Daniels (1819–1855), influenced by Marx’s *Poverty of Philosophy*, claimed that the task of science was to uncover the revolutionary elements in human misery that could act as the basis for defeating conditions of impoverishment.¹⁷ A proletarian science could, thus, liberate people from its bourgeois deficiencies and enhance the creation of inheritable proletarian virtues. These ideas provided theoretical ground for other Marxist intellectuals like Hugo Iltis, who forecast the likelihood of blending Marxism and Lamarckism. The hope of such a blend was expressed precisely in the conviction that acquired characteristics could be inherited.¹⁸ In other words, while Marxist socialism resists the Mandelian assessment that immortal germ-plasma is subject only to rare harmful mutations, because it leaves humanity without options to conduct mutational change, it might be receptive to evolutionary Lamarckism. This idea was in recent years rescued by Reinhard Mocer. He claimed that the basic postulate of “proletarian hygiene” is that the physical or biological enhancement of mankind, not of a particular ethnic group, is a prerequisite for social revolution. This stance was hardly related to human breeding but was at the heart of the idea of proletarian science different from bourgeois science.¹⁹ Having said this,

¹⁵ Trombley, *The Right to Reproduce*, p. 34.

¹⁶ H. G. Wells, *Socialism and the Family* (London: A. C. Fifield, 1906).

¹⁷ Karl Marx, *Poverty of Philosophy* (New York: International Publishers, 1963).

¹⁸ Reinhard Mocer, “The Program of Proletarian Rassenhygiene.” *Social Context* 11, 3–4 (1988):613.

¹⁹ See M. Schwartz, “Sozialismus und Eugenik. Zur falligen Revision eines Geschichtsbildes.” *IWK (Internationale Wissenschaftliche Korrespondenz)* 4 (1989), 465–89; and Mocer “The Program of Proletarian Rassenhygiene,” p. 609.

it is important to emphasize that a proletarian science would find difficulties in accepting the Lamarckian evolutionary concept of eugenics, however mildly it might be expressed. Indeed, the idea of class-consciousness collides with the idea of environmental evolution, raising a conceptual barrier against the adoption of either Mendelian or Lamarckian eugenics. In summary, I suggest that while most productivist socialists strove to outline the contours of a healthy national community with the help of eugenics, not all of them became racist and anti-democratic, as did the Nazis. Swedish social democrats are a case in point. Swedish Social Democracy, like the Fabians, advanced eugenic ideas on the basis of technocratic rather than racist or romantic lines of reasoning, and was aimed at what was termed the productive “national stock” and the creation of a welfare system for “the fittest.” Marxist Leninists would find it difficult to grasp that the party of class-consciousness accepted that the new proletariat man has been created through biological or neutral social scientists.

RACIST VS. WELFARE PRODUCTIVISM

Sweden: Productivism and the Socially Marginal

Swedish social democracy’s long relationship with eugenics has generated a variety of contrasting reactions. Swedish social democracy, as representative of a modern democratic way to socialism, an alternative to “pure” free market efficiency, loomed as an efficient as well as moral alternative to economic liberalism. Hence, several observers found it difficult to accept that the Swedish implementation of sterilization policies was deeper and wider ranging than in other democratic societies. Between 1935 and 1975, 62,888 sterilizations were performed in Sweden as the result of two laws enacted in 1934 and 1941.²⁰ Swedish social democracy was a substantial force behind the enactment of these two laws, a fact that has led to considerable debate on the international level.

Obviously, this does not mean that Swedish social democracy was the only movement propagating eugenic ideas. In fact, Sweden’s Sterilization Act of 1941 was proposed by a government of national unity. However, I do wish to stress that the role of social democrats in the process of legitimization and implementation of eugenics was extremely important. They were instrumental in ensuring a broad basis of support for social policies concerned with the quality of the national population that members of the right-wing bloc could identify with. Some previous research on eugenics in Sweden has emphasized the *zeitgeist*: the general spread of racial ideas.²¹ Other research has stressed the

²⁰ See for example: G. Broberg and N. Roll-Hansen, *Eugenics and the Welfare State* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), pp. 108–9. This is the last and most overwhelming study of eugenics and welfare politics.

²¹ G. Broberg and M. Tyden, *Oonskade i folkhemmet: Rashygien och sterilisering i Sverige* (Stockholm: Gidlunds, 1991).

role of policymakers.²² Still other research has viewed the policy of sterilization from a feminist perspective, as the victims were almost exclusively women.²³ Some observers focusing on the role of social democracy have drawn parallels with the Nazi sterilization policies of the 1930s and 1940s.²⁴ Others, in contrast, have maintained that Swedish social democratic involvement in eugenics was identified with the welfare state and was, therefore, devoid of any racist or national mythical connections.²⁵ Based on previous research as outlined above, I claim that the Swedish social welfare connection to eugenics coincided with a social productivist view of Fabian socialism, which argued that non-productive social elements were doomed to disappear. This attraction was based on the intertwining of two beliefs. The first is that there are scientific solutions to social problems. This belief leads to a powerful attraction to the work of scientific experts. The second is that Swedish social democracy guarantees the preservation of the Swedish nation as a “people’s home.”

Sweden’s scientific heritage and its long history of biological and anthropological interest had an enormous impact on social democratic leaders, for whom these studies represented political and social progress and enhanced the legitimacy of neutral scientific solutions to social problems. Moreover, since a welfare democratic society safeguarded the traditional idea of the “people’s home,” the ensuing conclusion was that only a productive society based on the elimination of socially marginal people could sustain that dream. The problems of population, the focus on the quality of the population, and the central function of social engineering were popular scientific issues, a matter for experts that coincided with the social democratic ideal of preserving a productive national stock. Thus social biology became part of a process of social engineering and the preservation of a ‘right living’ community and served to legitimize eugenics.

