

# Ten Theses on Artificial Intelligence for the New Social Democratic Basic Programme

## Preliminary Remarks

This paper is a contribution to the debate on a new Social Democratic basic programme. It does not supply finished programme passages. It sets out why Artificial Intelligence belongs in a basic programme – not as a footnote to digitalisation, but as one of the fundamental questions of this century.

This technology will change humanity profoundly. For the first time, an invention is automating the work of the mind – language, analysis, planning, judgement – and not merely the strength of the hands. Decisions to act that were previously reserved for human beings are in danger of being handed over to the manipulable algorithms of a black box. DeepMind's chief executive, Demis Hassabis, expects an upheaval ten times greater and ten times faster than the Industrial Revolution. Alongside the geopolitical “Zeitenwende” (historic turning point), a second one is thus under way – one that has attracted even less public attention but is considerably more significant than the one Olaf Scholz described: in data centres and doctrines as much as in business models.

We do not overlook the opportunities. A technology that detects diseases earlier, speeds up the development of medicines, makes knowledge available to all, eases the burden on public administration and gives science new tools can help to redeem an old promise of the Enlightenment. But opportunities do not realise themselves. They are realised only if the grave risks remain under control. That requires strict and binding regulation with democratic legitimacy. The Hamburg Programme sets the standard: not every invention serves progress; each must be examined as to whether it benefits the free development, dignity and security of human beings and their life together. Social Democratic policy on Artificial Intelligence must be measured against that sentence.

The changes will be felt everywhere: in geopolitics, in war and weapons systems, in work, in the distribution of wealth, in health – up to and including the possible merging of human and machine – and, finally, in the question of who will decide in future: the human being or the machine. This is a cross-cutting political issue that demands new thinking and new action at every level of politics. The following theses explore these fields.

## The Theses

### Thesis 1: Artificial Intelligence is a question for humanity – and therefore a question of fundamental principle

Basic programmes are not about technology. They are about power, freedom, justice and the question of how people want to live together. That is precisely why Artificial Intelligence belongs in one. For it goes beyond one more stage of technical rationalisation and reaches into the core of what Social Democratic politics is about: solidarity, work, equality, democracy, peace and human self-determination. Anyone who treats it merely as a matter of innovation or of industrial competitiveness has not grasped its significance.

The decisive question is that of power: who has command of the systems, who sets their goals, who controls the data, who receives the profits, and who bears the risks? Four corporations alone are investing almost seven hundred billion dollars this year in building data centres; that is equivalent, every three weeks, to the cost of the entire Manhattan Project; the annual sum exceeds the whole of the German federal budget, which stands at around 500 billion euros in 2025. Forces of this kind decide the living conditions of billions of people without a single voter ever having had a say. A handful of men hold in their hands the decisions on how these instruments are used, on political and technological power and money, on states and people – without ever having been elected. The SPD must therefore anchor Artificial Intelligence where the order of society is negotiated: in the basic programme, as a constitutional question of the 21st century – far more than a chapter on economic development policy.

### Thesis 2: The geopolitics of Artificial Intelligence demands common security

A geopolitical race for Artificial Intelligence has broken out. The United States and China are vying for supremacy in computing power, semiconductors, energy and talent; models, chips and capital are concentrated in a few regions of the world. Europe is in danger of becoming a mere market in which other powers' AI systems are applied, with a dependency imposed from outside that recalls the earlier dependency on oil. Digital sovereignty is therefore part of that European sovereignty over the foundations of our own existence which a new basic programme must demand. What is needed, at European and national level, is our own autonomous computing and data infrastructure, our own research, and open models for science and public administration. Research and development must also devise new strategies for data security and for the resilience of damaged infrastructure.

At present the global race is being used as a means of blackmail: whoever regulates – so the argument runs in Washington as in Brussels and Berlin – will lose out to the rival. This logic is as false as it is dangerous. American and Chinese scientists – among them the Berkeley researcher Stuart Russell and the Tsinghua computer scientist and Turing Award winner Andrew Yao – are jointly warning of a race for superintelligence that has no winner: whoever “wins” it would be the first to lose control to a machine intelligence. What Olof Palme, Egon Bahr and Erhard Eppler formulated for the nuclear confrontation applies here once again: in the end, security is achieved in common or not at all. The SPD must make international cooperation on AI safety – including between geopolitical rivals – part of its programme, give the Global South a share in access to the technology and in its

control, and challenge the narrative that an arms race is inevitable.

