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van Ree, E.

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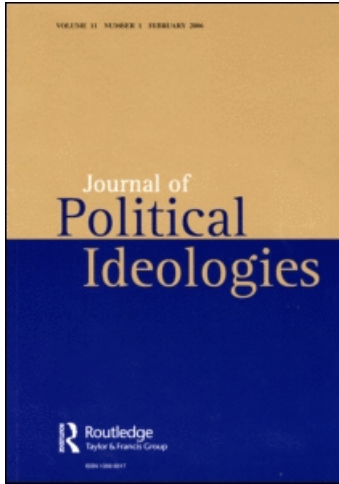
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Erik van Ree^a

^a Institute for European Studies, University of Amsterdam, PC Hoofthuis, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

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‘Socialism in one country’ before Stalin: German origins

ERIK VAN REE

*Institute for European Studies, University of Amsterdam, PC Hoofthuis, Spuistraat 134,
1012 VB Amsterdam, The Netherlands*

ABSTRACT *This article discusses the prehistory of the Stalinist concept of ‘socialism in one country’ in the German social democratic movement, from 1875 through to the first decade of the twentieth century. The internationalist Marxist discourse on the geography of socialism did not remain unchallenged in the party. German social-democrats hoped for their country to become the first to introduce the supposedly very efficient socialist mode of production. Anticipating other capitalist powers would have been a way to compensate for Germany’s disadvantages. In the early versions of ‘socialism in one country’, expounded most prominently by Ferdinand Lassalle and Georg Vollmar, the socialist mode of production might allow Germany to dominate the world market. In later ones, represented by Karlis Balodis, Richard Calwer and others, the acquisition of a colonial empire, or fusion with continental neighbours, would create the conditions for a socialist Germany to occupy her rightful Platz an der Sonne.*

In the mid-1920s the general secretary of the Soviet Communist Party Joseph Stalin and his then ally in the struggle for power Nikolai Bukharin presented a new doctrine of ‘socialism in one country’. The expected world revolution had not arrived, but Stalin and Bukharin pragmatically concluded that this was no fatal disaster. In contrast to established Marxist orthodoxy, they decided that a socialist state, society and economy could be constructed in a single country after all. The world revolution remained necessary in that the military security of the USSR could never be finally guaranteed as long as the country was surrounded by hostile capitalist powers, but there was no reason to assume that isolated socialist states would collapse for internal reasons.¹ Thus party dogma adapted itself to the situation the USSR unexpectedly found itself in.

In this article I intend to show that the doctrine of socialism in one country, even though at odds with ‘orthodox’ Marxism, was no new Soviet-Russian development, but went back to a long-existing viewpoint in the international social

democratic movement. Stalin and Bukharin were merely dusting off an old idea that had been pioneered by a number of important German socialists. Ironically, the Russians were not only following in the footsteps of the Germans when they adopted Marx's internationalism but also when they abandoned it. I will focus on the social democratic movement in the period between the establishment of the unified party, the *Sozialistische Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands* (SAPD), in 1875 and the first decade of the twentieth century.

This is no completely new thesis. Lev Trotsky was the first to point to Georg Vollmar, a leader of the right wing of the *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (SPD), as the father of the idea of socialism in one country.² References to Vollmar anticipating Stalin are rather widespread.³ In the literature I also found sporadic references to other German socialists commenting favourably on the project of socialism in one country, mainly Ferdinand Lassalle, Eugen Dühring, Karl Rodbertus, Eduard Bernstein and even Engels.⁴ However, to my knowledge the question has never been thoroughly researched.

That a number of German social-democrats could explore the perspective of socialism in one country has something to do with the flaws in Marxist discourse. Most nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century German social-democrats followed Marx and Engels in expecting socialism to be established simultaneously in several European countries. The way socialists imagined the future revolution was stamped by the experiences of the past. The French Revolution of 1789 quickly developed into an international war enveloping the whole of Europe, and the 1848–9 *Völkerfrühling* also involved many nations in a complex interplay. Socialists tended to imagine their revolution as a repeat performance, with upheaval in one country triggering similar events elsewhere, and leading up to a pan-European conflagration of revolution and counter-revolution. Hal Draper dubbed this model, with Marx and Engels as its most eminent representatives, '*contagious revolution*'.⁵ In this imagined framework, the question of whether socialism was possible in a single country would most likely never even pose itself.

Given that according to Marx and Engels the developmental levels of the capitalist countries were subjected to a process of equalization, revolutions would tend to come near-simultaneously. In the unlikely case that a revolution remained isolated, there was no way out, though, mainly because of economic globalization. Interdependencies between the 'civilized countries' were becoming ever more compelling, and a single socialist state could not maintain itself on a world market dominated by Great Britain. Only a European polity in the form of a league of Great Britain, France and Germany (perhaps joined by the United States of America) would have the power to form a viable socialist economy.⁶

Unfortunately, a flawed logic underlay this argument. If indeed, as Marx and Engels claimed, socialism was the superior system compared to capitalism, with a more efficient way of producing, then the single socialist state need not be afraid of being out-competed by its capitalist rivals or of being forced back to capitalism by the laws of the market. On the contrary, given the superiority of its economy, and provided that it made intelligent use of the international division of labour, the

single socialist state should become the new dominant player on the world market. As we will see, this is precisely what social democratic proponents of socialism in one country argued against Marxism. The second way for a socialist state to prevent itself from being overwhelmed by the capitalist world market would be to sever itself from it and from the competition, by locking itself up in an autarkic sphere. The reduction of exports and imports to a minimum could be secured by a state monopoly of foreign trade and protective tariff walls. Autarky comes at the price of dramatic inefficiencies, and would result in a barracks socialism of sorts, but it is not an impossible project. This too was proposed by some German social-democrats, though without seriously considering the likely consequences of their choice.

