

# TOWARDS A SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC CENTURY?

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HOW EUROPEAN AND GLOBAL SOCIAL  
DEMOCRACY CAN CHART A COURSE THROUGH  
THE CRISES

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## FOREWORD

KATHARINA HOFMANN DE MOURA, ANIA  
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In 2022, the world remains in turmoil. The pandemic has been an unprecedentedly harsh experience for individuals and communities. Its effects have posed urgent demands for policy-makers. Some of these are new and some have accelerated existing challenges, deepening the inequalities stemming from neoliberal rule and the aftermath of the financial crash of 2008. Climate change has come on top to overshadow all the other overlapping crises and poses fundamental questions about the future industrial model. And the unprovoked Russian aggression on Ukraine, alongside the unpredictability of possible moves by China on Taiwan, imposes an urgent need to safeguard peace and defend democracies in Europe and worldwide.

This is a concatenation of profound crises, which make the contemporary situation very precarious. Even more so, the accelerating pace of soaring inflation and extreme weather events is driving millions to fear for their lives and livelihoods. Citizens need a port in this gathering storm. Social democrats are in a position to provide it, considering their solidarity-driven ideology, vast organisational traditions and recent reflections which have helped renew the sister parties, making them fit to serve in contemporary times. But there is

no mechanism to grant them this opportunity by default, despite the fact that their position has strengthened with some recent electoral gains. And if they do not rise to the challenge, the radical-right populists may compete with their *faux* solutions instead.

The contemporary times

We are living in what Anthony Giddens recognised at the beginning of the millennium was a ‘runaway world’, out of control like a spinning top. Its trajectories are still under the influence of the neoliberal policy paradigm, which gained primacy with the elections of Ronald Reagan in the United States and Margaret Thatcher in the United Kingdom over four decades ago. It underpinned removal of the constraints nation-states had placed on capital in western Europe and north America in the 20th century. The state and its institutions were represented as slow-moving and bureaucratic, needing to give way to the most competitive, the fastest developing and the most open markets.

As economic thinking changed, so did understanding of the welfare state. Though the essence of the postwar deal, which enabled the empowerment and emancipation of so many, more and more doubted its affordability in the new times. This lay behind some experiments ostensibly aimed at eliminating ‘inefficiencies’ but which in the end undermined social-security provisions. Inequalities once more soared to levels last seen in the Gilded Age, even in such egalitarian welfare models as the Swedish.

Ever-more-frequent financial crises were unleashed until the crash of 2008, exacerbated in Europe by the austerity subsequently imposed (what Colin Crouch labelled the ‘strange non-death of neoliberalism’). In parallel, following the collapse of the Soviet bloc in 1989, the ‘shock therapy’ of market fundamentalism and the conviction that accession to the European Union and other communities was paved by privatisation, meant a new precariat in central and eastern Europe would blame both the past and the transformation for

their misfortune—and incline to entrust the populists with their future.

The current turmoil has led to an historic crossroads: it will matter who stands on the side of social justice and who offers an alternative, positive way forward. What will count will be battling fear with hope, the unknown with concrete proposals, uncontrolled externalities with predictability in government. And this is where progressive forces and their capacity to craft new ideas will matter most. While the period of neoliberal reaction against postwar Keynesianism may be coming to a close, it is incumbent on the contemporary left to chart a way through these troubled waters to calmer shores.

### The emerging consensus

An audacity to believe that a progressive era may be emerging comes from the fact that a remarkable feature of recent European politics is the consensus which has emerged across an ever-broader progressive constituency. Work (as a value and as an agenda), workers (as stakeholders) and workers' collectives (including trade unions and welfare organisations) are on the way back to the centre of the attention. Postwar Keynesianism not only took for granted the goal of indefinite growth of gross domestic product, but also citizens in their multifaceted identities were politically prioritised as consumers. Instead, in pandemic times the 'key worker', whether providing public services or essential supplies, has become someone to support and to respect, as Olaf Scholz emphasised in the 2021 German election campaign.

That has altered the debate, emphasising that quality (of work) and productivity are two sides of the same coin—especially when it comes to the public sector and the care economy, provision for which has shifted from being perceived as expenditure to necessary investment. Also the demands of care work exacerbated by the coronavirus lockdowns have highlighted how the world of work must be trans-

formed and care shared and socialised, if gender equality is to be implemented and work and life reconciled.

Unions are undergoing a revival after decades of retreat, in members and in expectations of the role that they should play. They are the only organisations individual workers have at their disposal to find collective strength to resist the race to the bottom in the labour market and the precarity engendered among others by platform companies. Regulating the latter is among the core preoccupations for social democrats (especially those in government) and is also on the agenda at the European level.

The new approach to the labour market, public services and the economy has created an opening to consider more substantial alterations to the capitalist model and a new industrial strategy. Old rivalries along the lines of jobs *versus* the environment have been eased. Trade unionists have realised there are no jobs on a dead planet—as the leader of the International Trade Union Confederation, Sharan Burrow, graphically puts it—while social democrats have come to embrace the fight against climate change, for innovation in agriculture and for sustainable energy policy. In Belgium and France they have started discussing this new ‘socio-ecological’ direction, encouraged by the pandemic, which has helped other topics on to the agenda, such as remote working, regulating what can be yet another way of greening economies.

Against this backdrop, John Maynard Keynes, one of the key figures associated with the Bretton Woods progressive consensus of 1944, has also made something of a comeback, thereby allowing the damaging north-south rivalries in Europe associated with austerity to be eased. The ‘frugal’ position has given way amid the pandemic to a recognition of the need for cohesion and collective European investment in public goods. This is embodied in the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) to spur post-pandemic recovery—rather than pursuit of another bout of austerity—and the green and digital transitions. That has been a historic step towards a supranational Europe focused on wellbeing, prosperity and sustainability.