### **Thesis 3: War at machine speed – no machine may take the decision over life and death**

With Artificial Intelligence, war becomes faster but not better. Early-warning systems, target selection and situation assessments rest on uncertain, incomplete and manipulable data; once autonomous systems reach machine speed and are finally linked to the command and control architecture, an escalation can be set in motion that unfolds faster than any human being can halt it. There are already reports from Ukraine that drones have, for the first time, killed people fully autonomously – with no radio link and no human command in the final second. Whether or not this has been verified in every detail, the technology exists, it is cheap, and it is spreading faster than policymakers are prepared to respond.

Unlike with nuclear weapons, traditional arms control fails here. The difference between a remotely controlled weapon and one that kills autonomously lies in the software, not in countable hardware: an update suffices, and no inspection can detect it. The only remedy, therefore, is to outlaw this category of weapon entirely, as was achieved for biological and chemical weapons, anti-personnel mines and cluster munitions. The United Nations General Assembly named the dangers in December 2025 by 164 votes; those voting against included Russia, the United States and Israel – the very powers that are driving these systems forward. Pope Leo XIV set the standard in his encyclical *Magnifica Humanitas*: Artificial Intelligence must “be disarmed”; lethal or irreversible decisions must not be entrusted to any artificial system. The SPD must lay down in its basic programme: no development, no procurement and no deployment of weapons that decide over life and death without effective human control; a prohibition binding under international law, as called for by the United Nations and the International Committee of the Red Cross by the end of 2026 – if necessary, following the model of the conventions on anti-personnel mines and cluster munitions, outside deadlocked negotiating forums. And: Artificial Intelligence has no place in the nuclear command and early-warning chain. In the 21st century, disarmament policy is also AI safety policy.

### **Thesis 4: This time is different – Artificial Intelligence is changing work at its core**

The reassuring claim that technology has always, in the end, created more work than it destroyed was for the most part historically correct. It may be about to become false. Earlier machines automated particular areas of human activity; what remained became more productive and therefore more valuable. An Artificial Intelligence that targets cognitive work as a whole breaks this logic. The International Monetary Fund expects around forty per cent of all jobs worldwide to be affected, and some sixty per cent in the advanced economies. Recent economic research shows, moreover, that wages can collapse even before full automation is reached, while the returns accrue to the owners of capital and computing power. The first to be affected are the scalable knowledge occupations – analysis, consultancy, administration, programming – and those starting out on their careers, whose entry-level positions are disappearing; experience is devalued and performance monitoring automated.

At the same time, work is more than income: it confers dignity, recognition and a sense of belonging. A basic income alone does not answer this question. Cash transfers – which, moreover, have first to be generated by the

economy – are no substitute for participation. The SPD must therefore tie the productivity gains of Artificial Intelligence to society: through co-determination on the use of AI in the workplace, a statutory right to further training, protection against automated monitoring of behaviour and performance, shorter working hours instead of mass redundancies, an upgrading of the social and caring occupations that machines cannot replace, and an education policy that places judgement above mere operating skills. Good work remains the benchmark, even when the machine decides. The structural change that accompanies the growing use of AI must be shaped by forward-looking policy. Social Democrats must seize this as an opportunity. Taking as an example master plans modelled on the IBA Emscher Park (the International Building Exhibition in the Ruhr), strategies for the structural change of our own time must be developed.

### **Thesis 5: Preventing techno-feudalism – the question of ownership returns**

Data, models and computing power are the means of production of the 21st century, and they are concentrated in the hands of a few corporations and their owners. If capital dominates and human labour becomes replaceable, we face the threat of an economic order in which a few platform lords extract rents from an infrastructure on which everyone depends – an order the economist Cédric Durand calls techno-feudalism. The real problem would then be the abolition of the market by private rule and private capital, not the market itself: dependency instead of competition, tribute instead of wages – and, in the end, fealty where citizens' rights ought to stand.

