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# Outgrowing the Cold War:

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## Cross-Continental Perspectives

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### on Early Post-War European

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### Social Democracy

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Tony Insall, *Haakon Lie, Denis Healey and the Making of an Anglo-Norwegian Special Relationship, 1945–1951* (Oslo: Unipub, 2010), 306 pp., NOK 349, ISBN 9788274774889.

Giovanni Scirocco, *Politique d'abord: Il PSI, la Guerra Fredda e la Politica Internazionale, 1948–1957* (Milan: Edizione UNICOPLI, 2010), 274 pp., €15, ISBN 9788840013817.

Robert Spalek, 'Między Pragmatyzmem a Zdradą: Zawłaszczenie PPS w Kraju (1944–1948)' ['Between Pragmatism and Betrayal: The Appropriation of the PPS in the Nation (1944–1948)'], in Robert Spalek, ed., *Polska Partia Socjalistyczna: Dlaczego się nie udało? Szkice. Wspomnienia. Polemiki* [*The Polish Socialist Party: Why did it not succeed? Sketches, Memories, Polemics*] (Warsaw: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2010), 407 pp., PLN 35, ISBN 9788376291802.

Peter Heumos, ed., *Europäischer Sozialismus im Kalten Krieg: Briefe und Berichte 1944–1948* (Frankfurt/Main: Campus Verlag, 2004), 557 pp., €69.90, ISBN 3593374706.

## I

Today more than ever before, early post-war European social democracy presents historians with a conundrum. Emerging from the Second World War euphoric at the prospects of a rapid breakthrough to socialism, European social democrats soon found their high hopes disappointed.<sup>1</sup> Towards the end of the decade, they had been

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<sup>1</sup> For the evolution from 'euphoria' via 'disillusionment' to eventual 'adaptation' in some Western European socialist/social democratic parties between 1945–9, see: Dietrich Orlow, *Common Destiny: A Comparative History of the Dutch, German and French Social Democratic Parties, 1945–1969* (New York:

driven onto the defensive across the continent. In Western Europe, social democratic parties had either become junior partners in coalitions dominated by the Christian democrats or were on their way out of government altogether. In Eastern Europe things were worse still, as social democratic parties were browbeaten into mergers with the communists – not to return to the political scene before the collapse of the Iron Curtain. Where had it gone wrong?

For decades, historians came up with a straightforward answer to this question: the coming of the cold war during the period 1947–8 ruined the prospects of post-war European social democracy. With both of the superpowers being seen as ill-disposed towards the social democratic parties, their decline has often been depicted as a foregone conclusion. Whereas the Americans were perceived to favour the Christian democrats by doing all in their power to split the labour movement in Western Europe,<sup>2</sup> a Soviet master plan was held to have guided the communists every step of the way in their quest for absolute power in Eastern Europe.<sup>3</sup> This left the social democrats with a choice between being side-lined by the superpowers or selling out to them, both of which were detrimental to their influence and popularity for years to come.

As the archives of the post-war era opened up – from the late 1970s in Western Europe and after 1989 in Eastern Europe – these old certainties have begun to unravel. Documents often showed opportunism to be the guiding force behind the actions of the superpowers, co-opting whichever political party was willing to serve their interests. Recent years have witnessed a flurry of works on American labour diplomacy towards the non-communist Left in Western Europe, frequently emphasising the substantial room for manoeuvre which these initiatives presented to social democrats.<sup>4</sup> While the historiography on the relations between the Soviet Union and the Eastern European social democrats still oscillates between coercion

Berghahn Books, 2000), 44–64. For the high hopes and ensuing disenchantment within the post-war European Left more generally, see: Geoff Eley, *Forging Democracy: The History of the Left in Europe, 1850–2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 278–329.

<sup>2</sup> The list of publications on American intervention in domestic political life in post-war Europe is endless. Suffice it here to mention just two accounts from the 1980s, which reiterate many cold war commonplaces on post-war Western European social democracy: Ronald Filippelli, *American Labor and Postwar Italy, 1943–1953: A Study in Cold War Politics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988); Hans-Jürgen Grabbe, *Unionsparteien, Sozialdemokratie und Vereinigte Staaten von Amerika 1945–1966* (Dusseldorf: Droste, 1983).