The ideology of eugenics in Sweden was sustained by a long intellectual heritage of physical anthropology. As early as 1882, the Swedish Society for Anthropology and Geography had studied the Swedish population in the light of the marked changes of the population due to migration. In 1909, the Swedish Society for Racial Hygiene was formed in Stockholm, and 1910 saw the founding of the Mendel Society, the first Swedish genetics association. Before World War I, prominent physicians such as Herman Lundborg saw eugenics as a reasonable answer to the problematic influx of foreigners. Lundborg also suggested that a cultural academy to study racial biology be formed. It was to be

²² See A. Carlson, *The Swedish Experiment in Family Politics: The Myrdals and the Inter-war Population Crisis* (New Brunswick, Transaction Publishers, 1990); and Y. Hirdman, *Att lagga livet till ratta: Studier i svensk folkhemsolitik* (Stockholm: Carlssons, 1989).

²³ See M. Runcis, *Steriliseringar i folkhemmet* (Stockholm: Ordfront, 1998).

²⁴ See M. Zaremba, in, “Rasren i valfarden. Folkhemmets fortrangda arv.” *Dagens Nyheter*, 20 Aug. 1997.

²⁵ N. Roll-Hansen, “Scandinavian Eugenics in the International Context.” In, Broberg and Roll-Hansen, *Eugenics and the Welfare State*, p. 260.

called The Royal Swedish Society for the Study of the People and Culture of Sweden. However, what might be the most representative example of this trend was the proposal, advanced by F. Lennmalm, a professor at the Royal Caroline Institute of Medicine, to establish a Nobel institute for racial biology. Although the proposal came to naught, a state institute was actually proposed in the form of a bill introduced in both chambers of the parliament in 1921, which received support from a broad spectrum of parties from the conservative right to social democracy.

Similar ideas of racial preservation led to the establishment in 1922 of the Racebiological Institute. This could be considered a breakthrough in the history of Swedish eugenics and represented a Swedish national supra-ideology that had been strengthened and become overt during the First World War. Subsequently, two developments, one scientific and the other political, accompanied the enshrinement of eugenics as a Swedish supra-ideology. At the scientific level, racial biology was espoused for different reasons by both racial romantics and pragmatic social engineers, who contributed to the transformation of the eugenic discourse from racial and biological to social issues.²⁶ At the political level, social democracy advanced in Sweden to the point of forming a central political party whose main goal was to define the boundaries of a Swedish 'people's home' on the basis of productive capacities rather than ethno-cultural characteristics. The definition of 'productive quality' and of the 'socially marginal' who had to be eliminated because of their high social cost therefore became important.

The special impact of Social Democratic members of the parliament can be perceived in the Swedish parliamentary debates on the issue of sterilization. From a predominately racial discourse in 1922, the electoral victory of the Social Democratic Party in 1932 brought about a change along more social lines of argument, which had become pronounced by 1941. The trend characterized by the merger between social reform and Darwinian ideas was strongest in the 1934 debate, when sterilization was suggested as a solution to specific social ills. Indeed, a bill of voluntary sterilization promoted by Social Democrats was enacted in 1934 and expanded in 1941. Both bills were concerned with the 'feeble-minded' and 'asocial' members of society and were conceptualized as far-reaching social reforms. It is in this vein that I wish to discuss the concept of welfare eugenics, which implies policies of a eugenic character stemming from the promotion of welfare reforms. This was clearly in play regarding the population question and its implication for welfare policies that were introduced to the political agenda by Alva and Gunnar Myrdal.

From Racial to Welfare Eugenics: Expanding the Social Discourse

Two fundamental problems faced Swedish society and the Social Democratic Party in the inter-war period, a period dominated by Sweden's entry into the

²⁶ W. A. Jackson, "The Making of a Social Science Classic: Gunnar Myrdal's *An American Dilemma*." *Perspectives in American History*, New Series, 2 (1985), p. 234.

modern era. First, there were the social problems caused by urbanization: mainly bad housing and health provisions. Second, there was the problem of development. To maintain technological advances there was a demand for a qualitative improvement of the population, mainly through education. As these problems were structurally induced, the solution proposed was also structural in nature. Equality of individual citizens was to be achieved through active welfare policy and social engineering.²⁷

Alva and Gunnar Myrdal were both academics, and he was also a Social Democratic member of parliament, and their 1934 book generated heated debate. The Myrdals claimed that decreasing breeding figures had to be actively combated with positive welfare measures or else the cultural and social integrity of the Swedish people would be threatened. The authors warned the growing influx of foreign elements would result in lowered social standards, and the working classes would be the first to be affected. This was the so-called “population crisis.” “We are not interested in national expansion. On the other hand, we have said that a rapidly shrinking population, inheriting a rather rich and roomy country, must attract immigration. Immigration to an old country with a well-organized labor market and a rather highly developed structure of social welfare is something which probably does not occur without international friction. . . . This fear has, it is true . . . been mingled with a mild sort of nationalism. After all, we in Sweden are all striving to build up a social and cultural structure of our own, better than the one we inherited.”²⁸

A policy of sterilization became an integral part of the Swedish welfare program, which implied a policy of production and egalitarian redistribution. It was not by chance that this program owed a great deal of its success to the salience of the population question on the political agenda. As a political argument in favor of welfare policies, the Social Democratic Party made effective use of the public debate that was created in the wake of the Myrdals’ book.²⁹ For example, Gustav Möller, speaking at the Social Democratic Party convention in 1936, ended the discussion by saying, “I have to say that I do not hesitate to scare as many right-wing men, as many Agrarians, and as many People’s Party supporters as I can with the threat of our people’s imminent disappearance, if I with that threat, make them vote in favor of the social policies I propose.”³⁰

According to the Myrdals, a “positive population policy,” with the explicit aim of raising the quality of popular human resources, was necessary in the field of redistribution. Among the policies proposed in this vein were increased public housing, child allowances, maternal care, and general health care. For eco-

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

²⁸ G. Myrdal, G. “Population Problems and Policies.” *The Annals* 197 (May 1938), pp. 203–4.