Marx and Engels had a deep insight in the processes of globalization and the formation of the capitalist world market, but their conclusions concerning the economic perspectives of socialist states were badly thought through.⁷ It was easy enough for other socialists to make a plausible case for the viability of isolated socialist states.

In the period under discussion here, there were no formal debates at German Social Democratic Party congresses on the question of socialism in one country. Rather, the matter was addressed in individual writings of socialist ideologues and party leaders. However, the avowals of belief in the viability of nationally isolated socialism were too frequent to be treated as sporadic eruptions. They were in good accordance with the German Social Democrats’ strategy of aiming for a parliamentary majority and the seizure of power initially within the confines of their own country. Whereas Marx and Engels did not extrapolate from this strategy to conclude that an isolated socialist Germany would be a viable state, for others this would have seemed a natural conclusion to draw. Furthermore, as we will see, the individual arguments for socialism in one country were supported by a shared logic that gave them consistency and a powerful patriotic motive that provided them with emotional force.

In early social democratic tracts in defence of the idea of socialism in one country, written during the 1860s and 1870s, the predominant motive was a patriotic one: introducing socialism first would be a courageous choice for Germany to make. Given the superiority of the new economic principle, the country’s international position could only profit. In the versions developed in the 1890s and 1900s, the isolated socialist state was newly imagined as an empire. The socialist-patriotic imagination was reoriented toward German colonial expansion or towards a continental-European merger with Germany’s neighbours into a new self-sufficient superstate.

In a thoughtful essay Mary Anne Perkins argues that for centuries European political thought, and German in particular, had a ‘dynamic polarity’ at its core: ‘on the one hand, a type of cosmopolitanism founded on the idea of a common European culture, on the other a national consciousness which has varied in expression from liberal patriotism to chauvinistic nationalism.’⁸ This excellently characterizes the spirit of social-democracy too. Rather than framing them as pure internationalists, or as essentially internationalists with patriotic admixtures, one

would better see the late nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century social-democrats as people wrestling with the question of how best to combine the two concerns of internationalism and patriotism.

The literature highlighting the profound influence of patriotism on German socialism is rich and immense in scope.⁹ From its inception the movement was internationalist in orientation. Sociologically, proletarian internationalism can be understood in the light of the lack of integration of the industrial working class in the nation. Left out in the cold among their own national communities, radical workers in the nineteenth century would naturally look to their companions in distress in other countries for support and solidarity. Then again, the more workers became integrated in the nation in the course of the century on a political and economic level, the more open they became for patriotic concerns.¹⁰

In Germany such concerns ran especially deep because the country was always in a disadvantaged position: until 1871 it was not yet even a proper country at all, and the socialists were in the forefront of the struggle for national unification. After Germany was made one under Bismarck, despite its remarkable progress in industrialization, it remained disadvantaged as an imperialist and colonial power. In the 1890s many came to believe that Germany had to fight for a *Platz an der Sonne* of her own. Among those were social-democrats who did not want to be regarded as insensitive to the national interest.¹¹ This is the context in which the idea of socialism in one country arose in the German workers' movement. The Soviet-Russian discovery of it represented no unique or original departure but affirmed the permanence of the patriotic motive in the socialist movement.¹²

As for my sources, apart from searches in the works of important German social-democrats, I studied the relevant volumes of the social democratic theoretical journals *Die Zukunft* (1877–8); *Die Neue Gesellschaft* (1877–9); *Jahrbuch für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik* (1879–80); *Die Neue Zeit* (1883–1914); *Der Sozialistische Akademiker* (1895–6) and *Sozialistische Monatshefte* (1897–1914).

The 'isolirte sozialistische Staat'

The German socialist party has a complex history. The year before he died, in 1863, Lassalle founded the *Allgemeine deutsche Arbeiterverein*, to be followed by the establishment of August Bebel and Wilhelm Liebknecht's *Sozialdemokratische Arbeiterpartei* (SDAP) in Eisenach in 1869. Bebel and Liebknecht were personally close to Marx, but Lassalle's ideological influence remained equally strong.¹³

In 1875 the two parties fused at a congress in Gotha. The new SAPD could not be considered Marxist. The later staunch Marxists Bebel, Liebknecht, Bernstein and Karl Kautsky had not yet exclusively committed themselves to one socialist line of thinking. This was a period of ideological eclecticism and intense searching. The party leaders were eagerly looking for figures of authority to clarify the new doctrine to which they had committed themselves. The so-called 'state socialists' trusted that the existing state could be used for socialist reform.