<sup>3</sup> See, for example: László Révész, *Die Liquidierung der Sozialdemokratie in Osteuropa* (Berne: Verlag Schweizerisches Ost-Institut, 1971).

<sup>4</sup> On the British Labourites: Hugh Wilford, *The CIA, the British Left and the Cold War: Calling the Tune?* (London: Frank Cass, 2003). On the Dutch social democrats: Paul Koedijk, 'The Netherlands, the United States, and Anticommunism during the early Cold War', in Hans Krabbendam, Cornelis van Minnen and Giles Scott-Smith, eds, *Four Centuries of Dutch-American Relations, 1609–2009* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2009), 597–607. On the German social democrats: Julia Angster, *Konsenskapitalismus und Sozialdemokratie: Die Westernisierung von SPD und DGB* (Munich: Oldenbourg Verlag, 2003). In her work on the United States and the French Right, Deborah Kisatsky has even argued that the French socialists grew into the 'favored clients' of the State Department, see: 'The United States, the French Right, and American Power in Europe, 1946–1958', *The Historian*, 65, 3 (2003), 615–41.

and consent,<sup>5</sup> there is more general feeling that ‘local politics mattered’<sup>6</sup> and that ‘those who sought compromise and attempted to get along with the Soviet occupiers were not knaves and fools, but people who had legitimate hopes that some degree of . . . democracy could be saved’.<sup>7</sup> But if the post-war European social democratic parties had real leeway in their international dealings, there must be more to their histories than marginalisation at the hands of the superpowers. This article will review some recent attempts at repositioning early post-war European social democracy as an international force in its own right rather than a helpless victim of cold war machinations.

## II

For all the fanfare over American labour diplomacy, the British Labour Party’s diplomacy remains relatively uncharted territory. This is surprising. After all, its landslide 1945 election victory bestowed Labour with all but unlimited prestige within the international socialist movement as the only social democratic party to have achieved a parliamentary majority on its own. This enabled the Labour Party and, by extension, the British Foreign Office under Ernest Bevin and later Herbert Morrison to wield substantial influence amongst European social democrats during the early stages of the cold war.

In his *Haakon Lie, Denis Healey and the Making of an Anglo-Norwegian Special Relationship, 1945–1951*, Tony Insall reconstructs what he describes as ‘the development of a uniquely close relationship’ between the Labour Party and the Norwegian social democratic party (Det Norske Arbeiderparti, DNA, now Arbeiderpartiet) (pp. 47–98). This relationship, continuously spurred on by the Foreign Office and the British ambassador in Oslo, was forged by Denis Healey – Labour’s International Secretary – and Haakon Lie – the General Secretary of the DNA. It proved to be instrumental in winning over formerly neutral Norway to the Western alliance. After Bevin’s Western Union speech in January 1948, Healey even arranged for Lie, who was facing inner-party resistance to the DNA’s ever closer identification with the Western bloc, to be briefed confidentially about its ramifications (pp. 92–8). Similarly, the presence of a Labour delegate stressing that the Atlantic pact dealt with ‘nothing less than peace and freedom’ at the January 1949 DNA party conference was reported to have been of assistance in carrying a large majority for the party leadership’s line on Norwegian entry into NATO (p. 229).

The most interesting parts of the book are its two chapters on the activities of the notorious Information Research Department (IRD), created by the British Foreign Office in 1948 to counter Soviet propaganda and disseminate anti-communist

<sup>5</sup> Good examples of this are the articles published in: Stefan Creuzberger and Manfred Görtemaker, eds, *Gleichschaltung unter Stalin: Die Entwicklung der Parteien im östlichen Europa 1944–1948* (Paderborn: F. Schöningh, 2002).

<sup>6</sup> Norman Naimark, ‘Stalin and Europe in the Postwar Period, 1945–1953: Issues and Problems’, *Journal of Modern European History*, 2, 1 (2004), 36.