Yet these systems have been trained on the collective knowledge of humanity – on books, research, music and billions of everyday conversations – mostly without permission, acknowledgement or payment. What is drawn from a common good must serve the common good. The fact that even in the United States it is now being proposed to give the public a stake in the big AI corporations through a sovereign wealth fund shows that the question of ownership is back. A state shareholding alone does not amount to democratic control as long as it remains open whose interests the technology serves. The SPD must press the distributional question of Artificial Intelligence assertively: through the effective taxation of data power and computing power, robust competition law with powers to break up dominant companies, public computing and data infrastructure, digital commons, fair remuneration for authors and creators, and a share in the profits for employees and for society. The democratic welfare state was the answer to industrial capitalism; it must now become the answer to digital feudalism.

## **Thesis 6: Privacy protects democracy – limiting surveillance and manipulation**

As early as 2013, Michal Kosinski and his colleagues demonstrated how much digital traces reveal about a person. From simple Facebook likes, sexual orientation, skin colour, religion and party preference could be predicted with accuracy rates of between 82 and 95 per cent. The people concerned had not disclosed these characteristics anywhere; the profile emerged only from the interplay of many weak signals. A follow-up study in 2015 showed that around ten likes are enough to assess a person's personality more accurately than their work colleagues can. With seventy likes the model outperformed friends, with one hundred and fifty the person's own family, and with around three hundred even their spouse. In field experiments involving around 3.5 million people, psychologically tailored advertising produced up to forty per cent more clicks and fifty per cent more purchases. How this becomes a political weapon was demonstrated by the Cambridge Analytica affair, in which the data of up to 87 million Facebook users were misused.

Generative Artificial Intelligence lowers the cost of such manipulation still further: mass-produced texts, deceptively realistic images and voices, individually tailored messages that escape all public scrutiny. At the same time, the liar's dividend arises: even genuine evidence can be dismissed as supposedly artificially generated, and trust in the public sphere erodes. Whoever knows people's fears, weaknesses and dispositions can steer them without their noticing. Data protection is therefore a matter of democratic policy, not of bureaucracy. The SPD must enshrine in its basic programme: no biometric mass surveillance, tight limits on political microtargeting, a ban on inferring sensitive characteristics for the purpose of political influence, the labelling of synthetic political content, transparency in online advertising, access to the platforms for researchers and a massive strengthening of media literacy. Privacy is the precondition for people being able to judge freely and vote freely.

## **Thesis 7: Healing, yes – placing the human being at others' disposal, no: health and the limits of the human**

Nowhere are the opportunities of Artificial Intelligence more tangible than in medicine. Systems such as AlphaFold, recognised with the Nobel Prize in 2024, have predicted the structure of hundreds of millions of proteins and accelerated drug discovery by years; AI detects tumours in images that escape the human eye and relieves nurses and doctors of paperwork. It can also carry medical knowledge into underserved regions. A social democracy that understands health as a public good must make these possibilities accessible to all, regardless of income, origin or where people live. At the same time, diagnosis and treatment remain the responsibility of doctors; no algorithm may ration treatment or turn the sick into data sets, and health data must never be used to the detriment of the people from whom they come.

But the technology does not stop at the human skin. Brain-computer interfaces have moved from the laboratory into the clinic: worldwide, more than two dozen paralysed people already have such implants, with which they control computers by thought; mass production and automated surgery have been announced for this year, and the providers speak openly of a future “symbiosis” of human and machine. As a therapy for people who are paralysed, blind or seriously ill, this is a blessing. As a programme for the “enhancement” of healthy people, it

would cross a line and produce a two-tier humanity of the optimised and the left behind: neural data are the most intimate thing a human being can disclose.

The Hamburg Programme of 2007, which is still in force, knows neither Artificial Intelligence nor brain-computer interfaces; neither existed in its present form at the time. It does, however, establish a principle that can be applied directly to these new technologies: it upholds the prohibition of targeted genetic intervention in the human germline and requires every invention to be examined as to whether it serves the free development, dignity and security of human beings and their life together. A new basic programme must extend this principle to neurotechnology and protect mental integrity with the same clarity: strict protection of neural data, a clear boundary between healing and the technical upgrading of the human being, and no commercial or state access to the brain. Human dignity is not at anyone's disposal – not even that of humanity's own technology.