This tendency was represented by Lassalle and other independent socialist thinkers such as Eugen Dühring, Karl Rodbertus and Albert Schäffle, and remained very influential. But Bismarck’s October 1878 *Sozialistengesetz*, which remained in force until 1890, undermined the party’s faith in the existing state, thereby unintentionally assisting Marxism in gradually triumphing over its state socialist rivals. The Marxists clustered around Kautsky’s theoretical journal *Die Neue Zeit*, established in 1883. With the adoption of the new party programme at the 1891 Erfurt congress, Marxism became the dominant force in the SPD, as the party had been rechristened at its Halle congress in 1890.¹⁴

Lassalle, Dühring, and Schäffle all argued that socialism could initially be constructed in a single country. Theirs was not a narrow-minded economic nationalism. Like Marx and Engels, they proceeded from the primacy of the world market, but drew another conclusion, namely that the superior efficiency of the socialist economic system would allow the socialist state to dominate it. History would reward the courageous country, preferably Germany, that came first.¹⁵ Lassalle expounded this thought most clearly in his last work *Herr Bastiat-Schulze von Delitzsch* (1864), in which he explained that the socialist system would turn out a triumph of efficiency. This led him to the following spectacular conclusion:

Cast a glance at the *world market* from this perspective! The *world market* belongs to *that* nation that first decides to embark on the introduction of this social transformation on a grand scale. It will be the deserved reward for its energy and decisiveness. Because of the cheapness of the concentrated production, the nation taking the lead in this will occupy an even more *superior* position compared to the capitalists of the other nations than *England* has occupied for so long towards the continental nations.¹⁶

Introducing the new system first would allow Germany to break Britain’s economic dominance on the world market, a very different approach to the question than Marx and Engels took. The idiosyncratic Professor Dühring was very popular in the SAPD until Engels’s *Anti-Dühring*, published in instalments in 1877–8, brought his influence to an abrupt end. In his *Cursus der National- und Socialökonomie*, of which the first edition appeared in 1873, Dühring repeated after Lassalle that a ‘community that would introduce a socialistic [*socialitäres*] balance ... before others’ would be able to out-compete its capitalist rivals; ‘as a consequence of its superior system [*bessern Ordnung*] its economic strength would be relatively the greatest, and it would therefore need no protective measures [*Schutzes*] in the old sense.’¹⁷

The economist and political scientist Schäffle set his mark on the organization’s thinking about the *Zukunftsstaat*. Schäffle’s views changed over the years, but during the seventies he can best be described as a fellow-traveller of socialism. His 1874 *Die Quintessenz des Sozialismus* was highly regarded by Bebel and Bernstein.¹⁸ Almost as influential was the third volume of Schäffle’s *Bau und Leben des sozialen Körpers*.¹⁹ In that work Schäffle noted that due to the differences in developmental levels socialism could never be simultaneously established in all countries. He explained that due to its more effective economic

system, 'the social state [*Socialstaat*]' would produce against lower costs, and would therefore be a strong player on the international free market.²⁰

This kind of argument was not accepted by party leader Bebel, who in his authoritative *Unsere Ziele* (1871) reasoned that a socialist state could only be organized on an international basis, because capitalism was also organized internationally.²¹ But the approach of the state socialists did find a following among the party leadership. Socialism in one country was even considered an important question. In October 1877 the first issue of the SAPD's theoretical journal *Die Zukunft* came out. In an article probably written by editor Karl Höchberg, the journal's mission was defined as demonstrating, among other points, that if socialism were established in some country, there were no decisive 'external difficulties' that would block this process. The point was to prove that 'a socialist commonwealth [*Gemeinwesen*] of some size could more easily survive in the face of any external power than another state'.²²

In the September 1878 issue, 'V.' (almost certainly the collaborator of the journal and the Bavarian social democratic leader Georg Vollmar) reviewed a brochure *Der Zukunftsstaat*, which originally appeared in the *Schweidnitzer Stadtblatt* and which discussed what would happen to Germany if the social-democrats came to power. V. announced that in the journal's coming issues he would be discussing the question of whether an 'isolated socialist state' could exist, and the conditions of trade of such a state with the non-socialist countries.²³ *Die Zukunft* was closed down that year, but that same year Vollmar's brochure *Der isolirte sozialistische Staat* appeared. It was reprinted in Höchberg's new *Jahrbuch für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik* in July 1879.²⁴ It was the single most important work to be published on the subject in the German socialist party.

According to Reinhard Jansen, Vollmar was equally influenced at the time by Marx and Engels, and by Lassalle and Dühring.²⁵ Vollmar began by noting that he would be covering an 'almost completely disregarded' problem. He assumed that most socialists were of the opinion that socialism could only be introduced simultaneously throughout the civilized world. On the contrary, Vollmar set out to prove 'not only that the final victory of socialism in at first only one single state or several states is historically more probable, but also that nothing would get in the way of the existence and prosperity of the isolated socialist state'. According to Vollmar the complexity of the process of socialist transition made its simultaneous occurrence in all major countries effectively impossible. Socialism might come about near-simultaneously in two or three countries, for instance in France and Germany, but 'The victory of socialism in at first only one country is in any case the probable scenario'.²⁶

Vollmar admitted that in the modern age nations were ever more connected economically, but that would constitute no problem because socialism was the more efficient system. Rationally planned production and a state monopoly on foreign trade would create 'the most favourable position conceivable on the world market'. The socialist state would be 'the *securest* trading firm in the world'. Otherwise put, 'our state has a much greater influence on the world market than [the world market] on it'.²⁷