<sup>7</sup> Peter Kenez, *Hungary from the Nazis to the Soviets: The Establishment of the Communist Regime in Hungary, 1944–1948* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 1–2.

literature across the world. Drawing on archival materials only recently released under the Freedom of Information Act, Insall links up the secret diplomacy Labour conducted amongst the Norwegian social democrats with similar initiatives towards other European social democratic parties. Healey seems to have been the key figure within a shady international network here, which involved journalists trafficking in draft articles about the atrocities being committed in the Soviet bloc, the identification of foreign social democrats willing to publish these articles under their name and the provision of further IRD materials to these authors to rewrite the drafts in the light of their specific national context. Healey was constantly on the lookout for new recruits within the international socialist movement. In December 1948, he wrote to his contact in the IRD that he had spoken confidentially to several European social democrats at a recent international socialist conference and that IRD materials could henceforth be sent to Kaj Bjørk (the international secretary of the Swedish social democratic party), Georges Brutelle (the international secretary of the French socialist party – Section Française de l'Internationale Ouvrière (SFIO)), Koos Vorrink (the chairman of the Dutch labour party) and Haakon Lie (pp. 146–7).

It is in the field of spreading large quantities of IRD-produced anti-communist propaganda across post-war Norway that Insall considers the Labour-DNA special relationship to have reached its prime. Especially those publications analysing the 'facts' about the Soviet Union in dispassionate tones – such as Lie's 'The Real Conditions in Soviet Russia' or the widely published 'Codex on Forced Labour in the Soviet Union' – seem to have struck a chord amongst the Norwegian working classes (although Insall bases these observations on embassy reports rather than grass-roots research). This successful deployment of IRD documentation in Norway stood in stark contrast to the more serious obstacles Labour encountered in the two European countries against which Insall weighs the Norwegian case. In Italy, the division of the socialist movement into pro-communist and anti-communist parties deprived Labour of an effective interlocutor. Although the French socialists were united in their anti-communism, the SFIO party organisation was in disarray with only very few amongst a declining membership willing to undertake propaganda or recruiting activities (pp. 111–24).

Yet, the mere fact that 'the Labour Party was unable to build solid and effective relationships with any of the socialist parties in either France or Italy' (p. 133) does not necessarily render the relations between Labour and the DNA 'uniquely close'. In fact, the major weakness of Insall's book is its comparative component. Bearing in mind the clear differences between the DNA and its French and Italian sister parties in terms of electoral support (strong vs. weak), communist competition (weak vs. strong) and ideological outlook (reformist vs. revolutionary), the selection of these two cases for comparison seems a bit odd to say the least. In order to determine the extent to which DNA-Labour relations were indeed unique, an account of Labour's dealings with social democratic parties more similar to the DNA, like the Danish social democratic party or the Dutch labour party, would have been more illuminating.

What is more, the Labour-DNA special relationship remained very much a one-way street. Under domestic pressure from the Norwegian communists to join

in demonstrations against the Franco regime, the DNA looked to the Labour government to take the lead on removing the Spanish dictatorship. But no less than three DNA consultations on the Spanish question during 1946 fell on deaf ears amongst a Labour government anxious to retain its trade relations with Spain and unwilling to play into the hands of the Soviet Union (pp. 170–80). Perhaps the Anglo-Norwegian special relationship Insall describes was then somewhat like its better-known namesake – special to the junior partner, just a relationship to the senior.

For the Labour Party had affiliations right across the continent, even in those areas where American labour diplomacy could not or would not reach. This is well illustrated by the contributions to a 2006 special issue of *European History Quarterly*, entitled ‘Beyond the Curtain: Britain, the Labour Party and the Left in Cold War Europe’. It seeks to overcome traditional cold war divides by addressing, as guest editor Dejan Djokic puts it, ‘the (sometimes troubled) relations between the (British) Labour Party and parties and individuals of the Left in *both* Eastern and Western Europe between ca. 1945 and 1970’.<sup>8</sup> Still more than an exercise in East–West transnational politics, however, the contributions to this volume represent an account of Labour’s dealings with forces to its left in continental Europe: the Hungarian social democrats in a united front with the communists, the Yugoslav communists after the Stalin–Tito split, the East German state in its quest for recognition and the renegade Italian socialists about to enter government.

