

Socrates

The development of early social democracy as an ideological and political alternative to Marxism from the perspective of rights and social justice

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Abstract

This article explores the rise of early social democracy in 19th-century England as an ideological and political alternative to Marxism, with a focus on rights and social justice. While Marxism emphasized class struggle and revolution, early social democrats sought gradual, legal reforms to improve working-class conditions. Scholars have often overlooked the legal and institutional contributions of early social democracy to the foundations of modern welfare states. This study fills that gap by examining how early social democrats conceptualized justice, equality, and reform through democratic institutions. They promoted universal suffrage, civil liberties, social legislation, and legal accountability as pathways to economic and social fairness. The article uses historical analysis to trace the ideological development of social democracy, discursive analysis to understand the spread and reception of its ideas, and a social constructionist framework to examine how rights and welfare were shaped by social context. Unlike Marxism, which rejected existing legal structures, social democracy worked within them to promote inclusive governance. The article argues that early social democracy served as a bridge between radical theory and practical reform, laying the groundwork for lasting institutions of social protection, equality before the law, and democratic accountability. Its legacy continues in today's welfare-oriented democratic states.

Keywords

early social democracy • ideological alternative • Marxism • democratic reforms

INTRODUCTION

One of the main problematic aspects of this subject is the contradiction between individual freedom and collective social justice, which is manifested in the attempts of early social democracy to find a balance between the application of market mechanisms and social mechanisms, which ensures a fair division of resources and observance of human rights. This contradiction becomes particularly relevant in light of the desire of early social democracy to distance itself from the radical reforms of Marxism and its ideas about the collectivisation of property and the struggle between the classes, while at the same time retaining the objective to ensure social justice. One should add that the subject is important in the contemporary context of fostering social equality, democratic reforms and social security. The emphasis of early social democracy on social rights, equality and justice is significant in the context of contemporary rights and political philosophy, because it helps us to understand

how the ideas of early social democracy ideas regarding human rights and social security developed.

Social democracy is a contemporary and eclectic process, several developmental stages of which can be found in all its stages, maintaining its fidelity to social justice (Judt, 2005: 133). Each of the stages of social democracy characterises the adaptation to economic, political and social conditions typical of the era. Social democracy can be divided into five main stages of its development: early social democracy (mid- and later 19th century), social democracy as a political movement (early 20th century), social democracy and the welfare state (mid-20th century and 1960s), social democracy and neoliberalism (1970s–1980s) and contemporary social democracy. The emphasis on the early stage of social democracy, as opposed to social democracy in all stages, enables us to conduct a more serious and concentrate analysis about the formation of the ideological foundations of social democracy, which helps us to understand the initial direction of its development.

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Although the ideological and historical development of social democracy has been addressed in various studies, existing literature tends to focus more on the 20th-century welfare state or modern social democracy. There is comparatively less academic attention given to the ideological foundations of early social democracy and its unique role in shaping social justice through non-revolutionary means. This article seeks to fill that gap by examining the early phase as a distinct and crucial formative period, wherein the core principles of reformist politics, legal protection and social rights were first articulated.

The ideas of early social democracy arose during the mid-19th century, when society underwent radical changes, the basis for which was the Industrial Revolution, urbanisation and the rapid spread of democracy. These precipitated fundamental changes in the structure of society. As a result of these revolutions, new problems arose for the solving of which new ideological and political solutions were required. Capitalism became the dominant economic model, which resulted in widespread social inequality. During the Industrial Revolution, more and more members of society chose to work in factories, which were located in large cities, which resulted in extensive public migration. [...] With the development of industry and influx of workers into cities, the ground was prepared for the workers' movement and revolutionary ideas (Birkerts, 1928: 9). Industry became widespread, but working conditions could not keep pace with its rapid development and were extremely onerous, with nearly no rights or social security, as a result of which the need arose within society for new political and economic solutions, as well as for changes in the legal system, which would protect the proletariat and reduce social inequality. Early social democracy is closely linked to Marxism. Although conceptually, early social democracy and Marxism stood for the protection of social rights and equality, they were nevertheless mutually conflicting political movements, where social democracy was oriented towards reforms, whereas Marxists believed that reforms only extended the agony of capitalism as opposed to solving its basic problems.