Vollmar importantly admitted that his belief in the viability of an isolated socialist state was not widely shared in the party. In his 1879 *Die Frau und der Sozialismus*, which became extremely influential among party members for decades, Bebel predicted that the revolutionary ‘explosion’ would spread ‘in a flash’ across the whole civilized world, resulting in a ‘great federation’ of the civilized nations. Socialism in one country was obviously impossible. For Bebel the prosperity of separate nations depended on the ‘*global economy*’. As a consequence, the ‘humane existence’ could not be ‘the exclusive way of life [*Daseinsweise*] of a single privileged people, who, however excellent they might be, can neither found nor maintain this condition in isolation [*isolirt*]’.²⁸

In choosing the word ‘*isolirt*’ Bebel may have been polemicizing against Vollmar, whom he might not have been willing to attack openly. At the time the two men were close allies on the radical left wing of the party. At its establishment in 1879, the newspaper *Sozialdemokrat*, which served as a base for the left wing, was edited by Vollmar.²⁹

In conclusion, it seems that in the period prior to the Marxist triumph, the notion of socialism in one country was well-known among the party elite from the work of influential state socialist ideologists. The mission statement of *Die Zukunft* and Vollmar’s work prove that the idea was picked up, even on the party’s left wing. However, if Bebel’s thinking would have been more representative than Vollmar’s, most party leaders would have felt more comfortable with Marx and Engels’s robust internationalism.

Socialism as autarky: Karl Kautsky

After the symbolic triumph of Marxism at the 1891 Erfurt congress, the SPD did not become an ideologically monolithic organization. During the 1890s the issues of colonialism, imperialism and militarism began to occupy centre stage in the party’s attention. The German ruling classes realized that as a latecomer in the struggle for global dominance, their country needed to fortify its position in the face of British and French imperialism. In engaging in the power game in Africa, China and other parts of the world, and in its naval rivalry with Great Britain, Germany began to formulate her own *Weltpolitik*. The ‘revisionists’, whose main theoretical journal was the *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, adapted themselves to this agenda. Their ‘social imperialist’ programmes have been analysed in depth in the scholarly literature.³⁰

After Engels’s death in 1895, the editor of *Die Neue Zeit*, Kautsky, was widely seen as the main theoretical spokesman of ‘orthodox Marxism’. In contrast to the revisionists, he rejected German colonial and imperial ambitions. In his view, the most effective way of strengthening the country would be to expedite the transition to socialism. In a remarkable March 1897 editorial of *Die Neue Zeit* discussing admiral Friedrich von Hollmann’s naval programme, it was concluded that Germany was too late to become a winner in the imperialist rivalry:

If Germany wants to get ahead of richer nations, only one road is available to her, the road of a 'social revolution, which ... makes possible the creation of new productive forces that cancel out the disadvantages of the geographical situation'. Marx expressed this thought already fifty years ago ... and later Lassalle gave it the formulation that the world market will belong to that nation whose working class first manages to emancipate itself. ... The *Weltpolitik* of the big industrialists must be confronted with the proletarian *Weltpolitik*.³¹

This editorial suggested not only that Germany could establish socialism on her own, but that this would even represent the desirable state of affairs; for the spread of socialism to other nations would have undone the lead socialism would have given Germany, which was the whole point of the editorial. That was however not likely the real drift of Kautsky's thinking. More likely, he only intended to show that the socialist economic system was a solution for countries that were insufficiently able to get ahead. Nonetheless, the editorial shows that even the 'orthodox' Kautsky was not insensitive to the patriotic attractions of socialism in one country.

Kautsky was influenced by the spirit of the times. From the 1870s onward capitalist states had been retreating from free trade to nationalization of their economies and protectionism. Correspondingly, in the work of German social-democrats, including even of free-trade advocate Kautsky, the concept of autarky became steadily more important. In his 1892 *Das Erfurter Program*, Kautsky defined the socialist state as a 'self-sufficient association [*Genossenschaft*]' that must produce 'everything it *needs* for its existence', something he said all socialists agreed on. He explained that the expansion of international trade had more to do with capitalism than with real needs, and that under socialism international trade 'will be strongly reduced'.³² To be sure, Kautsky was probably not referring to an isolated socialist state but to an international community of socialist states, each of which would be organizing its own autarkic economy.³³ Nonetheless, this was a programme of socialist autarky. The book was probably the single most authoritative compendium of the SPD's ideology for the next 25 years, so the weight of these passages should not be underestimated.

In envisioning the *Zukunftsstaat* as an autarky, Kautsky was continuing a tradition connected to the philosopher Johann Gottlieb Fichte, who was highly regarded in socialist circles as a humanist and a forerunner of socialism.³⁴ Fichte's argument in *Der geschlossene Handelsstaat* (1800) was that a state that wants to regulate its economy, as it should in order to protect the welfare of its people, must sever the unpredictable economic links with the world abroad as much as possible.³⁵ This was easily translated into Marxist terms. In March 1900 Kautsky argued that a socialist economy was necessarily a 'closed [*in sich abgerundetes*] area of production' because 'The more products the economy of a socialist commonwealth must procure from outside, the more commodity trading will be preserved within the socialist society.'³⁶ In other words, it was the Marxist ideal of a society without commodity production (i.e. production for the purpose of trade) that led Kautsky to the conclusion that a socialist state should be self-sufficient.³⁷

With the model of the autarkic socialist economy, the question would no longer be whether socialism might or might not be constructed in a single state, but

merely what territorial scale and natural resources would be required for this to be realized. It seems that Kautsky was aware of this implication of his own theorizing. He proposed that a socialist Germany could produce ‘the bulk of its food products itself . . . provided that it formed one economic area with Austria’.³⁸ However, it remained exceptional for Kautsky to engage in such speculations, for an obvious reason: he saw an isolated socialist Germany as an extremely *unlikely* outcome of the revolutionary process. Kautsky’s thinking was stamped by the ‘hypothesis of revolutionary chain reactions’: a revolution in one state was bound to provoke revolutions elsewhere.³⁹ ‘Today the social-democracy could not be victorious in Germany without making the socialist movement irresistible in all of Europe.’⁴⁰ In practice, then, the question of whether an isolated socialist Germany could survive would most likely not pose itself.