Even though the articles often deal with politicians on the party’s left wing, they essentially present Labour as a Cold Warrior through and through. This does not mean, however, that it always saw eye to eye with the Americans. Ulin Jodah McStea points out that whereas the State Department wrote off Hungary as a lost cause after the communists and their social democratic allies had annihilated the centre-right Smallholders’ Party by early 1947, the Foreign Office encouraged the Labour Party to throw its full weight behind the Hungarian social democratic party (Magyarországi Szociáldemokrata Párt, MSzDP) in the hope of strengthening the position of autonomists within the party leadership. This involved countless Labour delegations visiting the MSzDP in the run-up to the crucial elections of August 1947; already by April, communist leader Matyas Rakosi had been complaining to the Soviets that the Labour Party was exerting ‘quite a lot of pressure’ on the MSzDP with someone coming over ‘almost every week’.<sup>9</sup> These efforts seemed to pay off when the autonomist wing of the MSzDP prepared to engineer the downfall of pro-communist party leader Árpád Szakasits after the communists had won the elections by committing massive fraud. Just how central Labour backing was to this scheme is attested to by the fact that the leader of the plotters met with Bevin in London beforehand to assure himself of British support. But news of the pending coup was

<sup>8</sup> Dejan Djokic, ‘Introduction’, *European History Quarterly*, 36, 3 (2006), 348 (emphasis in original).

<sup>9</sup> Ulin Jodah McStea, ‘Slowing Sovietization: The Labour Party, the Hungarian Social Democrats and the Elections of 1947’, *European History Quarterly*, 36, 3 (2006), 350.

leaked and Szakasits stayed on as party leader, leaving Labour in a position ‘powerless to protect’ the MSzDP from further communist attacks.<sup>10</sup>

Dejan Djokic shows how a similarly thorny issue arose in the Labour Party’s dealings with communist Yugoslavia during the 1950s. Ever since the Tito–Stalin split, relations between Labour and the regime in Belgrade had been cordial. But when its chief ideologue Milovan Djilas was purged in 1954 following his critique of the communist bureaucracy, some of his friends in the Labour Party raised their voice in protest. Aneurin Bevan expressed his concerns over the trial against Djilas in a letter to Tito, while Jennie Lee and Michael Foot came to the defence of Djilas in the *Tribune*. Upon receiving a smuggled letter from Djilas, Labour’s General Secretary Morgan Philips wrote privately to Tito in April 1956. Whilst arguing that the handling of the Djilas case constituted ‘a test . . . of your progress towards a real socialist democracy’, Philips went out of his way to stress that he did not want to interfere in Yugoslavia’s internal affairs and that he was merely interested in the ‘human aspects’ of the case.<sup>11</sup> In fact, so anxious was the Labour Party to keep on good terms with Tito that it not only remained officially neutral, but allegedly also prevented Djilas’s articles from being published in the *Daily Herald*.

The Labour leadership was more sympathetic towards a number of its left-wing MPs engaging in what, according to Norman LaPorte and Stefan Berger, ‘amounted to an exercise in parallel diplomacy’ with the German Democratic Republic (GDR) from the second half of the 1950s.<sup>12</sup> Various motivations by a degree of support for the East German brand of socialism, a dislike of consecutive centre-right governments in Bonn, a desire to serve Britain’s trade interests or an aspiration to promote détente in international relations, their pleas for the recognition of the GDR were increasingly (albeit tacitly) supported by a Labour leadership striving for greater stability and security in Europe. The steady flow of parliamentarians visiting the GDR formed a constant bone of contention between Labour and the West German social democrats. To ‘keep the peace in the family’ it was agreed that delegations would be briefed by the West Berlin SPD (Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands) before entering the GDR.<sup>13</sup> But the SPD need not have worried, as most Labour visitors to the GDR held few illusions about the East German regime. During an August 1961 meeting with some East German communists, shadow cabinet member Richard Crossman made it quite clear that he was ‘politically and ideologically opposed to the development of socialism in the GDR’.<sup>14</sup> For him the recognition of the GDR was all about accepting cold war realities. This was the only way to both further the

<sup>10</sup> McStea, ‘Slowing Sovietization’, 367.

<sup>11</sup> Dejan Djokic, ‘Britain and Dissent in Tito’s Yugoslavia: The Djilas Affair, ca. 1956’, *European History Quarterly*, 36, 3 (2006), 376.

<sup>12</sup> Stefan Berger and Norman LaPorte, ‘*Ostpolitik* before *Ostpolitik*: The British Labour Party and the German Democratic Republic (GDR), 1955–64’, *European History Quarterly*, 36, 3 (2006), 397.

<sup>13</sup> Berger and LaPorte, ‘*Ostpolitik* before *Ostpolitik*’, 397.