The purpose of this article is to analyse how early social democracy conceptualised and advocated social justice, to investigate its ideological divergence from Marxism and to evaluate how these foundations shaped future democratic systems. The central hypothesis is that early social democracy created a sustainable framework for realising social equality through legal and democratic mechanisms, rather than class struggle.

This study applies the historical method to trace the ideological evolution of early social democracy, discursive analysis to understand how its ideas were communicated and received, and a social constructionist approach to examine how concepts like justice, equality and welfare emerged in response to specific social conditions.

The eclipse of Marxism by early social democracy during the Industrial Revolution took place gradually, because social democrats offered a reformist and democratic approach, which was attuned to the needs and developmental trends of industrial society, ensuring practical and sustainable changes oriented towards the introduction of a labour law and minimal wage, social security system and accessible education. Society only adopted the reformist path because it did not promise the radical and often violent changes associated with revolution. The priority was expansion of individual rights and the advancement of social justice. This early social democratic approach was successful, because it was able to resolve the problems of industrial society, maintaining stability and democracy.

The objective of early social democracy was a more just, equal and democratic society in which citizens could enjoy social and economic rights, and participate in public administration and the legislative process. Greater participation in public administration meant that working people, as workers and employees, could obtain significantly more political rights and influence in decisions affecting life and work. This was akin to a response to the social and economic problems caused by the Industrial Revolution and urbanisation. The ideas of early social democracy developed as a contemporary process that responded to specific challenges and adapted to the social needs of the time.

The first early social democratic movements demanded the performance of major social reforms, in order to foster social justice, economic equality and wider opportunities to participate in the country's political decision-making. Early social democrats believed that the consequences of capitalism resulting from the Industrial Revolution could be resolved with democratic methods such as reforms of the labour law, expansion of political rights and the formation of a social security system. By contrast, Marxists believe that reforms were of a superficial nature and that social justice demanded radical changes, which would result in complete annihilation of the capitalist system. Marxists believed that true social justice could only be fulfilled through radical revolution and power controlled by the proletariat. Even poorly educated factory workers believed that Marxism and revolution would deliver to them the promised paradise on the face of the earth (Dāvis, 1938: 416).

Undeniably, early social democracy developed from the ideas of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, but at the same time it differed from orthodox Marxism, formulating its own approach to social, economic and legal system issues. Accordingly, in time it developed into an independent ideology and political movement, which endeavoured to combine social justice with democratic values. This transformation subsequently established the foundation for the social democratic parties typical of the modern age. It should be added that one

can see similarities in early social democracy and Marxist ideology, for example, (a) the emancipation of the working classes—defence of the rights of the working class and advancement of social equality; (b) criticism of the capitalism resulting from the Industrial Revolution—there was a shared belief that the capitalism resulting from the Industrial Revolution was the cause of inequality, therefore it had to be reformed or replaced; (c) solidarity and collective rights—it was believed that collective action and solidarity were vital to consolidating social justice. However, at the same time, early social democracy and Marxism also differed. Marxism advocated revolution and the absolute toppling of capitalism, whereas social democracy proposed the gradual and democratic reform of capitalism. Social democrats supported parliamentary democracy as the basis for lasting and stable changes and an open electoral process, whereas Marxists were sceptical and believed that it was not possible to ensure justice, and that therefore a dictatorship of the proletariat had to be established as a transitional stage to socialism. Marxism could be characterised by the word ‘radical’, whereas early social democracy could be described as ‘gradual’.

Early social democracy replaced Marxism, it rejected the ideas of revolution and the struggle between the classes. During the Industrial Revolution, social democrats succeeded in improving the living conditions of workers, and inequality between the classes using democratic reforms, which could be more effective and less destructive than revolution. Social democrats emphasised the need for collaboration between employers, workers and the state. Legislative acts were introduced that stipulated working hours, safety at work, social guarantees and tax systems. Unlike Marxism, early social democracy did not attempt to completely eradicate private property, it believed that private property could be beneficial to society if social and economic regulations were prescribed. Sectors such as infrastructure, health care and education must be made accessible to all citizens in order to reduce inequality. In early social democracy there was a belief that public and private property could coexist if appropriate laws and mechanisms exist that are guaranteed to be beneficial to the public.