²⁹ H. Tingsten, *Den svenska socialdemokratins ideutveckling, Vol. 1* (Stockholm: Bonniers, 1967), pp. 336–38.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 340.

conomic and social reasons, it was necessary to “circumscribe the reproductive freedom of these lightly feeble-minded.”³¹ The “popular quality,” as the Myrdals chose to call it, was a question of societal concern, and, thus, the good of society preceded the good of the individual. Under the heading “Social policy and the quality of the population” the Myrdals wrote, “The direct task of prophylactic social policy is creating better human material,” and on the specific question of sterilization, Alva Myrdal added: “In our day of highly accelerated social reforms the need for sterilization on social grounds gained momentum. Generous social reforms may facilitate home-making and childbearing more than before among the groups of less desirable as well as more desirable parents.”³²

Although Swedish social democracy did not owe a direct debt to the Fabians, the engineering devices suggested by Alva and Gunnar Myrdal, like those supported by the Fabians, were consistent with technological neutrality and communitarian socialism. Physical and mental health grew into ideals in welfare Sweden’s “people’s home.”

When the first steps toward the introduction of sterilization laws were taken in 1922, the public discourse on racial hygiene was at its height in Sweden. Racial hygiene, propagating the quality of the Swedish population, was advocated by representatives of all parties. The debate of 1922 led to the establishment of a public inquiry commission in 1925. The commission submitted a report in 1927, but no law was enacted.

Early arguments in favor of a sterilization law emphasized motives of genetic hygiene, especially directed at the “feeble-minded.” The term “feeble-minded” was adopted from medicine and seen as hereditary. However, up to that time, despite the wide interest in the field, scientific findings with respect to hereditary links were still quite vague. This meant that, for sterilization purposes, only a few properly verified cases could be subjected to surgery.

In any case, racial hygiene, propagating the quality of the Swedish population, was advocated by representatives of all parties in parliament and especially by Alfred Petrén, a Social Democratic parliamentarian and head inspector of all mental care institutions in Sweden. It was he who submitted the first motion to enact a bill of sterilization.

Petrén strove to regulate the cases of sterilization that were not motivated by strictly medical grounds. He began discussing sterilization primarily for racial hygienic reasons, pointing to three groups who were forbidden to marry according to Swedish marital law: the mentally deficient, the mentally ill, and the epileptic. On the subject of the mentally deficient, Petrén held that sterilization was a necessary alternative to life-long institutionalization. The mentally ill should be sterilized if it could be proved that they had no chance of recovery.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 223.

³² A. Myrdal, *Nation and Family: The Swedish Experiment in Democratic Family and Population Policy* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1968), p. 215.

The epileptic should be allowed sterilization on humanitarian grounds as it was the only possibility for these otherwise healthy individuals to marry. Secondly, Petrén discussed sterilization for social reasons, raising the possibility of legislating sterilization as punishment for grave sexual offences.³³

Petrén was a forerunner in shifting the sterilization issue from genetics to the social arena. Dissatisfied with a proposed law of sterilization presented by the government, he issued a motion to parliament in 1933. He demanded that sterilization not only be allowed on a racial hygienic basis. He argued against the proposed law because no social indications were recognized, nor were there any humanitarian considerations. Second, the bill called for the consent of the individual concerned. Sterilization was to be allowed only for individuals who had the mental capacity to comprehend and the legal capacity to agree to the operation (*rättskapabla*). Petrén disagreed with these reservations, and he held that the bill as formulated failed to fulfil the intent of the state, which as he declared, was preventing mentally deficient persons from having children. The need for consent would unduly reduce the number operations that could be performed.³⁴

Following these criticisms, another government proposition was presented in 1934. The grounds for sterilization were cited as eugenic, social, humanitarian, and criminal. "On a eugenic basis, sterilization has been advocated to prevent the birth of inferior offspring with regard to persons who suffer from certain severe hereditary diseases, and especially in regard to psychologically (including morally) inferior individuals."³⁵ The social argumentation implied "First and foremost the situation where persons are psychologically or physically inferior to such a degree that they cannot, or are not suited to care for their children." It continued, ". . . where the addition of new individuals to a family would constitute such a burden on the family's welfare that their maintenance would be put in jeopardy . . . that the mother's health would be broken by distress."³⁶ Humanitarian and criminal arguments were also cited but were not included in the law that was adopted.

In practice, individuals who were targeted for sterilization displayed various forms of social misbehavior and were, therefore, marked by the state as unable to take care of their children. Thus, the policy was clearly aimed at the weaker segments of society, the social marginals.

³³ Motioner i första kammaren, no. 38, *Av herr Petrén, Alfred, angående lagbestämmelser, som i vissa fall medgiva sterilisering av sinnesslöa, sinnessjuka och fallandesjuka, eventuellt sedlighetsförbrytare*, saml. 3, band 1, no. 1-92 (Stockholm: H. W. Tullbergs, 1922), pp. 3-7.

³⁴ Motioner i första kammaren, no. 188, *Av herr Petrén, om utarbetande av nytt förslag till steriliseringslag*, saml. 3, band 1, no. 1-188. (Stockholm: Victor Pettersons Bokindustriaktiebolag, 1933), pp. 4-9.