<sup>14</sup> His East German interlocutors even noted that ‘he hated communism’. Berger and LaPorte, ‘*Ostpolitik* before *Ostpolitik*’, 410.

cause of détente and undermine the GDR in the long run – the aim was ‘killing the regime with kindness’.<sup>15</sup>

In Ilaria Favretto’s article on Labour’s involvement in the renaissance of Italian socialism, the party’s role as a cold war broker in the international socialist movement is reaffirmed. After spending more than a decade in the shadow of the communists, the Italian socialist party (Partito Socialista Italiano, PSI) had re-entered political life as a force in its own right by the 1960s. Both the formation of a centre-left government in 1963 and the reunification of the PSI and its right-wing breakaway PSDI (Partito Socialista Democratico Italiano) in 1966 were enthusiastically greeted by the Labour Party, counting on the ‘filial admiration’<sup>16</sup> it enjoyed amongst the Italian socialists to favourably influence Britain’s bid for EEC membership and hoping that a strong socialist party after the British and Scandinavian model would emerge.<sup>17</sup> These expectations were soon disappointed: where the centre-left government proved unable to stand up to the French in Europe, the newly constituted PSU (Partito Socialista Unificato) was marred by heavy infighting right from the outset. The Labour prime minister Harold Wilson was successful, though, in winning over the PSI to his government’s ‘robust support for the United States coupled with an energetic search for a negotiated settlement’ in Vietnam<sup>18</sup> – yet another example of Labour’s significance to the West’s cold war effort.

### III

In their strong reliance on state archives, however, the accounts discussed thus far tend to obscure those dimensions of post-war international socialism unrelated to the diplomatic exchanges of the cold war. It is exactly this chiefly diplomatic take on the international socialist movement that Peter Heumos seeks to steer clear of in his source publication *Europäischer Sozialismus im Kalten Krieg: Briefe und Berichte 1944–1948*. Drawing on documents collected in twenty (mostly party) archives across eight countries, he reconstructs the drifting apart of post-war European socialism from the perspective of the Eastern European socialist and social democratic parties. Often dismissed as mere Soviet puppets bent on sabotaging the proceedings of their Western European counterparts, Heumos reinstates these parties as independent political actors. The documents he uncovers reveal the rupture between the post-war European social democrats to be as much their own doing as it was a consequence of the coming of the cold war.

To be sure, the division of the continent impacted on relations between the Eastern and Western European social democrats. Their geopolitical location in the sphere of influence of the Soviet Union locked the Eastern European parties into coalitions with the communists right from the outset. But Heumos identifies an altogether

<sup>15</sup> Berger and LaPorte, ‘*Ostpolitik* before *Ostpolitik*’, 414.

<sup>16</sup> Ilaria Favretto, ‘The Wilson Governments and the Italian Centre-Left Coalitions: Between “Socialist” Diplomacy and *Realpolitik*, 1964–70’, *European History Quarterly*, 36, 3 (2006), 423.

<sup>17</sup> Favretto, ‘The Wilson Governments’, 428–30.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 426.

different rationale for collaboration with the communists being put forward by the Eastern European social democrats. In view of the dearth of democratic centrist or centre-right parties in most of their countries, they argued, the communist-social democratic united front constituted the sole guarantee of a democratic and socialist development. As the cold war gathered momentum with the watershed events of 1947 (the Truman Doctrine, the Marshall Plan, the foundation of Cominform), these arguments were internationalised in what Heumos describes as an Eastern European 'offensive' (p. 37) within the international socialist movement. Claiming that the disparities between the revolutionary transformations in the East and the stagnant reforms in the West risked widening the rift between the two halves of the continent still further, the Eastern European social democrats told their Western counterparts it was about time for them to catch up. Countries like Poland could not forever remain a bridge between 'capitalism and revolution or between reformism and revolution', but should instead function as a bridge 'between the Russian revolution and a future social revolution in the West' (p. 36).