In the early stage of social democracy, the basic principles of social democracy were formulated, along with the main ideas of social democracy regarding rights and social justice and ideology, which formed the basis for subsequent social democratic movements. It attempted to balance economic modernisation with employees’ rights, ensuring the industrial development does not take place at the expense of social equality (Jackson, 2013: 31). It should be added that the development of these principles and ideas continue to influence modern discussions about social justice, economic inequality and the role of government in ensuring human rights. It is important to understand how early

social democracy sought a path to socialist values through democracy and reforms, as opposed to radical revolution and the destruction of capitalism. In the early stage of social democracy, social democrats began to advocate the rule of law, labour rights, social security and equality. Early social democracy and Marxism offered two different approaches to transforming society, where early social democracy used democratic solutions, whereas Marxism emphasised the power of revolution. Although social democrats tried to reform capitalism, this resulted in ideological and political clashes and caused theoretical disagreements among the representatives of Marxism and early social democracy.

In summary, the article explores the emergence of early social democracy as a non-revolutionary yet transformative political force that laid the groundwork for legal reforms, social protections and inclusive democratic participation—foundations which remain relevant to this day.

RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The impact of the Industrial Revolution on the development of Marxism and the evolution of early social democracy

The Industrial Revolution was a period of social and ideological changes, which had a significant influence on the development and ideas of Marxism and early social democracy. Furthermore, the Industrial Revolution was a decisive precondition for the evolutionary process of Marxism and social democracy. The economic and social challenges resulting from it generated intensive debate on rights, justice and societal development, which precipitated a need for new political and ideological directions, which still influence the world nowadays. It should be added that the Industrial Revolution began long before the advent of the ideology of Marxism formulated by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels.

The Industrial Revolution began in England during the second half of the 18th century and became the cradle for the broader Industrial Revolution, which subsequently spread to the United States, Germany and France. Thanks to its geographical situation, colonial network, abundant natural resources, economic development and powerful naval fleet, England was a conducive location for the start of the Industrial Revolution. In these new times, only England possessed the unique combination of economic, social and technological factors, which precipitated the Industrial Revolution there, making it the first and leading industrial country (Patriquin, 2004: 197). Moreover, England had a sufficiently stable economy and well-developed financial system to become a centre of scientific and technological development. Financial markets provided the necessary capital to new enterprises, while the principles of the market economy created a favourable

environment for technological innovations, which enabled England's industrialists to engage in manufacturing much more productively. Technological innovation guaranteed an enterprise's performance and productivity resulted in greater income and competitiveness. England became the industrialisation and economic leader. The Industrial Revolution was aided by agricultural improvements introduced during the early agrarian revolution, which generated the labour force required for food production—in agriculture there was no longer a need to employ so many employees, therefore it paved the way to new opportunities for people. It led to the mass concentration of workers in towns and factories.

In principle, the Industrial Revolution created new social classes, significantly transforming the structure of society. The mutual problems between the classes and notable social inequality were the basis for the theories of Marxism and subsequently for early social democracy. The division of the classes created a fundamental basis for Marxist theories. Feudal classes, where each member of society knew their role, were cardinally redivided by the Industrial Revolution, which introduced the bourgeoisie and proletariat. Theoretically, the Industrial Revolution was the object studied under the aegis of Marxist theory, which explained the problems of industrial society and foresaw its collapse.

When the Industrial Revolution spread in other countries, they had already learned from England's mistakes (Anstrats, 1995: 239). The Industrial Revolution caused an unexpectedly rapid increase in industrial production, the growth and overpopulation of large towns, accentuated the difference between social classes and generated undesirable tension within society, as a result of which the fragmentation of society occurred, that is, a distinct class society, creating the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. In essence, exploitation of workers and social inequality generated a need for theories and the development of political movements to defend their rights. Society started to realise that the problems of workers were collective not individual, therefore fostering solidarity and the formation of trade unions. Meanwhile, the bourgeoisie found itself in perpetual conflict: initially against the aristocracy, and later against that section of the bourgeoisies whose interests were contrary to industrial development [...]. To the same extent as the bourgeoisie developed, that is, capitalism, the proletariat developed—the class of modern workers. With the development of industry, the proletariat will recruit from all classes of inhabitants [...]. The lower strata of the middle class—small-scale industrialists, small-scale traders and rantiers, artisans and farmers—all these classes would slide into the ranks of the proletariat (Kleinhofs, 2019: 88). As a result of the Industrial Revolution, the bourgeoisie became even more affluent, while the condition of the proletariat, which became the dominant section of society, deteriorated. Numerically, the working class grew, based

on two large reserves of pre-industrial period workers—artisans and farmworkers (Rubenis, 2002: 263). Responding to the problems created by the Industrial Revolution and the development of capitalism in the mid-19th century, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels formulated the theory of Marxism. Inequality between the bourgeoisie and proletariat was the main reason why Karl Marx believed that capitalism was unjust and that logically its existence would only be transitory and short-lived.