³⁵ Kungliga Maj:ts Propositioner, No. 103, *Utdrag av protokollet över justitiedepartementetsförendet, hållet inför Hans Maj:t Konungen i statsrådet å Stockholms slott den 21 Dec. 1933*, band 6, no. 70-111 (Stockholm: Beckmans Boktryckeri, 1934), p. 5.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

As noted, in 1933–1934 the eugenic argument had been partly replaced by a social one. From a political point of view, the Social Democratic Party that took office in 1932 legitimized what could be defined as the “right way” of communitarian living. A positive population policy was aimed at the ‘right-living’ members of the community. To these groups, improved health care, housing, etcetera, would serve as encouragement, and would also increase production in the long-term. A policy of sterilization, on the other hand, was aimed at the ‘wrong-living,’ in an attempt to discourage their actions as well as to reduce short- and long-term costs. Although clear links were seen between hereditary genetics and social problems, the latter aspects were the primary subjects of concern. The subsequent parliamentary debate of 1941 even featured speakers who wished to abandon the Darwinist basis of the policy proposal in order to pursue more radical reforms in this area.

In 1941, the reforms advocated were more far-reaching than eugenic argumentation would allow and originated in part with legislators frustrated by the limited extent to which sterilization was performed under the existing legislation. The primary reason for expanding the law was to regulate the sterilization of those considered fit to give their consent to the operation. The new law would regulate voluntary sterilization of persons of “legal capacity.” The proposed law added a social reason to the existing ones for sterilization, which was phrased, “due to asocial way of life, is for the future obviously unsuitable to have custody of children.” ‘Asocial’ referred to such behaviors as vagabondry and alcoholism.³⁷ Simultaneously, the administrative structure was changed, centralizing most of the decision-making to one board which included two government political appointees, a clear indication of the socio-political agenda of the board.³⁸

From the social point of view, the central claim was that children, due to one or both of the parents’ “inferiority,” would grow up in an unfavorable environment and not receive the care and upbringing necessary to develop into capable members of society. In those cases it would be better that children were not born. This was considered a humanitarian approach.³⁹

In other words, social misbehavior was considered a question of genetic inferiority, assumed to be hereditary. Nils von Hofsten, the most important researcher of the Racebiological Institute, recommended that the National Board of Social Health and Welfare link asocial behavior and heredity genetics. Some politicians opposed the idea that social behavior depended on genetics because they saw it as a straightjacket that would limit their possibilities for social engineering. For example, Oscar Olsson, a Social Democratic politician, played

³⁷ Kungl. Maj:ts propositioner, no. 13. *Kungl. Maj:ts proposition till riksdagen med förslag till lag om sterilisering m.m.; given Stockholms slott den 13 Dec. 1940*, saml. 1, band 5, no. 2-30 (Stockholm: P. A. Norstedt & Soner, 1941), p. 33.

³⁸ Runcis, *Steriliseringar i folkhemmet*, p. 361.

³⁹ Statens Offentliga Utredningar, 1936, no. 46, *Betänkande angående sterilisering avgivet av befolkningskommissionen* (Stockholm: Isaac Marcus, 1936), p. 14.

down the idea of biological inheritance and talked only of “social inheritance.” He claimed, “One must, as far as possible, prevent the reproduction for coming generations of asocial individuals who lead a socially destructive life.”⁴⁰

Accordingly, the parliamentary debate in 1941 featured expanded social arguments that had partly “outgrown” the science of eugenics. In general terms, all the parliamentary debates on sterilization were characterized by a sensitive fear of the ‘deviant’ or the ‘asocial,’ and the politicians justified their actions in the name of the goals of the collective. Critics pointed out that the advance of eugenics lead directly to sterilization policies.

This was, for example, a primary argument whenever the debate touched on the *Tattare*, a name assigned to transient groups such as Gypsies. In Swedish folklore, the *Tattare* were supposed to be immoral and idle with a dark and southern appearance. In the emerging Swedish welfare state the *Tattare* were an anomaly that belonged to the periphery of society. Individuals displaying social character traits generally associated with *Tattare* were assumed to be members of that “group.” Broberg and Roll-Hansen argue that the notion of the alien *Tattare* as a biological reality and as a biological as well as a social threat was strengthened between the 1920s and 1940s. Since their genetic taint was still unproven by more accurate scientific measures, the social reasons for sterilization that were added to the Sterilization Act of 1941 were regarded as a solution for the problem of the *Tattare*. An anthropometrical study carried out by G. Dahlberg with the collaboration of the State Institute for Race Biology in 1944 reached the conclusion that it was objectively impossible to separate *Tattare* from other Swedish citizens. In other words, if the *Tattare* were to be distinguished from the rest of Swedish society, a eugenic argument was useless.⁴¹ Thus, policymakers and administrators focused on social characteristics generally associated with marginality that came to be associated with “members” of the group.

Several voices perceived both the legal and the moral problems of that policy. For example, parliamentary criticism was raised on the issue of the voluntary nature of the law. Georg Branting, a Social Democratic member of parliament, argued that forced sterilization was the real aim of the speakers in parliament. He claimed, “there is a reactionary thought behind the regulation that persons who are considered unsuitable to have custody of children should be sterilized.”⁴² Branting sought a different solution to the social problem. “As I see it—and I assumed that social democrats in general thought it to be evident—it is the duty of society to improve these miserable social conditions, not just for the parents but also for the children.”⁴³ However, in most cases, if there

⁴⁰ Första kammarens protokoll, no. 24, *Onsdagen den 23 Apr. 1941*, no. 18–33 (Stockholm: P. A. Norstedt & Söner, 1941), p. 38.