For all the rhetorical bravado about the divergences between Eastern and Western Europe, however, Heumos insists that the coming of the cold war was not as divisive an issue within the post-war international socialist movement as is frequently assumed. Far stronger emotions were aroused by questions involving national sentiments, particularly those controversies surrounding the SPD's readmittance into the European socialist family. Having initially kept the German social democrats out of the international socialist movement, a growing number of Western European social democratic parties began calling for their return during 1946–7. This was vehemently opposed by the Eastern Europeans, who accused the SPD and its leader Kurt Schumacher of revisionism (the insistence on restoring Germany to its 1937 borders), extreme anti-communism and reluctance to implement fundamental socio-economic reforms. While this has the familiar ring of traditional Soviet critiques of the SPD, Heumos maintains that it was national rather than international considerations that underlay the Eastern European opposition (p. 41). To quote just one of many examples: after sending a secret fact-finding mission to Berlin in late 1946, the Czechoslovakian social democrats concluded that the SPD had a good programme and that most of its leadership consisted of true social democrats – normal relations could, however, not be restored until it was clear that the party would not place itself at the head of a perceived anti-Czechoslovakian irredentist movement for those Germans expelled from the Sudetenland (pp. 369–75).

Concluding that 'this undefined co-existence of socialist internationalism and "normal" foreign politics' (p. 43) contributed to the eventual disintegration of the post-war international socialist movement, Heumos throws new light upon a topic previously only addressed in terms of the cold war confrontation. His compilation of 125 documents (119 of which had not been published before) in English, French, German, Czech and Polish (translated into German in the latter two cases), moreover, will remain a lasting contribution to research on post-war European socialism. Yet, in many ways, his volume falls prey to exactly the same vices as more traditional accounts of the post-war Eastern European social democratic parties. In coalescing their various experiences around a single narrative – this time on nationalism rather



than fellow-travelling – he misses out on the clear differences between the parties that come to the fore in the nearly five hundred pages of correspondence and reports he discloses. Especially on the crucial issue of communist-social democratic relations, serious tensions seem to have arisen between the Hungarian social democrats and the Polish socialists on the one hand and the Czechoslovakian social democrats on the other. After a pro-communist leadership was replaced by an autonomist one at the Brno congress (November 1947) of the Czechoslovakian social democratic party (Česká strana sociálně demokratická, ČSSD), the leader of the Hungarian social democrats wrote to his Polish counterpart expressing doubts as to whether the ČSSD could still be considered ‘a party of the Left’ (p. 234). Just what the concepts of Left and Right entailed to each of the Eastern European social democratic parties remains unclear, however.

In the absence of real comparative histories of post-war Eastern European social democracy, case studies of individual parties provide the best way into these questions. But the legacy of forty years of under-researched, personally motivated and highly polemical scholarship still weighs heavily on the work being done on the post-war Eastern European social democrats.<sup>19</sup> This is well reflected in Robert Spałek’s contribution to a recent volume on the twentieth-century history of the Polish socialist party (Polska Partia Socjalistyczna, PPS): dealing with the post-war years, his article is evocatively titled ‘Between Pragmatism and Betrayal: The Appropriation of the PPS in the Nation (1944–1948)’. Spałek restores some dignity to the Polish socialists, frequently denounced as a bunch of careerist usurpers who had actively conspired with the communists to keep pre-war leaders from regaining positions of influence within the post-war PPS. In their efforts to carve out a niche for autonomous action, the Polish socialists often found none other than Stalin on their side.

In fact, the most striking feature of Spałek’s article is the extent to which it demonstrates the Soviet leader to be personally involved in Polish party politics. It was he who decided that the provisional government that was formed in liberated Lublin in July 1944 would be headed by socialist Edward Osóbka-Morawski and it was to him that communists and socialists referred their cross-party differences. That tensions could run high during such audiences was shown when Osóbka-Morawski had to defend autonomist voices within the PPS against communist attacks in a late 1944 meeting with Stalin. Back in the car afterwards, he shouted out to communist leader Bolesław Bierut: ‘You have taken bandits and madmen into your ranks, purge your own party, not ours’ (pp. 150–1). The two men parted without shaking hands – certainly not the behaviour typically associated with the staunchest of fellow travellers.