The Industrial Revolution not only created economic and social changes, but also influenced the legal system, resulting in the drafting of new legal provisions and the need to review existing legal provisions, with the aim of regulating a new industrial and urbanised society. It was necessary to establish a new legal system to meet the new challenges of industrial society and regulate the consequences of these changes in relation to the economy and social issues. Workers' unions and political parties were developed under its influence, which advocated Marxist and social democratic ideas. The main driving force behind these ideologies was conflicts between the classes, and economic and social inequality.

The Industrial Revolution played a decisive role in creating a new economic system—the creation of capitalism, because fundamental changes were introduced in manufacturing processes, societal structure and economic relations. This turned out to be a serious social problem with all the resultant consequences. A lack of knowledge about social issues is a great travesty, because then loud endlessly repeated words begin to prevail, which propel the people along the wrong paths (Sorokins, 1929: 4). The long working hours, low wages, poor working conditions due to industrialists, while dissatisfaction, strikes, protests and awareness of social rights on the part of the proletariat, were among the issues that arose after the Industrial Revolution. Following the Industrial Revolution and the introduction of mechanisation in factories, production work required less physical strength. The opportunity arose for employers to employ women and children in factories, who they could pay less for their work than men (Smiltēna, 2022). Exploitation of workers and the huge inequality between societal classes were problems caused by the Industrial Revolution. Karl Marx advocated gender equality and equal opportunities, pointing out that the fact alone that women, children and men took part in manufacturing work made them equal as a workforce, because they all participate in the creation of society's joint benefits. At the same time, there was marked inequality between the genders within the workforce, for example, working-class men had fewer political rights than members of the bourgeoisie, while women had practically no rights at all; women in factories were paid less than men. In principle, women in a factory were comparable to ancillary production equipment as tools. Marxists fought for the work of women to be appreciated accordingly and consolidated at the

legislative level, otherwise it was unfair and did not conform to the context of natural rights. It should be added that many modern welfare state policies have been inspired by the efforts of socialist countries and Marxist movements. Although the objectives of Marxists were not always accomplished in full, their efforts had a significant impact on labour protection of women and gender equality.

The Industrial Revolution not only transformed the economic and social landscape, but also demanded significant changes in the legal system and legislation in various fields. New laws appeared that regulated factory conditions, child work and living standards in towns, reflecting the need to govern the societal consequences caused by industrialisation (McLaren, 1983: 157). Protection of workers' rights became one of the most pressing tasks, as a result of which labour protection legislation was drawn up in the process of drafting legal provisions, in order to guarantee paltry but minimal wages, rights to a holiday and social guarantees, and to stipulate a restriction on working hours. Legal provisions were drawn up in the realms of urban and environmental protection, and the building of urban infrastructure, because urbanisation caused by the Industrial Revolution had consequences—significant environmental pollution arose that caused health problems and ecological disasters. Social democratic ideology arose from the conviction that democratic reforms could guarantee workers' rights, improve living conditions and guarantee access to important public services such as health care and education (Carlsson and Lindgren, 1998: 61).

The Industrial Revolution was one of the main historical processes that led to the evolution of Marxism as a direction of social and political thought and was an important factor in the process of the birth and development of the Marxist movement. The Industrial Revolution created conditions that made Marxist ideas relevant and worthy of support, as responses to the internal contradictions of capitalism, and constituted a new view of history, society, economics and politics. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels attempted to understand and explain the capitalist systems resulting from the Industrial Revolution, as well as society's new problems. They emphasised that capitalism is contradictory and internally destabilised, which in time would lead to its collapse, and therefore it had to be replaced in good time by socialism and later by communism. Karl Marx's thoughts about the collapse of capitalism were violent and apocalyptic. He continually awaited the collapse of capitalism in the most powerful revolution [...] and the replacement of the government by a proletariat dictatorship (Vaizey, 1972: 34). Karl Marx and social democrats had different ideas on how to behave towards capitalism and societal changes, although both ideologies acknowledged that the capitalism initiated by the Industrial Revolution had fundamental problems.