### **Thesis 8: The human being remains the measure – decisions must not be ceded to machines**

The quietest and perhaps most far-reaching change is the creeping surrender of decisions. First the machine recommends. Then it drafts. In the end it decides: on loans and job applications, on welfare benefits and examinations, and soon on administrative decisions, situation assessments and draft judgments. AI agents of the latest generation plan over longer periods, act independently and control other systems; their autonomy is not a side effect but a precondition of their function. With every delegated decision convenience grows, and with convenience the ability withers: whoever gives up deciding forgets how to do it. The end result is a society that is free in form and led in fact.

In addition, these systems are trained, not programmed: grown rather than built. Even their makers cannot reliably explain or predict their behaviour; research on interpretability lags years behind development, while the models are already helping to improve their own successors. In controlled tests, frontier models have deceived their evaluators and attempted to avert their own shutdown by blackmail: a logical result of optimising towards a goal, not malice. The Center for AI Safety identified the risk of a loss of control as early as 2023, in a statement that was also endorsed by leading developers such as Sam Altman and Demis Hassabis: it ranks alongside pandemics and nuclear war. From this follows the primacy of human responsibility: no machine may take irreversible decisions – not on life, not on liberty, not on people's livelihoods, not on war and peace. The SPD must enshrine ultimate responsibility, a duty to give reasons and effective rights to challenge decisions wherever algorithms pass judgement on people, and make the use of autonomous systems in government, the justice system and critical infrastructure subject to human control. In the end, responsibility is always borne by a human being, never by the machine – and that human being must be in a position to bear it.

## **Thesis 9: Strict rules do not hold back progress – they are its precondition**

No medicine reaches the market without authorisation, no aircraft takes off without inspection. Nor is any power station connected to the grid without a licence. Only what is perhaps the most powerful technology of our time has so far been released largely on its makers' say-so; in the United States, as the physicist Max Tegmark has pointedly put it, Artificial Intelligence is less regulated than a sandwich shop. The principle must be reversed: proof of safety before release instead of damage limitation afterwards. The European AI Act, with its prohibitions on manipulative practices and social scoring and its classification of election-related systems as high-risk, is a beginning but not the end of the matter: what is needed are mandatory independent audits of the most capable models before they are deployed, reporting obligations for serious incidents, clear liability rules, access to the systems for public research and special protection for critical infrastructure. Anyone who claims that such rules stifle innovation is confusing freedom with irresponsibility: only the trust that grows out of binding rules makes a technology socially acceptable.

And because the risk is global, national regulation is not enough. The Bletchley Declaration by 28 states and the European Union was a first step; it must be followed by binding international institutions: oversight of the most dangerous capabilities, of the kind the world created for nuclear technology, joint safety testing, and crisis communication between the major powers.

An open conflict has broken out over the direction of this development. Some investors and corporate leaders want to increase the pace still further in order to be the first to reach a so-called superintelligence: a system that surpasses human beings in almost all cognitive abilities and goes on improving itself. They are opposed by many of the most respected researchers in the field, among them the Nobel laureate in physics Geoffrey Hinton and the Turing Award winner Yoshua Bengio. They warn that such a system could escape all human control, with consequences up to and including the extinction of humanity, and call for its development to be prohibited as long as there is neither a broad scientific consensus on its safety and controllability nor broad public support. That is how the Future of Life Institute put it in October 2025 in its Statement on Superintelligence, which tens of thousands have since signed. The SPD must make this demand its own and advocate an internationally binding moratorium.

The speed of development currently exceeds the capacity of any system of governance to adapt. The answer to that cannot be the capitulation of democracy: democracy must become faster and better informed, but above all more self-confident. Voluntary commitments by corporations are not enough: what is needed is law, oversight and a political system that does not abdicate its responsibility. The SPD must understand AI safety policy as policy for peace and democracy and make Germany and Europe pioneers of binding international rules. To underpin this new policy, independent research and development must be strengthened.