⁴¹ See G. Dahlberg, “Anthropometry of ‘Tattare,’ a Special Group of Vagabonds in Sweden.” *Uppsala Läkaresällningens Förhandlingar*, New Series, 50 (1944).

⁴² Första kammarens protokoll, p. 37. ⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 41–42.

were objections, they did not pertain to the principle of sterilization as such but revolved around the due process of law in the implementation of the proposed bill.

Most critics of the existing law, however, advocated methods of force, and they enjoyed broader support than did Branting. Members of both the first and second chambers of parliament signed motions in favor of forced sterilization. A majority of these signatories were Social Democrats, and a large number of them were women.⁴⁴

In brief, then, the sterilization law enacted in 1941 was characterized by the extension of eugenic considerations so that in addition to individuals suffering from mental retardation and defects of a hereditary nature, “anti-social” elements could also be included. Assuming that the prerequisites of eugenic or social sterilization were present, the operation could be performed without the consent of the patients if they were considered unable to exercise their legal capacity.

In the 1950s and 1960s, the arguments that had sustained the old type of eugenics gradually faded from scientific debate in Sweden. Reacting to the defeat of National Socialism, as well as to the post-war rise in the standard of living, which enabled greater individual freedom, Swedes reflected anew on the use of social eugenics. In general terms, the new mood was marked by a return to medical eugenics, and the question of sterilization was frequently connected to an altered view of the relation between state and individual.

The national perspective thus became less prominent in the debates over population policies. (The term “population policies” was discredited and was replaced by “family policies” in the 1950s.) The discussion moved from the general level to that of the individual.⁴⁵ Despite this change of mood, it was not until 1967 that the National Board of Health admitted that the policy of sterilizing disabled people had been implemented because of an exaggerated belief in the importance of heredity legitimized on social grounds.

THE RACIST APPROPRIATION OF EUGENICS

At first glance, it seems heretical to pair Nazi national-socialism and the Swedish welfare state. Indeed, the two regimes and the ideas that sustained them were diametrically opposed. Moreover, there is a theoretical difficulty in including Nazi Germany within the parameters of socialism. However, in this

⁴⁴ Motioner i första kammaren, no. 105, *Av herr Källman m. fl., i anledning av Kungl. Maj:ts proposition med förslag till lag om sterilisering m. m.*, saml. 3, no. 1-244 (Stockholm: P. A. Norstedt & Söner, 1941); Motioner i andra kammaren, no. 144, *Av fröken Nygren m. fl., i anledning av Kungl. Maj:ts proposition; no 13, med förslag till lag om sterilisering. m. m.*, saml. 4, no. 1-338 (Stockholm: Ivar Häggström, 1941); Motioner i andra kammaren, no. 37, *Av fröken Rosen m. fl., i anledning av Kungl. Maj:ts proposition med förslag till lag om sterilisering m. m.*, saml. 4, no. 1-338 (Stockholm: P. A. Norstedt & Söner, 1941).

⁴⁵ G. Broberg and M. Tyden, “Eugenics in Sweden: Efficient Care.” In, Broberg and Hansen, *Eugenics and the Welfare State*, p. 133.

study, as noted, I have included Nazi Germany within the racial productivist, nationalist, and anti-Marxist types of socialism. Despite their differences, and objections from various intellectual sources, Nazi type racial socialism and Swedish social democracy are comparable. Both are types of communitarian socialism, both espoused notions of a socialist “people’s home” based on the idea of protecting the productive elements of the national stock. While the Nazis turned the idea of productivism toward a concept meritocracy based on racial terms, the Swedish stressed the productivist “Fabian” elements of industrial society. A Swede might pose to a German the hypothetical question: “Why exclude Jews when they are productive elements of society?” This question demands an examination of the shift from eugenics based on a meritocracy to racial eugenics in Nazi Germany. As noted by Sheila Faith Weiss, German eugenics preceded and developed independently of racism, and was not necessarily a prelude to the Holocaust.⁴⁶

Until Hitler’s seizure of power, German eugenics captured the interest of individuals whose allegiance spanned the breadth of the Wilhelmine and Weimar political spectrum. As Paul Weindling noted, in Germany a school of racial hygiene coexisted with the school of racial anthropology.⁴⁷ Although both trends relied upon similar social Darwinist sources, there were tensions between them. While racial anthropologists based their theories on racial inequalities and opened the way to selectionist genetics following Gaubinau’s observations on race, the racial hygienists kept for themselves a space of scientific neutrality, which was soon attacked by the Nazis. A clear example was Alfred Pletz, the German founder of the science of racial hygiene. A social Darwinist himself, he was guided by a scientific realm that soon led to conflict with the Nazi version of synthesizing social Darwinism to radical nationalism—German scientists would consider eugenics to “national” rather than universal.

This new tone was evident at the International Federation of Eugenics Organizations (IFE) in 1934. At this conference, which included delegations from Norway, the United States, France, and Great Britain, a resolution was passed confirming the German belief that eugenics research and practice was of the highest and most urgent importance for the existence of all civilized countries.⁴⁸ The Germans however, added that their understanding of the concept of eugenics as linked to race was the right one. Ernst Rudin, a Munich racial hygienist and the head of the German delegation, spoke of the relationship between mental retardation and race. Of radical importance was the intervention of Falk Ruttke, a lawyer and a member of both the SS and the Committee for Population and Race Policies in the Reich’s Ministry of the Interior.

⁴⁶ Sheila Faith Weiss, “The Race Hygiene Movement in Germany, 1904–1945.” In, Mark Adams, ed., *The Wellborn Science*, p. 9.

⁴⁷ Paul Weindling, “Dissecting German Social Darwinism: Historicizing the Biology of the Organic State.” *Science in Context* 11, 3–4 (1988), p. 629.