Both Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels tried to understand and explain the problems of the new society (the Industrial Revolution generation), and under its aegis developed a theory that historical changes primarily occur due to changes in the economic base, as well as production relations. In other words, the Industrial Revolution replaced the feudal system with capitalism, which would be followed by socialism, because capitalism would inevitably cause conflict between society's classes, resulting in capitalism's unavoidable collapse.

Marxism

Both Marxism ideology and its offshoot of early social democracy arose in response to the capitalist system—the rapid social and economic changes caused by industrialisation, the expansion of capitalism, the deterioration in working conditions and exploitation of employees. The dissatisfaction of the Proletariat created favourable conditions for Marxism as an alternative to capitalism. Early social democracy evolved from Marxist ideas about the nature of capitalism; this was the main philosophical foundation on which early social democracy was based. However, there were important ideological and tactical differences in the development of social democracy. By means of radical reforms, Marxists wanted to rewrite history by destroying capitalism. By contrast, social democrats wanted to improve the existing order, making it more just by reforming capitalism from within. The ideas of rights and social justice were linked to efforts to improve the living conditions of workers and their families. Social justice is founded on the idea that society must be provided with equal opportunities and that resources must be available to all its members, regardless of their social status or economic situation. The values of justice and equality play a special role in the formation of social policy. A high level of inequality is a significant condition hindering the development of the whole of society (Rajevska, 2014: 114).

Marxist ideas inspired early social democracy and social democracy adopted many Marxist principles, but differed in its approach and methods. Social democrats emphasised the importance of both economic inequality and just laws. Unlike Marxism, social democrats were in favour of the retention of private property, although at the same time preserving the right of the state to regulate its usage. Early social democracy was based on theory that the life and working conditions of workers could be improved by reforming capitalism by means of legislation and politics. In addition, the proletariat required political power to influence government policy. It should be added that, as a result of ideology, this led to the introduction of general voting rights. Social democrats developed their path to social justice and social fulfilment, without adopting the radical Marxist approach as a means of introducing socialism. The most important political precondition for the upsurge in Marxism was the aggravation of the struggle

between labour and capital in the mid-19th century, and the evolution of the workers' movement into an independent political power in the most developed European countries (Enciklopēdija.lv, 2024).

Based on gradual reforms, democratic values and social justice, early social democracy is an important phase in the development of social and political thinking, which offered an alternative in the mid- and late 19th century to liberal capitalism and radical Marxism. It differed from liberalism, which emphasised the advantages of individual freedom and the market economy, as well as from Marxism, which demanded revolution and the introduction of socialism by means of the power of the proletariat. During this period, social democracy was not completely divorced from other socialist ideas, that is, it was not a homogenous ideology. It was closely linked to the theories of socialism and Marxism, but it differed from revolutionary approaches, and offered another path to socialism. Early social democracy was divided into two streams, that is, supporters of reformism and supporters of revolutionary Marxism. The adherents to reformism believed that the welfare of workers could be improved by taking the parliamentary route and adopting gradual reforms. By contrast, revolutionary Marxists believed that the only way to achieve socialism was by destroying capitalism through revolution enacted by the proletariat, which would be followed by the establishment of a socialist country. In order for a proletarian revolution to take place in a country, besides favourable objective conditions and a state of desperation inciting the masses to revolution, the masses also require a leader. Such leadership can only be provided by a revolutionary party (Dīmanis, 1957: 16).

Early social democracy did not deny the importance of capitalism. It proved that the principles of capitalism and social justice are not mutually exclusive. Regulation and reform of capitalism would reduce its negative consequences. Capitalist society could be efficient, economically stable and just, but it must be socially responsible. One concludes that early social democrats believed that it was not necessary to destroy capitalism without delay, but rather to gradually reform and develop it so that it would become a socialist system. This was the fundamental difference that separated radical Marxism from early social democracy. For their part, Marxists believed that capitalism was an inevitable phase in the course of history, and it was necessary that in order for socialism to develop, power had to be entrusted to the working class, which would combat the bourgeoisie and foster the revolution. The bourgeoisie was convinced that socialism could not be effected and that except for criminal elements, who belonged behind bars, no sensible person would support Marxism; this doctrine was damned by science and the mind (Dīmanis, 1957: 4).