Then again, Kautsky was aware that the revolutionary process might not always take the expected course. In *Die Soziale Revolution* (1902) he explained that it happens that countries do not make the steps history is prescribing for them and are punished for their negligence by decay.⁴¹ If socialism would triumph in a ‘small territory’ such as Belgium it could not maintain itself on purely economic grounds. However, should the USA turn socialist first, and the European proletariat would fail to take power in turn, European society would decay and Europe would assume a position in comparison to America such as southern Italy occupied in comparison to Germany.⁴² Thus Kautsky clearly suggested that a great power such as the USA might well flourish as a single socialist state.

However, the main significance of Kautsky’s understanding of socialist autarky lay not in his own speculations about socialism in one country, in which he engaged only very sporadically, but in that he provided revisionists with the terms to formulate their thoughts on an isolated socialist Germany.

Socialism in one empire

Revisionists publishing in the *Sozialistische Monatshefte* never represented a monolithic position. Roger Fletcher emphasizes their deep division, mainly between tendencies represented by the editor of the *Monatshefte*, Joseph Bloch, on the one hand and Bernstein on the other. Fletcher characterizes Bloch, and Max Schippel, Richard Calwer, Gerhard Hildebrand and other luminaries, as authoritarian nationalists and champions of protectionism. Bernstein’s sympathies lay more in the liberal direction. A long-term resident of Great Britain, he was an Anglophile and advocated free trade, but he was also known for his spirited defence of colonialism in the name of the superiority of modern Western culture.⁴³

In revisionist work the accent shifted from a confidence in the ability of the national state to dominate the world market, such as had been expressed by Vollmar and others, to the hope of insulating the state from the world market in an enlarged colonial sphere with autarkic ambitions. ‘Socialism in one country’ became ‘socialism in one empire’. Tactical arguments were aligned with principled ones. On one level, the socialist defence of German colonial expansion had nothing to do with socialism. Motives of national interest counted heavily.

It was felt that if workers' living standards were to rise, the colonial contribution was indispensable.⁴⁴ Then again, patriotic socialists would hope for their country to become the first to make the transition to the superior economic system. Given that the SPD was the strongest social democratic party in the world, this was not a totally fanciful idea. Revisionist authors surmised that the flow of colonial products might prove crucial in keeping an isolated socialist Germany afloat.

Around the turn of the century this latter idea was in the air. In his groundbreaking and widely read and debated 1899 *Voraussetzungen des Sozialismus*, Bernstein observed that, given its strength, German social-democracy might possibly come to power in the not too far away future, but 'in many other countries it will still take a considerable period of time until they will be introducing socialism'. Under these conditions, 'one day the time might come when it may be desirable for us to be able to procure at least part of these products from our own colonies'.⁴⁵

The same thought was expressed in Karlis Balodis's *Produktion und Konsum im Sozialstaat*, published in 1898 by Dietz Verlag. The independent Latvian socialist scholar Balodis (Karl Ballod) lived in Germany since 1895 and wrote under the pseudonym 'Atlanticus'.⁴⁶ Balodis found it 'completely unthinkable that the whole earth will turn socialist in one blow'. One should reckon with the possibility that one state comes first and 'that such a state will acquire nothing from the rest of the world'. That state has no other choice but to become a 'closed state, which produces all it requires on its own territory'. Germany would need a colonial empire to fall back on, in case it came to stand alone.⁴⁷ The book had a foreword by Kautsky, who fundamentally disagreed with its colonialist conclusions, but considered it a serious contribution to the debate.⁴⁸

A similar viewpoint was again defended in December 1899 by the unknown social-democrat Erich Rother. Rother's point was to show that it was in the interest of the proletariat that Germany had a powerful army and navy. This confession was embarrassing enough for Bebel to inform the Reichstag that the *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, in which 'Zur Theorie der Flottenfrage' had appeared, was not representing the official party position.⁴⁹ For Rother, socialism meant 'the organized, closed economy, producing all its essential consumer goods on its own territory and for itself, without dependence on the world abroad'. Economically closed territories were already under formation, in particular the British and French empires, Russia's continental colonialism, and the United States, dominating the American continent. These 'large areas of production' should be seen as the 'nuclei [*Keime*] of future socialist organizations'. From the point of view of the development of 'separate [*einzelner*], rounded socialist societies', Germany was behind, lacking as she did a colonial empire of her own to cover her imports. Rother did not exclude the possibility of a proletarian triumph on an international scale, but possibly a socialist Germany might have to fight for a colonial empire with the capitalist world: 'who can say whether one day we will not have to eke out the secure basis for the socialist society with armour and torpedoes?'⁵⁰