⁴⁸ Stefan Kuhl, *The Nazi Connection: Eugenics, American Racism and German National Socialism* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 27.

He proceeded to outline all the steps the Nazis had taken, beginning with a measure designed paradoxically to combat unemployment. The Nazis viewed unemployment as leading to family breakdown. The Law to Reduce Unemployment, enacted in July, 1933, attempted to replace women workers with men through the implementation of state-funded work. The next step was to foster procreation through marriage subsidies to young persons of "good stock." The Decree for the Granting of Marriage Loans allowed funding for non-Jewish couples free of mental or physical illness. The Law against Dangerous Habitual Criminals of 1933 allowed for the sterilization of criminals. Finally, another important step taken by the Nazis to improve the quantity and quality of the German people was to provide special support to rural settlements. The Hereditary Homestead Law and the Law for the New Formation of German Farmer Stock of 1933 provided more than 100,000 new homesteads for families of good stock and subsidized "hereditary valuable" farmers. Implementation of these eugenic measures was guaranteed through the centralization of the public health administration following the passage of the Law for the Unification of Health Administration. The centralization of the politics of eugenics under the "Führer principle" meant that, in contrast to the previous Weimar age, the eugenics society was no longer an independent organization. One important development regarding this point was the elimination by Ernst Rudin of the word "eugenic" from the society's official name. The reason was that the Nazi seizure of power eliminated the possibility of a 'non-racist' racial hygiene. Until 1933, not even Aryan sympathizers considered the preservation or purification of Nordic racial characteristics the focus of their attention. After 1933, race hygiene combined the ideas of racial and genetic care. While the latter was in the tradition of the non-racist eugenics of the meritocracy, concerned with the management of the mental and physical traits of the population, the idea of race care was new.⁴⁹ This does not mean that there was no continuity between the period prior to 1933 and that which followed. For example, before the sterilization law enacted in 1933, many scientists exhibited no racist orientation, but this law set the course for a racist eugenics implemented by the Nazis. Unlike the failed Prussian proposal of 1932, the Nazi law allowed mandatory sterilization based on racial grounds.

The important point, however, is that the regime's statutes called for the establishment of genetic health courts and supreme genetic health courts in order to determine the racial health of the population. The task of these courts was to provide moral and scientific legitimization for this project, and the role of scientists such as Lenz, Ploetz, and Rudin vis-à-vis the genetic health courts was to compose expert committees to "rubber stamp" government policies. Overall, the idea promoted by the Nazis was that their ideology of eugenics was morally superior to those of other countries that had eugenic policies.

⁴⁹ Sheila Faith Weiss, "The Race Hygiene Movement in Germany," p. 42.

Alfred Pletz, for example, admitted that the United States, not Germany, was the bold leader in the realm of eugenics.⁵⁰ At the same time, German racial hygienists emphasized that sterilization practices in some parts of the United States relied on punishment and arbitrariness to support their sterilization measures.⁵¹ They proudly referred to their own elaborate decision-making process, implemented by the above-mentioned special courts. Racial purity was presented as a moral issue rather than a punishment. This new criteria was totally accepted by research institutes and scientific professionals. For instance, institutes created during the Weimar period, such as the German Research Institute for Psychiatry in Munich and the Berlin KWI for Anthropology, Human Heredity and Eugenics accepted their new role during the Third Reich. They would provide “hard evidence” for the genetic basis of pathological mental traits in order to aid the government’s effort to sterilize the “unfit.” While the main goal of eugenic scientists in the pre-Nazi era had been to formulate a strategy aimed at boosting national efficiency based on the parameters of a meritocracy, from 1933 onward eugenic scientists were identified with the claim that racial purity determined efficiency. New research was conducted in order to provide genealogies for individuals whose pure “Aryan lineage” was in question. In this context efficiency was put at the total service of racial ideology. Eugenic scientists were thus important in composing racial testimonials and genealogies for the Ministry of the Interior after the passage of the Nuremberg Laws, and by providing expert testimony in cases coming before the genetic health courts they helped execute the sterilization laws. In summary, German eugenic scientists cooperated with the Third Reich in transforming eugenic policies into a centralized state ideology, and the Nazis adopted a genetic understanding that regarded race as fixed, not subject to change. As noted by Gisela Bock, this tradition focused on the improvement of one’s own race, with the concepts of race and eugenics working in tandem.⁵² In sum, although crucial distinctions must be made between social Darwinism and Nazi racism, the Nazis gave political expression to the idea that there was no distinction between biological sciences, eugenics, and the idea of a racial productivist society. Despite their being opposed political regimes, both the Swedes and the Nazis performed forced sterilizations. While the Swedish Social Democrats however, found a delicate balance between the evolutionary paradigm of Lamarckism and the Mendelian system, the Nazis adopted Mendelianism to protect the national stock. While the Sweden stressed the role of eugenics for social reform, the Nazis used it to ‘purify’ race.

⁵⁰ See Kuhl, *The Nazi Connection*, p. 13. See also Randhall Hnasen and Desmond King, “Eugenic Ideas, Political Interests and Policy Variance. Immigration and Sterilization Policy in Britain and the U.S.” *World Politics* 53 (Jan. 2001), pp. 237–63.

⁵¹ Kuhl, *The Nazi Connection*, p. 38.

⁵² Gisela Bock, *Zwangssterilisation im Nationalsozialismus: Studien zur Rassenpolitik und Frauenpolitik* (Opladen: WDV, 1986), p. 60, cited in Kuhl, *The Nazi Connection*, p. 71.