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels used the period of the Industrial Revolution to develop their ideology—Marxism as a critique of capitalism. Moreover, drawing inspiration from the changes wrought by the Industrial Revolution, they conceived the theory of historical materialism. In the mid-19th century, under the aegis of their theory of communist revolution, they proposed a radical and revolutionary interpretation of the idea of socialism, stressing that the communist transformation of society logically emanated from the proletariat's class struggle against exploitation and oppression. Moreover, its most important precondition was the assumption of power by the proletariat by way of revolution, implementing the proletariat dictatorship, which would in future be transformed into the self-governance of the people, where people lording it over people would be replaced by the governance of material items (Enciklopēdija.lv, 2024). It was declared that social inequality is the nucleus of capitalism. Marxists believed that the capitalist legal system was designed to maintain class differences between capitalists and workers, in defence of private property. Violent revolution was the only way to build a new society in which social inequality and inhumane working conditions would not exist. Marxists believed that only after the complete annihilation of capitalism and the class society founded by it, and after the revolution, would it be possible to establish a communist society where the proletariat would destroy the bourgeoisie, resulting in a society in which there would be no private property, only joint property. What the bourgeoisie therefore produces, above all, are its own grave-diggers. Its fall and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable (Marx and Engels, 1848: 21). In regard to the development of liberal ideology, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels believed that the ideas manifested by the movement justified capitalism and exacerbated social inequality. Marx believed that socialist society had to become the final phase of the class war, that is, a society where the means of production were jointly owned by all, as a result of which there would no longer be a struggle for them (Carlsson and Lindgren, 2007: 47).

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels proposed radical revolution and the introduction of socialism by force, in order to precipitate the complete collapse of capitalism and transition to a socialist society, because this would lead to a collapse of the system. Their works also had a significant influence on the development of socialist and communist movements, especially after the publication of *the Communist Manifesto*, which served as a source of inspiration and encouraged revolution and the unification of the working class, in order to topple capitalism. At the same time, the founding fathers of early social democracy like Eduard Bernstein, August Bebel and Karl Kautsky and others adapted Marxist ideas to certain historical and political conditions, emphasising democratic methods and gradual reforms as the path to the implementation

of socialism. Although social democracy and Marxism are closely linked, the proponents of early social democracy developed a different path to their objective, that is, to make society more just and to eradicate social inequality. It adopted the basic principles of Marxism regarding the oppression of the working class and inequality, but simultaneously emphasised a democratic approach and gradual reforms as the means of governing society. *The Communist Manifesto* was a political and ideological platform which formulated the basic principles of Marxism, described practical political actions and offered recommendations for organising socialist revolution. Marxism in itself was based on a critique of capitalism, [...] primarily emphasising the class struggle as a driving force behind historical changes (Rummel, 1977: 76).

Early social democracy was an important factor in the founding of parties in Western Europe and other parts of the world. The advocates of early social democracy turned their attention to the development of the principles of social justice and equality, in order to ensure a more just society, reduce social inequality and improve the living conditions of workers. They developed a functioning political system in which workers could influence government decisions not through revolution, but legislation. Early social democrats introduced a conceptual approach in which the state would assume responsibility for social security. During this period, the early social democrats sought ways to improve the living conditions and rights of workers and employees, concurrently preserving the principles of stability and democracy, while advancing societal welfare, justice and equality, democracy and political freedom as the main objectives. Ideas and values are the basic concepts of social democracy, and the earlier idea of revolution has been replaced by reformism or revisionism (Tengdahl, 2014: 13).