It was difficult for Kautsky to define his position towards Rother. He consistently opposed German imperialism and colonialism, but Rother’s autarkic fantasies were similar to his own. In his March 1900 response he admitted: ‘I too am of the opinion that in a socialist society—more or less like in a primitive peasant economy—will inhere the ambition preferably to produce all its consumer goods itself.’ Nonetheless, it would be better for a socialist Germany to import goods than to engage in colonialism; and there was also the alternative of a tariff union with Austria-Hungary and other neighbouring states.⁵¹

The latter suggestion was no isolated remark. Since the 1890s, and more systematically from 1905 onwards, Blochian revisionists advocated the unification of continental Europe on the basis of a French-German understanding and under German domination. British, American, Russian and East-Asian competition was to be headed off through the formation of an autarkic continental empire behind tariff walls. This idea was influenced by the Marxist insight that the national state was economically obsolete and supranational formations had the future.⁵² The main contribution to this particular socialist imperialist tendency was made by Richard Calwer, economist and former member of the *Reichstag*. In his September 1905 article ‘Weltpolitik und Sozialdemokratie’, Calwer urged Germany to define her position against the four autarkic empires in the process of formation: Britain, the USA, Russia and the Japanese sphere in East-Asia. He saw salvation not in colonial expansion but in the ‘removal of the economic, political and national barriers between the European countries’.

Calwer claimed that neither Britain nor America would ‘soon find the strength to transform the present economic order in a socialist direction’. In France and Germany, however, the transition was to be expected earlier. Given the dependence on the world market, a socialist economy could not be organized in a ‘narrow national framework’. However, a continental ‘aggregate of countries’ could be a sufficient framework, ‘when the Central- and West-European countries create a large, sufficiently broad basis that can be closed off from the rest of the world’.⁵³ The expectation that in the not too far away future a continental European superstate might turn socialist and be locked in competition with the remaining capitalist great powers was repeated by other right-wing social-democrats in the next few years.⁵⁴

Concluding remarks

In this research into the precursors of the Stalinist doctrine of socialism in one country I have confined myself to the German social democratic movement in the period after the formation of the unified party, for a good reason. The SPD was admired by European social-democrats for its size, organization and stamina, and theoretically it was the most influential party. It was considered an honour for social-democrats of other countries to be published in *Die Neue Zeit* and the *Sozialistische Monatshefte*. What was written in these journals was scrutinized by leading social-democrats in other countries.⁵⁵ Finding socialism in one country in the works of prominent SPD leaders in this period would be the most relevant

in terms of the reputation of the idea in the Second International, the organization of social democratic parties established in 1889.

This is not to say however that the idea originated in this period. Its roots struck deeper in time. To mention just one example, the communist tailor Wilhelm Weitling, founder of the *Bund der Gerechten* in 1836—later to become the *Bund der Kommunisten*—was the author of two works serving as programmatic texts for the league. In both of them, *Die Menschheit, wie sie ist und wie sie sein sollte* (1838) and *Garantien der Harmonie und Freiheit* (1842), it was expounded that a communist system triumphant in only one country, even in a small one, could easily survive.⁵⁶ Arguably, in 1845 even Engels still acknowledged this possibility.⁵⁷

It is my educated guess that a search through the relevant materials of the French, Italian, British, Austrian and other sections of the Second International will produce similar results. Far from being Stalin's or Bukharin's invention, socialism in one country was an idea shared by social-democrats of different countries and eras, an ubiquitous counterweight to Marx and Engels's vision of the necessarily supranational character of the socialist order.

In the post-1875 German context, social-democrats, for the most part on the right wing of the party, hoped and expected that Germany would be the first country to introduce the socialist mode of production. Anticipating the other capitalist great powers would have been a way to compensate for the disadvantages Germany experienced, in terms of lateness of national unification and of the weakly developed colonialism and imperialism. In the early versions, expounded most prominently by Lassalle and Vollmar, the idea was that socialism might allow Germany to dominate the world market. In later ones, represented by Balodis, Rother, Calwer and others, the acquisition of a colonial empire, or fusion with continental neighbours, would create the conditions for a socialist Germany to occupy her rightful *Platz an der Sonne* in the imperialist era.

Socialism in one country remained a dead letter in Germany, but came to life in Russia. Some of the German publications discussed here seem strikingly relevant in light of later Soviet-Russian developments. It is not only that many of Vollmar's formulations were repeated almost to the letter in Stalin's works. More importantly, the Russian empire was one of the four or five state conglomerates that German 'social imperialists' identified as sufficiently richly endowed to construct an isolated socialist economy. Also, even though he rejected the autarkic model and gladly imported capital goods from the West, Stalin followed a line of making Russia economically self-sufficient where possible. Vollmar, Balodis, Calwer and others form part of the discursive prehistory of the USSR. The question of whether Soviet political leaders and economists were actually inspired or influenced by them must be the object of further research.

