From Planning to Crisis Management? Time, Futures, and Politics in West Germany and Britain from the 1960s to the 1980s

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When it comes to assessing the 1970s and 1980s, titles of historical publications often end with a question mark. Were western societies 'on the way to a new modernity?' Did the 1970s mark the 'end of confidence?' Was it a 'period of disillusionment or promise?'[1] ELKE SEEFRIED (Munich/Augsburg) added to this much-debated area of research by organizing a workshop, hosted by the German Historical Institute London, which also asked a question: 'From Planning to Crisis Management?' Focusing on temporal perceptions and the political, the workshop highlighted two categories of fundamental importance to both contemporary debates and today's historiography on this period. By concentrating on West Germany and Britain from the 1960s to the 1980s, the workshop aimed to evaluate dimensions of change and continuity, and to identify differences and similarities between the two countries.

The workshop was opened by DIRK VAN LAAK (Gießen) who introduced the idea of planning in the twentieth century as one of the key terms of the conference. The first section focused on scientific and social actors closely interlinked with the political sphere. Elke Seefried presented those who claimed to be able to predict future developments on the basis of scientific research, namely, futurologists. Even though the confidence in prognoses which had characterized the 1960s was shaken in the early 1970s, the idea of planning remained extremely important while adapting to the emerging new paradigms of ecology and quality. FERNANDO ESPOSITO (Tübingen) then drew attention to punks as a culture which challenged notions of progress but demanded the 'decolonization' of the future. Interestingly enough, their rejection of dull routines contributed to the emergence of new forms of capitalism characterized by ambivalences—more flexibility on the one hand, and a loss of security and predictability on the other. While punks rejected utopian ideas, NGOs were to a large extent based on them. But as JAMES McKAY (Birmingham) showed, radicalism turned into reformism when NGOs exchanged their independence for political influence in the present. As they became sought-after experts in different policy areas, NGOs subjected their timeframes to those of politics. Referring to the peace movement of the early 1980s, HOLGER NEHRING (Sheffield) pointed out how different estimations of present and future threats led to conflicts between those who opposed the stationing of nuclear weapons and those who demanded it. This went along with different ways of viewing the past, namely, when peace activists connected present developments with the Second World War.

Political parties and political conceptions of planning were the subject of the second and third sections. The perceptions of past, present, and future in both conservative and social democratic parties in Britain and West Germany were presented as shifting and ambiguous, yet in different ways. As JULIA ANGSTER (Kassel) and LAWRENCE BLACK (Durham) showed for the SPD and the Labour Party respectively, the future no longer seemed to be promising for both social democratic parties, a 'better future' as it were, but threatening. Especially for the SPD, 'change' had increasingly served only as a means of preservation since the 1970s. At the same time the conservative parties' attitude towards the future changed as well, as MARTINA STEBER (London) pointed out. While the conservative parties had focused on the present for decades, advanced concepts of planning and the promise of 'a better tomorrow' gained importance during the 1970s. The British conservatives were much more open to

[1] Thomas Raithel / Andreas Rödder, Andreas Wirsching (eds.), Auf dem Weg in eine neue Moderne? Die Bundesrepublik Deutschland in den siebziger und achtziger Jahren, Munich 2009; Konrad H. Jarausch (ed.), Das Ende der Zuversicht? Die siebziger Jahre als Geschichte, Göttingen 2008; Hartmut Kaelble, The 1970s in Europe: A Period of Disillusionment or Promise? The 2009 Annual Lecture of the German Historical Institute London, London 2010.

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the future than the West German CDU. The Labour Party, however, was labelled an actor of the past and old-fashioned.

GLEN O'HARA (Oxford) then elaborated on planning timeframes in British politics between 1961 and 1973. In his view, shrinking time horizons were a consequence not so much of presumed economic problems as of rising complexity, unintended consequences, and an increased sensitivity to volatility in economics. This, he said, added to the collapse of the ideas of linear progress and modernization. The terms 'ungovernability' and 'overload' played an important part in both British and West German debates as the consensus of the 1960s eroded. In contrast to O'Hara, GABRIELE METZLER (Berlin) emphasized the 1970s as a period of political and economic crisis which led to a crisis of legitimacy in Western democracies. Yet liberal democracies did not disappear. Instead they changed, thus making the 1970s a period of reform.

How these changes in attitudes and in framing time manifested themselves in different areas of politics was at the centre of the following sections, starting with economic policy. Contesting prevalent assumptions, ALEXANDER NÜTZENADEL (Berlin) argued that Keynesianism was not a phenomenon of the 1960s and early 1970s in West Germany, but had been implemented there during the late 1950s, when economists turned their attention to Anglo-American theories. By the early 1970s Keynesianism was already in decline since it had proved to be inefficient in solving new problems. For Britain, JIM TOMLINSON (Dundee) questioned the frequently invoked 'end of Keynesianism'. He referred to the survival of Keynesianism at national level, stressing that public spending was not cut back despite the boom in neoliberal thought. Analysing 'Keynesianism' in detail, the section also revealed the variety of concepts that lay behind the overall term.