This pattern of communists and socialists turning to Stalin to mediate their disagreements was repeated on several occasions over the following years. If the

<sup>19</sup> With the archives in communist Eastern Europe sealed off, Denis Healey’s edited volume *The Curtain Falls: The Story of the Socialists in Eastern Europe* (London: Lincolns-Prager, 1951) remained the only source on the post-war Eastern European social democratic parties for decades. Containing articles written by exiled Czech, Hungarian and Polish social democrats, its contributors seem more interested in settling the score with their former pro-communist adversaries than discussing their own role in the demise of Eastern European social democracy.

communists had expected the Marshal to champion their cause no matter what, they were badly disappointed. While Stalin made it quite clear to the PPS that ‘enemies of Poland’s independence’ (e.g. the Polish Peasant Party under the leadership of Stanisław Mikołajczyk) could not be included in the communist-socialist electoral bloc, he granted that Poland should be governed ‘by two equal parties in a united front’ (p. 194). That involved real concessions on the part of the Polish communists: no more meddling in the internal affairs of the PPS, allowing the socialists to run their own campaign and a more even division of government posts. Having secured the personal support of Stalin, the PPS emerged as a credible counterweight to the communists in post-war Poland. What had doubtlessly been a ‘puppet’ in 1944 had grown into ‘a large and significant party’ by late 1946 (p. 205).

As pressure for a fusion began piling up over the course of 1947, the socialists would remind the communists time and again of Stalin’s 1946 adage that ‘the PPS was, is and would remain indispensable to the Polish nation’ (p. 201). The way the socialists saw things, they had something to offer that the communists could simply not deliver to their Soviet overlords: social peace. With the risk of a civil war still looming large, its deeper roots in Polish society allowed the PPS to be the glue holding the nation together. The single most severe conflict between communists and socialists over 1947–8 emerged then not over some party-political issue, but over the communist-led nationalisation drive. During this Battle for Trade (pp. 211–12), the socialists stood up for the preservation of the three-tier (state-co-operative-private) Polish economy. After all, the extra costs of the bureaucracy for a still more extensive state sector could only be passed on to the working classes in the long run and that was not what socialism was being built for (p. 211).

Whilst Spalek’s article provides a fascinating insight into the genuine room for manoeuvre the Polish socialists held in their dealings with the Kremlin, it remains very much a prisoner of traditional cold war perspectives when it comes to explaining the demise of the PPS in 1948. Alluding to a Moscow-led campaign to liquidate the socialist and social democratic parties across Eastern Europe (p. 212) that gained momentum with the foundation of the Cominform (pp. 217–19), Spalek points to the Soviets as the decisive factor in the merger of communists and socialists in Poland. He is at best hazy, however, on just how this came about. As there is no account of what was discussed between Stalin and new PPS leader Jozef Cyrankiewicz during their meeting in January 1948, Spalek guesses that Cyrankiewicz was told that the time for a merger had come (p. 224). But the questions as to what had changed the Soviet leader’s mind about the indispensability of the PPS or how this affected the socialists’ self-understanding as the guarantor of social peace are left unaddressed.

Soviet attitudes were also a crucial point of reference for the post-war Italian socialists. In this sense, the PSI represented the exception to the rule among the anti-communist, pro-American and reformist Western European social democratic parties – regarded, as Denis Healey once described it, ‘as part of East[ern] Europe’.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>20</sup> ‘European Socialism’. Labour Party Archives, International Department, Box 13, Labour History Archive and Study Centre, Manchester.

Indeed, as the cold war got underway, the PSI looked East in the steadfast belief that only the closest of alliances with the Soviet Union could guarantee peace. In his *Politique d'Abord: Il PSI, la Guerra Fredda e la Politica Internazionale, 1948–1957*, Giovanni Scirocco examines the long and painstaking road the Italian socialists travelled from effectively being part of the Soviet camp to reacquainting themselves with mainstream (Western) European social democracy. With every step taken in international politics having direct repercussions at home, his account is as much a national as it is an international history of the PSI.

The book consists merely of an introduction and two very long chapters (no conclusion). Both chapters consist of extensive discussions of intra-party debates, combined with often much shorter sections on socialist attitudes towards specific international questions and actors (the Korean War, the Partisans for Peace, Suez etc.). Whilst this compartmentalisation of the narrative certainly does no good to the depth or overall coherence of the argument, it does reveal clear patterns in the international politics of the PSI in the early years of the cold war.