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 33. On socialist autarky in Kautsky see also: H. Kelsen, *Sozialismus und Staat. Eine Untersuchung der politischen Theorie des Marxismus* (Leipzig: C.L. Hirschfeld, 1920), pp. 58–59; G.D.H. Cole, *A History of Socialist Thought*, vol. II, *Socialist Thought. Marxism and Anarchism 1850–1890* (London and New York: Macmillan/St Martin's Press, 1961), p. 434.
 34. The editorial of the first issue of *Die Neue Zeit* mentioned Fichte as a source of inspiration: Die Redaktion der "Neuen Zeit", "An unsere Leser!", *Die Neue Zeit*, 1 (1) (1883), pp. 2, 4.
 35. According to Cole, Fichte anticipated 'Socialism in one country': *A History of Socialist Thought*, vol. I, *Socialist Thought. The Forerunners 1789–1850* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1977), p. 225. For the book: J.G. Fichte, *Der geschlossene Handelsstaat. Ein philosophischer Entwurf als Anhang zur Rechtslehre und Probe einer künftig zu liefernden Politik* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1979). For a discussion of Fichte's *Handelsstaat* see: Szporluk, *op. cit.*, Ref. 5, p. 101; T. Harada, *Politische Ökonomie des Idealismus und der Romantik. Korporatismus von Fichte, Müller und Hegel* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1989), pp. 37, 56–62. Kautsky was also returning to the state socialists. Even though defending free trade and opposing protectionism, Dühring, Rodbertus and Schäffle imagined the *Zukunftsstaat* as a self-sufficient economy, orienting production toward perfectly matching its own needs: Dühring, 1892, *op. cit.*, Ref. 17, pp. 89–90; C. Rodbertus-Jagetzow, *Das Kapital. Vierter Socialer Brief an Von Kirchmann* (Berlin: Puttkammer & Mühlbrecht, 1884), pp. 101–102, 124, 159, 223, 275, 285–286; Schäffle, *op. cit.*, Ref. 18, chapters 3–5. For Carl August Schramm, defender of Rodbertus's heritage in the party, on an autarkic socialist Germany: C.A.S., 'Die Vermehrung der Producte durch socialistisch organisirten Betrieb', *Die Zukunft*, 1 (14) (15 April 1878), pp. 404, 406, 408, 411. Cole suggests that Peter Kropotkin inspired Kautsky in suggesting that international trade would decrease under socialism: *op. cit.*, Ref. 33, p. 434.
 36. K. Kautsky, 'Schippel, Brentano und die Flottenfrage. Fortsetzung', *Die Neue Zeit*, 18.I (25) (1899–1900), pp. 777–778. See also: K. Kautsky, 'Der Wiener Parteitag', *Die Neue Zeit*, 20.I (7) (1901–2), p. 199.
 37. On the question of the primacy of the internal market under socialism and socialist international trade see also: K. Kautsky, *Handelspolitik und Sozialdemokratie. Populäre Darstellung der handelspolitischen Streitfragen* (Berlin: Vorwärts, 1901), pp. 7, 91–95; Kautsky's introduction to: Atlanticus, *Produktion und Konsum im Sozialstaat. Mit einer Vorrede von Karl Kautsky* (Stuttgart: Dietz, 1898), pp. xvii–xxiv; K. Kautsky, *Die Agrarfrage. Eine Uebersicht über die Tendenzen der modernen Landwirtschaft und die Agrarpolitik der Sozialdemokratie* (Hannover: Dietz, 1966), p. 442. See also: Schröder, *op. cit.*, Ref. 4, pp. 175–176.
 38. K. Kautsky, 'Allerhand Revolutionäres', *Die Neue Zeit*, 22.I (19) (1903–4), pp. 591, 596.
 39. M. Salvadori, *Karl Kautsky and the Socialist Revolution, 1880–1938* (London: NLB, 1979), p. 89.
 40. K. Kautsky, 'Schippel, Brentano und die Flottenfrage. Schluss', *Die Neue Zeit*, 18.I (26) (1899–1900), pp. 815–816. See also: K. Kautsky, 'Krieg und Frieden. Betrachtungen zur Maifeier', *Die Neue Zeit*, 29.II (30) (28 April 1911), pp. 105–107.
 41. K. Kautsky, *Die Soziale Revolution. Zweite, durchgesehene Auflage* (Berlin: Buchhandlung Vorwärts, 1907), pp. 51, 56.
 42. K. Kautsky, 'Allerhand Revolutionäres', *Die Neue Zeit*, 22.I (21) (1903–4), pp. 653, 655–656. See also: K. Kautsky, 'Der amerikanische Arbeiter. Schluss', *Die Neue Zeit*, 24.I (24) (1905–6), p. 787.
 43. Fletcher, 1979, *op. cit.*, Ref. 30, pp. 240–241; Fletcher, 1983, *op. cit.*, Ref. 4, pp. 86, 89; Fletcher, 1984, *op. cit.*, Ref. 4, pp. 39–40; Fletcher, 1988, *op. cit.*, Ref. 30. See also: P. Gay, *The Dilemma of Democratic Socialism. Eduard Bernstein's Challenge to Marx* (New York: Collier Books, 1962), p. 252; H. Mommsen, 'Nationalismus und nationale Frage im Denken Eduard Bernsteins', in H. Heimann and T. Meyer (Eds), *Bernstein und der Demokratische Sozialismus* (Berlin, Bonn: Dietz, 1978); Schröder, *op. cit.*, Ref. 4.
 44. See: O'Boyle, *op. cit.*, Ref. 30, pp. 291ff; Ascher, *op. cit.*, Ref. 30, especially pp. 406ff; Schröder, *op. cit.*, Ref. 4, pp. 175–176.
 45. E. Bernstein, *Die Voraussetzungen des Sozialismus und die Aufgaben der Sozialdemokratie* (Stuttgart: Dietz, 1899), pp. 144–145, 149–150. According to Schröder (*op. cit.*, Ref. 4, pp. 170–171) and Fletcher (1983, *op. cit.*, Ref. 4, p. 84; 1984, *op. cit.*, Ref. 4, pp. 162–163), Bernstein defended the same standpoint at the August 1907 Stuttgart congress of the Second International. However, though advocating a 'positive-socialist colonial policy', Bernstein did not refer to the possibility of an isolated German socialism. See: *Internationaler Sozialisten-Kongress zu Stuttgart, 18. Bis 24. August 1907* (Berlin: Vorwärts, 1907), pp. 28–29.