THE SOVIET UNION AND THE PROLETARIAT SOCIETY

In its origins, the eugenic movement in the Soviet Union was shaped by scientific entrepreneurship rather than by state leadership, reflecting a growing preoccupation of the Russian intelligentsia with the hereditary nature of Russian talent.⁵³ This preoccupation denoted the strong presence of liberals such as Iurii A. Filipchenko (1882–1930) and Nikolai K. Kol'tsov (1892–1940) within the Russian eugenics society—the Bolsheviks were an important though not dominant strain within the eugenics movement. In the early 1920s, a new group of Marxist activists assumed increasing prominence in articulating the relevance of Russian science to socialist construction. The Circle of Materialist Physicists at the Moscow Medical School and the Society of Materialist Biologists were two of the schools created. As the government and party consolidated power in the mid-1920s and began to establish policies and priorities, discussions about the science in these new Marxist institutions became more animated. In journals such as *Estestvoznaniye I Marksizm* (Science and Marxism), for example, Soviet Marxists published articles on Darwinism, genetics, and eugenics. They admired the experimentalist, materialist, scientific, and non-religious approaches to the human condition. What they did not like were those aspects that appeared idealistic, which suggested therapeutic impotence, or provided no basis for action. Leading members of the Kol'tsov Institute in Moscow, such as M. V. Volotskoi or Aleksandr Serebrovsky (1892–1948), were fascinated by the promising practical potential of the new experimental biology. Their theoretical frames, unlike those of their Western counterparts, included elements of practical intent. For them, Bolshevik eugenics meant active engagement in both science and practice. They believed that the genetic quality of future human populations could be improved either by negative selection—eliminating the breeding of the unfit—or by direct induction of desirable heritable changes, either by the control of mutation or some sort of Lamarckian mechanism. This last option could lead, through positive selection or positive eugenics, to an increase in the number of offspring with desirable traits. The negative option was soon ruled out—Russia in the 1920s suffered from a diminishing population, especially in Moscow and Petrograd. Several Marxists therefore became interested in Lamarckism, which, although itself a eugenic theory, was not really based in genetics. This shift was emphasized when the Vienne biologist Paul Kammerer, a Marxist sympathizer whose theories were popularized in the Soviet Union, attacked Mendelian geneticists as “slaves of the past.” Theoretically, however, the debate was much more complicated. For several Marxists the main problem was that if acquired characters can be inherited, then obviously all representatives of the proletariat bear in themselves the traces of all unfavorable influences that their ancestors had suffered over many years. In that case, Lamarckism rather than Mendelian genetics would

⁵³ Mark Adams, “Eugenics in Russia,” in Adams, ed., *The Wellborn Science*, p. 63.

render social action pointless. Aleksandr Serebrovsky, one of Kol'tsov's protégés, claimed that genetics should be considered apart from ideology, and he proposed a solution: eugenics should be considered ideological, not scientific. Each class must create its own eugenics. After this position came under growing criticism from several Marxists, Serebrovsky adopted a new term: "anthropogenetics," defined as a true science, in contrast to eugenics, which was portrayed as an attempt to apply scientific data to human heredity.⁵⁴

This thesis received unexpected support from H. J. Muller, one of the best-known critics of establishment eugenics. Muller was a Marxist who claimed that economic inequality masks genetic differences. In a capitalist society characterized by "such glaring inequalities of environment as ours," genetic merit and environmental good fortune are necessarily confounded.⁵⁵ He believed that only socialism could ensure the reproduction of good human material. Only a socialist society could reproduce people like Lenin, Newton, Leonardo da Vinci, and Marx. For some Soviet Marxists, Muller's claims, published in 1935 under the name *Out of the Night*,⁵⁶ demonstrated that, far from being eternally fixed, genetics could be changed by environmental influences and, therefore, could be manipulated. This view had also been held by Filipchenko in the 1920s. However, it conflicted with the Marxist view that science itself was class-based.⁵⁷

Although genetics was itself politically neutral and could be used to create a distinct proletarian Soviet style of eugenics, it was characterized by long-term processes that could not meet the urgencies of Soviet aspirations. Under the backdrop of what Western historians label "The Great Break," characterized by the Five-Year Plan (1929–1932), the first show trials, the move to heavy industrialization, the extermination of Kulaks, and the collectivization of agriculture, Stalin proceeded to "bolshevize" the Academy of Sciences. This process was at odds with the attempt to emancipate science from ideology, and even from the attempt to put science at the service of ideology, as suggested by Muller. For the new revolutionary trend, Marxist Leninism was the only acceptable proletarian science, and both biological sciences and eugenic social action were incompatible with it. Eugenics was therefore rejected and became negatively associated with the concept of "Menshevik idealism." At first

⁵⁴ M. V. Volotskoi, "Issues of Eugenics." *Journal of Communist Academy* 20 (1927), pp. 240–41.

⁵⁵ H. J. Muller [1934] "Dominance of Economics over Eugenics." In *A Decade of Progress in Eugenics* (New York: Garland, 1984) [orig. 1934].

⁵⁶ Diane B. Paul, *Controlling Human Heredity, 1865 to the Present* (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1995), p. 118. From the same author D. B. Paul, see (1984) "Eugenics and the Left," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 45, 567–590.

⁵⁷ It should be noted that at the International Genetics Congress that was to be held in Moscow in 1937, but was adjourned finally in 1939 in Edinburgh, most Soviet speakers were ordered to avoid mention of human heredity. This contrasted with Muller's personal views (in the meantime, Muller escaped the Soviet Union), since he aspired to stress the differences between Russian and German understandings in genetics. Muller attacked the belief in the inheritance of acquired characteristics as unscientific, and defined it as a fascist concept. Filipchenko's use of this argument in 1925 was the cause of his trouble with the Soviet regime.

glance, the Soviet experiment of the 1920s created an ideal setting for the emergence of the technocratic spirit of the 1930s, which established basic ideas about social engineering. However, the political leadership of the Soviet Union during the “Great Break” opposed the concept of “neutral technocracy” and substituted that of “red specialists.” There was an inherent connection between this and the proscription of any attempt at theoretical links between the biological and the social.