During the 'glacial years' of the early cold war (1948–53), the PSI was a full member of the Soviet-led 'peace camp'. The reasons for entering this contingent varied from party leader to party leader. Some (amongst them Rodolfo Morandi) seem to have actually believed that a Third World War was imminent; others (like Pietro Nenni) used the sceptre of war to cement the policy of frontism with the communists at home (pp. 52–6). Irrespective of the rationale, however, the consequence was the complete subordination of the PSI to the foreign interests of the Soviet Union. This not only compelled the Italian socialists to make the kind of volte-face typical of the post-war European communist parties (on Tito, on the Marshall Plan), but also involved the incorporation of Soviet propaganda into party jargon. Some of the PSI's rhetoric during this period is truly stunning for a Western European socialist party. Whilst it was claimed that the unnerving aspects of capitalism had millions of Americans taking sleeping pills every night (p. 94), the Soviet Union and the Eastern European people's democracies were described in 'hagiographic' terms (pp. 98–110). Upon visiting a collective farm near Moscow in August 1948, Nenni marvelled that 'the kolkhoz is a specimen of the new mankind. It realises the dreams of our pioneers' (p. 101).

This is not to argue that everyone in the PSI bought into this unquestioning identification of the cause of the Soviet Union with that of working classes worldwide. The centrist group around Riccardo Lombardi claimed that even recent history had shown the foreign interests of the Soviet Union to be diametrically opposed to the interests of the Italian working classes on a number of occasions: this had been the case with the Hitler–Stalin pact before the war and once again with the *Svolta di Salerno* (i.e. the Italian communists joining the allied military government at the Kremlin's behest in April 1944) in its aftermath (p. 42). There was a domestic side to this argument too. With the Italian communists constantly 'paralysed' by the diplomatic and tactical exigencies of the Soviet Union, it was the socialists' task to kindle class struggle amongst the working classes. In this respect, the centrists maintained that the leading role within the workers' movement did 'not necessarily fall to the

communists' (p. 65). Except for a brief period of backlash against frontism after the election defeat of April 1948, though, the centrists proved unable to win over the PSI to their foreign and domestic conceptions in the early stages of the cold war.

Sirocco demonstrates how this began to change after Stalin's death in 1953. In the ensuing atmosphere of international relaxation, Nenni himself moved to the centre. During another visit to Moscow in 1955, he was far less upbeat about the progress of Soviet civilisation – noting widespread misery and overcrowding (p. 105). Yet even the suggestion of realigning the PSI internationally – let alone of abandoning frontism and seeking 'an opening to the left' domestically – provoked fierce sentiments within a party apparatus imbued by nearly a decade of pro-Soviet propaganda. It was only after the Hungarian Revolution that a majority, convinced that 'socialism is not made by police and tanks' (p. 221), lost its illusions about the Soviet Union. This opened the way for renewed contacts with the Western European social democratic parties united in the Socialist International. But for all the friendliness of these contacts, very significant disparities remained. As Haakon Lie wrote after meeting a delegation of the PSI in 1957: 'They talk about class struggle and Marxism as we used to do thirty years ago – perhaps that is because their socio-economic situation resembles ours back then' (p. 264).

#### IV

If such discrepancies between parties and countries within one and the same bloc had survived a decade into the cold war (with all its homogenising effects), we need to rethink our approach of early post-war European social democracy. Considering the vast differences in terms of both socio-economic development and political history, comparisons between Italy and Norway or, for that matter, Czechoslovakia and Poland are only of limited value. The scholarly commonplace dismissal of the PSI as an 'anomaly' within the larger context of post-war Western European social democracy,<sup>21</sup> for example, fails to take into account that the developments in (north-) western Europe were in fact not the foremost frame of reference for the Italian socialists. Most of them perceived only the alternatives of Greece (civil war, followed by the installation of US-backed counter-revolutionary dictatorship) and Poland (communist-socialist united front, closely allied to Soviet Union) to be available to post-war Italy – under these circumstances, nearly all preferred Poland. What is needed, then, is an all-European perspective upon early post-war European social democracy, freed from the conceptual constructs of East and West so dominant during the cold war. That means moving beyond the safe confines of the diplomatic, transnational or single-country studies reviewed in this article to arrive at a truly comparative history of post-war European social democracy across the two blocs.

<sup>21</sup> For a critical discussion of the 'anomaly' concept in relation to the post-war PSI see: Christine Vodovar, 'Il socialismo nella storiografia italiana e francese dell'ultimo decennio', *Ricerca di Storia Politica*, 10, 2 (2007), 177–88.