46. For Balodis, see: N.W. Balabkins, ‘Der Zukunftsstaat: Carl Ballod’s Vision of a Leisure-oriented Socialism’, *History of Political Economy*, 10 (2) (1978), pp. 213–232.
47. Atlanticus, *op. cit.*, Ref. 37, pp. 17–18. For Germany that ‘precedes the other countries in the socialisation of society’ see also: Atlanticus, ‘Produktion und Konsum im Sozialstaat. Eine Selbstanzeige von Atlanticus’, *Die Neue Zeit*, 16.II (47) (1897–8), pp. 661, 663, 665.
48. Kautsky, “Vorrrede” in: Atlanticus, *op. cit.*, Ref. 37, pp. v–xxiv.
49. See: P. Probert, “‘Our Natural Ally’”. Anglo-German relations and the Contradictory Agendas of Wilhelmine Socialism, 1879–1900’, in G. Eley and J. Retallack (Eds), *Wilhelmism and its Legacies. German Modernities, Imperialism and the Meanings of Reform, 1890–1930* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2003), pp. 130.
50. E. Rother, ‘Zur Theorie der Flottenfrage’, *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, 3 (12) (Dec. 1899), pp. 639–642.
51. Kautsky, 1899–1900, *op. cit.*, Ref. 36, pp. 777–778.
52. See: Fletcher, 1984, *op. cit.*, Ref. 4, pp. 61–62, 91; C. Bloch, ‘Der Kampf Joseph Blochs und der “Sozialistischen Monatshefte” in der Weimarer Republik’, *Jahrbuch des Instituts für Deutsche Geschichte*, 3 (1974), pp. 261–262. See also: O’Boyle, *op. cit.*, Ref. 30, pp. 291ff; Schröder, *op. cit.*, Ref. 4. For early examples of this line of thinking: H.M., ‘Weltpolitik’, *Die Neue Zeit*, 12.II (320) (1893–4), pp. 167–170; R. Calwer, ‘Die Vorbereitung neuer Handelsverträge. Schluss’, *Die Neue Zeit*, 16.II (37) (1897–8), pp. 328–330; E. Frei, ‘Zur Flottenpolitik’, *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, 4 (1) (January 1900), pp. 36–38. See also: Probert, *op. cit.*, Ref. 49, p. 132.
53. R. Calwer, ‘Weltpolitik und Sozialdemokratie’, *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, 9.II (9) (Sept. 1905), pp. 744–746, 748. Later Calwer argued more loosely for either a European tariff union or colonial expansion. Germany should be in the vanguard of establishing socialism: R. Calwer, ‘Das Fazit der Marokko-Affäre’, *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, 10.I (5) (May 1906), p. 356; ‘Der 25. Januar’, *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, 11.I (2) (Feb. 1907), pp. 105, 107; ‘Kolonialpolitik und Sozialdemokratie’, *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, 11.I (3) (March 1907), pp. 195–196, 198.
54. G. Hildebrand advocated a socialist but partly deindustrialized ‘United States of Europe’. However, he allowed for the possibility that the ‘production on a communist basis’ would be initially organised in only one European country: *Die Erschütterung der Industrie herrschaft und des Industriesozialismus* (Jena: Gustav Fischer, 1910), pp. 6, 81, 238. On Calwer and Hildebrand see: Ascher, *op. cit.*, Ref. 30, pp. 406ff.
55. For a critical discussion of the supposed role of the SPD as model party in the Second International, see: J. Rojahn, ‘War die deutsche Sozialdemokratie ein Modell für die Parteien der Zweiten Internationale?’, *Internationale Korrespondenz zur Geschichte der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung*, 27 (3) (1991), pp. 291–303. A new and powerful case for the German influence on the Russian social-democrats was recently made by Lars T. Lih, who argues that Lenin was an orthodox Kautskyan: *Lenin Rediscovered. What is to be Done? in Context* (Leiden: Brill, 2006).
56. W. Weitling, *Die Menschheit wie sie ist und wie sie sein sollte* (München: Verlag für Gesellschaftswissenschaft, 1895), pp. 24, 45–46; *Garantien der Harmonie und Freiheit. Jubiläums-Ausgabe* (Berlin: Vorwärts, 1908), pp. 85, 205–206, 230–231. See for the status of these texts: H. Förder and M. Hundt, ‘Zur Vorgeschichte von Engels’ Arbeit “Grundsätze des Kommunismus”. Der “Entwurf des Kommunistischen Glaubensbekenntnisses” vom Juni 1947’, *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Arbeiterbewegung*, 12 (1) (1970), p. 65.
57. See: *MEW*, vol. 2, pp. 542–543, 548.