Reversing the conference's main title, RÜDIGER GRAF (Bochum/Cambridge) explained the development of oil forecasts in energy policy as a development from crisis management to planning. The energy crisis of the 1970s revealed the weaknesses of such forecasts, yet led not to a decrease in planning but to improved planning. In her presentation of British policies towards Europe, HELEN PARR (Keele) connected planning with British foreign policy under Harold Wilson and Edward Heath. Approaching Europe, she pointed out, was the only way for Britain to develop a new timeframe in order to remain an important political player on the international scene. ENRICO BÖHM (Marburg) also pointed to the relevance of the international level. In his presentation on the G7 summits, he stressed their importance as an instrument of economic crisis management. Not least, he suggested, these summits served as a way of exercising symbolic policies to demonstrate strength and unity.

The last section turned towards social and education policies. As MARTIN GEYER (Munich) demonstrated in his presentation, the 1970s and 1980s saw the emergence of new discourses on risk, risk management, and security, thus developing new time horizons. The risks of the future ranked more highly than the risks of the past. Demography in particular, and scenarios of future demographic development emerged as a strong argument for criticizing the welfare state. For the British case, PATRICIA THANE (London) pointed out that disappointment in the social policy outcomes of the supposedly optimistic 1960s did not lead to cuts in social policies but, despite the economic crisis, to the heyday of the welfare state during the 1970s. Finally, WILFRIED RUDLOFF (Kassel) drew attention to education policies. Aimed at a country's younger generations, education policy is inextricably linked with questions of the future. Using a four-level model, Rudloff showed how education forecasting and planning became important political tools and therefore shifted the time horizons of education policies since the 1960s. Until the mid 1970s, the 'future' remained the basic reference point of education policy before the focus shifted towards the present again.

The 1970s will probably remain a period which raises questions for quite some time, with research on it producing findings but also some more question marks. By concentrating on the British–German comparison, however, the workshop specified ques-

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tions, and helped to identify characteristics of the time and the dimensions of further research. First, notions such as 'progress', 'crisis', and 'risk' became visible as constructions. Rather than asking 'crisis—what crisis?' Jim Tomlinson therefore suggested asking 'crisis—whose crisis?' Second, Holger Nehring raised the question to what extent concepts and approaches to timeliness really can be transferred when comparing different societies. Third, Elke Seefried asked how large-scale theories such as high modernism can help to make sense of the 1970s. Fourth, she stressed the changing role of the state and its legitimacy as an important factor which shaped political thinking and policies of the 1970s. Establishing timeframes, Steven Fielding (Nottingham) suggested, means making sense. Linking these different timeframes with each other and with the actors behind them will help us to understand the 1970s, as this workshop clearly showed.

Conference Overview:

Dirk van Laak (Gießen): Planning in the Twentieth Century

Elke Seefried (Augsburg/Munich): From Creating Futures to Predicting Doom? 'Futures Studies' in the 1960s and early 1970s

Fernando Esposito (Tübingen/London): The Decolonisation of the Future. Punk and the Rise of a New Chronopolitical Order

James McKay (Birmingham): NGOs and Governmentality in contemporary Britain

Holger Nehring (Sheffield): New Social Movements in West Germany

Martina Steber (London): 'A better tomorrow'. Making Sense of Time in the Conservative Party and the CDU/CSU in the 1960s and 1970s

Julia Angster (Kassel): A Bygone Future. Changing Notions of Time in German Social Democracy, 1960s-1980s

Lawrence Black (Durham): A post-materialist Redefinition of Labour Politics in the 1960s and 1970s

Glen O'Hara (Oxford): Planning Timeframes in British Government, 1961-1973

Gabriele Metzler (Berlin): A Crisis of Democracy? The Debates on Governability in Britain and West Germany

Alexander Nützenadel (Berlin): Managing Economic Growth. The Rise and Fall of Keynesianism in West Germany 1957-1980

Jim Tomlinson (Dundee): 'Crisis, what crisis?' Long-term Diagnoses and Short-term Policies in British Economic Policy from the 1960s to the 1980s

Rüdiger Graf (Bochum/Cambridge Mass.): Disciplining Petroknowledge. Energy Forecasts between Geology, Politics and Economics

Helen Parr (Keele): Past and Future in British Policies towards Europe: A Comparison of the Wilson and Heath administrations

Enrico Böhm (Marburg): International Economic Summits. Leading the Way out of the Western Crisis

Martin H. Geyer (Munich/Florence): (Re-)Inventing the Future: Social and Demographic Policy in Germany during the 1970s and 1980s

Patricia Thane (London): Time, Social and Population Policy in Britain, 1960s to 1980s

Wilfried Rudloff (Kassel): Does Education have a Future? Educational Forecasting and Images of the Future in Britain and Western Germany

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