One of the main proponents of early social democracy, Eduard Bernstein, formulated 'reformist' ideas in response to the revolutionary approach of Marxism. He criticised Karl Marx's theoretical dogmatism and advanced the concept of evolutionary socialism in which capitalist reforms could be accomplished through gradual political and economic transformation. It should be added that reforms were believed to improve the capitalist system, not completely destroy it. Although social democrats praised some of the ideas of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, they were not always of one mind. For example, social democrats believed that Karl Marx's ideas about the exploitation of the labour force had a major influence on socialist movements. However, representatives of the social democratic movement were not always unanimous that revolution was the most appropriate way forward for society. Instead, a gradual path of reforms was proposed, using democratic methods based on democratic values, in order to improve the working conditions and social rights of members

of society, because this would be a better alternative than the complete destruction of the capitalist system. Gradually, social democracy began to take shape as a separate ideology and increasingly emphasised reforms, not radical revolution. Unlike communists, in the early stage of social democracy, social democrats concentrated on parliamentary and gradual reforms, endeavouring to avoid radical changes that could cause societal crises. Early social democracy evolved as a compromise between radical Marxist ideas and liberal reformism. The early social democrats were forced to align Marxist principles with practical political strategies in the context of parliamentary competition (Kitschelt, 1994: 68). Right up to the start of the 20th century, social democratic parties were forced to vary and make tactical decisions that would satisfy the requirements of both reformists and Marxists. Social democrats understood that members of society not only vote for 'public benefits', when they vote for a party, they vote against the current government, which has reduced their income and increased unemployment (Przeworski, 1985: 42).

Early social democracy was distinctly reformist and its proponents did not advance the goal of completely annihilating capitalism through revolution, because they did not consider it to be a necessary means of achieving social changes. There was a belief that by using gradual reforms it was possible to improve the state of society, to bring about changes within the social structure, creating opportunities for employees to live a life worthy of greater respect. Theoretically, social reforms could serve to improve the living conditions of the poor and workers. This meant that work was required on legal protections—a reduction in working hours, setting a minimal wage, introduction of a pension system, sickness insurance and so on. The early social democrats emphasised the need to gradually change society through democratic reforms, democratic institutions and parliamentary politics, accented political and social progress, by means of the parliamentary path and legislative reforms, not insisting on radical revolutions and political authoritarianism. The idea of revolution was rejected by the social democrats as an overly risky path to the transformation of society, which could lead to destabilisation and authoritarianism. In order to maintain peace within society and avoid social conflicts, reforms had to be introduced gradually, carefully observing the reaction of society, in order not to pose a threat to the stability of the state or foster the need for revolution. The early social democrats' idea of gradual reforms, which could be accomplished by democratic means, proved to be successful, because this approach helped social democratic parties to become one of the main political powers. In order to achieve electoral success, social democratic parties had to adopt gradual and pragmatic strategies of reform, which would attract a broader

constituency of voters. In doing this, they found a path to governance, which balanced socialist ideals with the realities of democratic politics (Przeworski, 1980: 58).

During the mid-19th century, a growing number of citizens started to demand voting rights and politically active participation. Workers started to organise in trade unions and demand improvements in working conditions and protection of workers' rights, because the Industrial Revolution resulted in great poverty and inequality, and onerous working conditions. Social democratic movements and parties supported the trade union movement, as part of political organisation, organising strikes, protests and political campaigns. As a result of the urbanisation caused by the Industrial Revolution and the growing concentration of workers, there was an increasing demand for rights to education, social security and health care. Early social democrats asserted that the state had to play an active role in economic life and provide social guarantees, which included health care, a pension system and of course education. There was a prevailing opinion that through educational, social and labour reforms it was possible to achieve economic and social progress, but that this did not have to be achieved through violence or radical changes. The active work of social democrats and public participation has become the basis for the establishment of the modern welfare state. The social welfare state became the main element of early social democracy strategies, in order to reduce economic inequality with the help of state intervention (Esping-Andersen and Van Kersbergen, 1992: 204). From the perspective of rights and social justice, early social democracy introduced structural changes that ensured protection of employees, social mobility, rule of law and democratic governance.

The desire of society to participate in politics was in contrast to the authoritarian and aristocratic societal systems that had existed prior to then. Early social democratic ideas were linked to democratic reforms, which would entitle members of society to participate in political processes. Only through free elections and a parliamentary system is it possible to ensure societal stability and justice in the long term. Social democrats believed that political reforms are necessary to foster justice and representation at various levels of society, thus advancing more complete democracy. It should be added that social democracy significantly influenced the development of democracy, because its adherents stressed the need for citizens to participate in politics and the expansion of voting rights. Social democrats increasingly started to support the expansion of voting rights up to the universal principle of voting rights (for men). Parliament was presented as a forum in which the voices of workers could be heard and connected to socialism (Delwit, 2005: 60).