A clearer example of the trend that associated voluntarism with science concerned Trofim D. Lysenko, who had become famous for the discovery of “vernalization,” an agricultural technique allowing winter crops to be obtained from summer planting. Lysenko maintained that the crucial factor determining the length of a plant’s vegetation period was not its genetic constitution but rather its interaction with its environment. He promoted research that targeted immediate practical results, and he attacked “useless scholasticism.” His theory suggesting that the mechanisms of heredity were based on organism–environment interactions, through internalizations of external conditions, suited the new extreme voluntarism that accompanied the drive to industrialize. As noted by Helena Sheehan, the ascendancy of Lysenkoism reflected the spirit of the times.⁵⁸ For Lysenko’s followers, the only solution was for geneticists to renounce the science of genetics, and supporters of a synthesis between genetics and eugenics were accused of fascism.

In 1938, Lysenko was elected to a position in genetics in the USSR Academy of Sciences and also to the presidency of the Lenin All-Union Academy of Agricultural Sciences. During the most intense period of his ‘reign’ over the field of genetics (1948–1952), it was understood that only socialism represented a social, emancipating science. The different attitudes that revolutionaries and non-revolutionaries held toward science were underscored by the views of bourgeois technocrats like Kol’tsov and Filipchenko that the “dreams of creating a perfect order, [were related] to eugenics, which was considered the religion of the future . . .”⁵⁹ In contrast, Muller told Stalin that biology was a neutral science that could be used to create a new proletarian society. But Stalin and Bolsheviks like Lysenko were not easily convinced—they refused to concede a neutral nature to science, and consequently Muller’s thesis was rejected. The party interpretation of the dialectical materialist synthesis of object and subject wielded control over formal science. To be precise, however, this anti-scientific spirit did not encompass other spheres of science such as nuclear physics. Indeed, the new atomic era of the 1960s demanded a new focus on ideologically-free science and led to the demise of Lysenkoism. The scientific revival that emerged from its demise paved the way for a new legitimacy of eugenics, though one limited to a role in medicine. Nonetheless, this new direction

⁵⁸ See Helena Sheehan, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Science. A Critical History* (New Jersey: Humanities Press International, 1985 and 1993), ch. 4.

⁵⁹ Adams, “Eugenics in Russia,” p. 162.

does not negate the basic premise that the Soviet interpretation of dialectical materialism and the new national necessities of the Soviet Union were incompatible with the development of eugenics and biological science, in either their Mendelian or Lamarckian forms. The Soviet state could not cope with “objective science,” even as the means to craft a new ‘Soviet man.’

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The connection of eugenics with socialism and welfare reform has generated several theoretical debates.⁶⁰ In this article I have stressed the productivist face of welfare politics. The productionist view of socialism, either in its democratic or authoritarian form, takes the concept of social reform as a technical rather than a political question, and promotes the central role of eugenics in social welfare. My claim has been that this productivist face of welfarism, as manifested by Fabian and Swedish Social Democracy, permits us to bridge the gap between these ideologies and conservative nationalist ones.

My main point is that German national-socialism and Swedish welfare socialism, despite their radical ideological differences, both displayed a positive attitude toward eugenic solutions to population problems. The Nazis worked to preserve a racial community while the Swedish Social Democrats pursued a welfare productivist model. While the Nazis linked eugenics to racial and productivist claims and were Mendelians, the Swedish Social Democrats were not racist and wavered along a thin line dividing Lamarckism and Mendelianism. For the Nazis, there was no dissonance between ideology and Mendelian biological advancement, while the Swedish Social Democrats, as representatives of progress and efficiency, tended to be lured by biological solutions to social problems. As bearers of a new social scientific spirit, the Swedish Social Democrats were convinced that their society could be improved by social scientific methods that were served by technocratic expertise. They paid tribute to the scientific mind rather than to Marxist dialectical materialism. In contrast to the Nazis, however, the Sweden Social Democrats believed that ‘lower’ races and people on the periphery of science could evolve and become productive if they developed in a proper environment over a long period of time. At the same time, their support for sterilization politics and the “biologization” of social problems leads us to additional thoughts. Despite sharp ideological differences along the ‘racism vs. non racism’ and ‘anti-democracy vs. democracy’ axes, both Germany and Sweden were lured by similar ideals of creating a community of productive people, namely, a national productivist socialism.

Finally in contrast to both the Nazis and Swedish Social Democracy, I claim that the Stalinist ‘science,’ based as it was in dialectical materialism which prevailed over scientific objectivity, pushed eugenics outside the pale of legiti-

⁶⁰ See Michael Freedon, “Eugenics and Progressive Thought: A Study in Ideological Affinity.” *The Historical Journal* 22, 3 (1979):645–79. See also a response by Greta Jones, in, “Eugenics and Social Policy between the Wars.” *The Historical Journal* 25, 3 (1982):717–28.

mate science, as incompatible with neutral advances in biology. Despite reservations, Soviet totalitarianism in its attempt to subordinate science to ideology contributed to at least one positive development: the undermining of eugenic solutions to social problems, either in their Mendelian or Lamarckian forms. Against the idea that a particular nation or people could be defined as biological entities, the Soviet Union conceived the proletariat as merely a social concept, one that did not determine fixed limitations to belonging. Again, this is not to disregard the Soviet regime's demonic totalitarian characteristics, but credit should be given to its rejection of 'neutral' socio-biological 'discoveries.'