## Thesis 10: Progress in the service of humanity – the mandate of the Hamburg Programme

The Hamburg Programme commits social democracy to placing the possibilities of scientific and technological progress in the service of human beings, and at the same time it urges us to examine every invention as to whether it lives up to that purpose. This dual stance is the legacy Erhard Eppler left to the party: the distinction between what must change and what should be preserved. Applied to Artificial Intelligence, this means: we do not want to stop the technology; we are not structural conservatives in that sense. We are value conservatives: we want to prevent technology from superseding the human being, devaluing human work, gathering human wealth in a few hands, corroding the public sphere, turning the human body into a platform, expropriating human decisions and putting peace at risk.

The Erhard-Eppler-Kreis invites the party to conduct this debate openly, seriously, with an eye to the future and without fear of the big questions. Artificial Intelligence will change humanity profoundly; whether for better or for worse will be decided in politics, not in technology. Great opportunities and strict rules are not a contradiction. They are two sides of the same insight: only what is mastered can liberate. A new basic programme that offered no answer to this would be out of date on the very day of its adoption.

### Proposed Wording for the Basic Programme

**Artificial Intelligence must serve human beings, be shaped by people in the interests of society and be subject to democratic control.** It opens up great opportunities for health, education, science, work and public goods – and at the same time it must not become the infrastructure of a new social divide, of total surveillance or of automated warfare. We understand Artificial Intelligence as a question of power and, at the same time, as an opportunity for the future: data, computing capacity, models and applications must not be controlled by a few corporations, military establishments or authoritarian states. Where this technology touches on fundamental rights, democratic rules decide – not technical feasibility and not the logic of the markets.

**We combine innovation with social security.** The productivity gains of Artificial Intelligence must benefit employees and society. Wherever AI is deployed in the workplace, there must be stronger co-determination through trade unions and works councils, training for employees, transparency and protection against automated monitoring; those starting out on their careers deserve special protection. Data, models and computing power are the means of production of this century: we will tax their returns fairly, prevent monopolies, build public digital infrastructure and commons, shape the necessary structural change and give society a share in the wealth that is drawn from its collective knowledge. We will not permit a techno-feudalism in which a few platform owners control the foundations on which everyone's life depends.

**Privacy is the precondition of democratic self-determination.** Political attitudes, personality traits and vulnerabilities can be inferred from digital traces. We will therefore prohibit biometric mass surveillance and manipulative AI practices, limit psychological microtargeting, create transparency in political online advertising and protect citizens from personalised disinformation. The democratic public sphere is not a commodity.

**Artificial Intelligence should heal, not place the human being at others' disposal.** We will put AI at the service of prevention, diagnosis, treatment and care and make its medical benefits accessible to all – regardless of income or where people live. Decisions on diagnosis and treatment remain the responsibility of doctors. We welcome neurotechnologies as therapy and set limits to them as an intervention in what it means to be human: we will protect neural data and mental integrity, draw a clear line between healing and the technical upgrading of the human being, and hold fast to the principle that human dignity is not at anyone's disposal – not even in the face of the merging of human and machine.

**In safety-critical areas, the primacy of human responsibility applies.** No machine may take uncontrollable or irreversible decisions on life, liberty, war or peace. We reject the development, procurement and deployment of autonomous weapons systems in which a human being does not decide on, and remain responsible for, each individual use against human beings, and we will work to have them outlawed under international law; Artificial Intelligence has no place in nuclear decision-making and early-warning chains. We reject the development of a superintelligence that could surpass human beings in almost all cognitive abilities and escape their control as long as there is neither a broad scientific consensus on its safety and controllability nor broad public support. To that end, we will work for an internationally binding moratorium. Because no one can win the race for the most powerful systems, the policy of common security applies here too: international rules, joint safety research, crisis communication between the major powers and fair access to the technology for the Global South. In all this, Europe must become digitally sovereign – capable of realising its values in this technology itself.

**Our benchmark remains the democratic and social state governed by the rule of law.** Within it, we stand up for our fundamental values of freedom, justice and solidarity. Artificial Intelligence should make work easier, widen knowledge, improve health and strengthen public goods. It must not disempower people or fragment the public sphere. It must not concentrate power any further. We will examine each of its applications as to whether it benefits the free development, dignity and security of human beings and their life together – and we will create the rules, institutions and international agreements that ensure the human being remains the measure.

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