At the end of the 19th century, under the influence of social democratic ideas organised political parties and movements

began to take shape, which followed the reformist path. The first major social democratic power was Germany's social democratic party (SPD), which was founded in 1875 and became one of the first social democratic parties in the world. It evolved because several earlier Marxist groups joined forces in the struggle for labour rights and democratic reform. The party emphasised the need for reform and the expansion of voting rights, as well as started legislative work to improve workers' living conditions. Early social democracy provided a strong platform for the subsequent social and political movement. It offered an alternative not only to the ruthless consequences of capitalism, but also to communist radicalism. At the end of the 19th century and at the start of the 20th century, the SPD party became one of the main political powers in Western Europe and elsewhere in the world, offering a compromise between capitalism and socialism. Industrial changes resulting from the transition to capitalism highlighted the relevance of the Marxist critique, especially in order to understand the dynamics of the class struggle and alienation rooted in modern industrial production systems.

It should be added that early social democracy influenced many social and economic processes, which impacted 20th century society and formed the basis for modern welfare states and social reforms. Social democratic ideas of political participation, social justice, legal protection and the role of the state in regulating the economy are still the central platform for many modern progressive parties. Early social democracy was the first step on the path to modern social and political structures, which are linked to labour rights, social justice, sustainable development and democracy, and it formed the basis for the modern legal system. Integrity is the virtuous criterion of politics and rights (Tauriņš, 2001: 6).

Social democratic ideas of social justice, workers' rights and welfare systems have become the standard in most developed countries, whereas Marxism has forfeited its political dominance.

CONCLUSIONS

The roots of early social democracy can be found in the second half of the 19th century as a reaction to the social problems caused by the Industrial Revolution. The Industrial Revolution generated social tension and caused practical problems that shaped the politics of the day (Allen, 2017: 2). Unlike orthodox Marxism, which proclaimed a revolutionary class struggle and the annihilation of capitalism, social democracy developed as a reformist movement that was a more practical and sustainable alternative to Marxism, and one which sought to improve workers' lives and working conditions under the aegis of democratic institutions. The basic principles of early social democracy were the reduction of social inequality,

equal opportunities, just distribution of income by means of democratic reforms as an effective and sustainable form of social changes. In early social democracy, it was emphasised that societal welfare and security are rights that every member of society is entitled to.

Early social democracy integrated some Marxist ideas such as social justice and legal protection of employees, but nevertheless opposed Marxist revolutions as the main catalyst for change. In regard to rights, early social democracy advanced the development of a legal system, concentrating on labour rights, social guarantees and political participation, in an attempt to achieve a social compromise between capital and labour, unlike Marxism, which emphasised antagonism between the classes. Social democrats stressed that human beings and their basic needs came first, and that reforms had to serve society and improve its quality of life. They acknowledged capitalism's powers of adaptation, and sought to regulate it through state intervention in the economy. Early social democracy fostered the development of parliamentary democracy, whereas Marxism remained linked to a revolutionary and dictatorial governance model.

Under the aegis of social democracy, the concept of social justice was based on solidarity, equality and the role of the state in providing welfare. From the perspective of rights and social justice, early social democracy advanced societal stability, improving the rights of workers and employees. The ideas of early social democracy still dictate political discussions about minimal wages, education, social guarantees, free health care and the tax system. These ideas introduced by early social democrats regarding the minimal wage, free health care and social guarantees have become an automatic standard requirement in many developing countries, proving that the concept of early social democracy is still relevant. In essence, early social democracy designed the conceptual foundation for modern welfare states, in which governments play an active role in reducing social inequality, emphasising society's collective responsibility for its more vulnerable members, providing free education, health care, social guarantees and the most important aspect of all—equal rights and opportunities.

Overall, one can conclude that early social democracy was not only an alternative to Marxism, but also a more successful societal development strategy in the long term, because it demonstrated that it was not necessary to achieve a more just society through revolution and repression, but with the help of democratic institutions and gradual reforms, observing both individual rights, and the joint interests of society. Early social democracy provided real mechanisms to reduce social injustice, at the same time preserving the democratic societal development model. It paved the way for societal relations, which maintained a balance between social justice

and economic stability. Although Marxism was influential theoretically and historically, from a practical perspective, Marxism led to authoritarian regimes, which differed from the original idea of a just society.

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