The left is now also more explicitly pro-feminist. In the past it had emphasised its commitment to gender equality, but in recent years it has become more verbal about such issues as the gender pay gap, reconciliation of private and professional lives and quotas for women on boards. It has been boldly on the side of those taking a stand in favour of the right to choose and all other reproductive rights, for quality sexual education and against ‘period poverty’, and for the right to adequate parental leave. There has also been a drive to make the movement more outspoken against other inequalities—such as those facing LGBTQI+ individuals striving for same-sex marriage and against stigmatisation and discrimination—stemming from universalist support for human dignity, rather than embrace of potentially fragmentary ‘identity politics’.

On the wider plane, the internationalist socialist tradition has much to offer in a world where multilateral organisations seem to have become increasingly powerless due to lack of reform (especially of the United Nations Security Council), opposition to the very principle of multilateralism and the rise of authoritarianism. But the need to rebuild them is real and social democrats have particular responsibility, with individuals of that background in charge of the United Nations, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and EU external relations. The goal is a foreign policy which projects Europe as a leading global actor in favour of social and ecological responsibility, which takes the word beyond the renewed ‘logic of the blocs’ of west *versus* east and seeks a new alignment with democratic actors in the global south.

This clearer, bolder and forward-looking progressive agenda anchors possibilities for building new majorities to realise these pledges. Greater pluralism on the left means radical-left and green parties are not only providing social democrats with coalition partners to make up the numbers but also acting as crucibles of policy and political innovation and exchange.

### A coherent narrative

This is the understanding which has motivated the Foundation for European Progressive Studies, the *Friedrich Ebert Stiftung* and *Social Europe* to produce this volume. The contributions which follow, from a wide range of progressive intellectuals and political practitioners, are organised according to country (the interviews) or theme (the written chapters). In combination they show not only that there is a wide range of ideas on the contemporary left but that the individual elements largely fit into a coherent, comprehensive narrative.

They serve as an intriguing snapshot of the moment but they also provide a way forward. The authors offer detailed policy ideas on how social democrats should position themselves on the various axes of politics: equality *versus* inequality, liberty *versus* authoritarianism, solidarity *versus* competition.

On the solid ground of this reformulated agenda, social democrats can reach out to greens, to others on the left and to social liberals to form effective national administrations. Indeed within the European Parliament the left, green and liberal political families have increasingly been able to define their programmes in such a way that the centre-right—struggling with its own identity in post-neoliberal times—finds itself unable to oppose progressive initiatives.

A key question also addressed in this book is the adequacy of social-democratic party structures, especially in the digital age. Parties hollowed out by decades of mediatised and individualised leadership and passive members can be reinvigorated by the right balance of top-down and bottom-up connections and ‘horizontal’ online links to wider popular, progressive constituencies and allies.

After decades of relative decline, there have been signs of a rebirth of social democracy, which is leading government throughout Scandinavia and across the Iberian peninsula, as well as latterly in Germany, while on the European level the European Pillar of Social Rights and the European Green Deal have been landmark developments.

The evidence of this collection is that a combination of intellectual commitment, moral courage and popular campaigning can foster a wider progressive renaissance, to meet the challenges of the 2020s and beyond.

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# PART 1

## THE INTERVIEWS



ONE  
PORTUGAL: REAL ACHIEVEMENTS

ISABEL ESTRADA CARVALHAIS

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YOU ARE *unusual in being not only a practising politician but also a theorising one, so to speak, with your academic expertise. So, let me ask you first to stand back and put in a European perspective the achievement of the Socialist Party in securing 41 per cent in the election in January, allowing António Costa to return to power with an absolute majority. If anything, the party has gained in support since the revolution of April 1974, whereas in Europe those social-democratic parties which have been in decline in recent decades can only look on in envy.*

*Another Portuguese political scientist, Pedro Magalhães, argued in Social Europe that this was partly a product of social inertia in the Portuguese social structure. The sociology of support for the Socialist Party, he suggested, had changed relatively little over the decades. But*

*what is your explanation for this electoral success-story for social democracy in the European context?*

I agree partially with Pedro Magalhães' analysis. I'm glad you said also 'partly' regarding the sociological explanation he presented, because it does not explain everything. I'm very sceptical about sometimes paternalistic assessments that we make of our electorate.

In certain regards his analysis is correct but we cannot forget that when the Socialist Party came to government in 2015 we were still in the middle of a crisis. We had been in an international bailout process. We had unemployment rates of something like 17 per cent, which was a record. When the socialist government of António Costa finished the first mandate in 2019, the unemployment rate had dropped to some 6.6 per cent. You could actually find public policies with a strong social dimension being implemented.

I would not like people to think: 'She's saying this because she's a socialist.' It is important that I keep some objectivity as an academic, as an independent, because I'm not a militant of the party. We have to look at figures, at what was the real situation of the country when the socialist government arrived and when they left in 2019 and when they returned.

There were a series of very important social answers to the situation that many people—young people, elderly people—were facing. Even in the middle of this Covid-19 crisis, and we are a country with limited resources, what we could see was a capacity to deal with a crisis. The capacity to provide some social answers, especially to small companies, medium companies, enterprises that were struggling with the crisis, and also to families that were struggling with unemployment, with the disruption of their daily life, was very important.

When people make their choice and vote, they also have this reality at the back of their mind. They didn't see the need to choose a different government, because you had some good answers, especially at the social level, that were relevant at that stage.

We could also go on and try to see why people don't see great

alternatives on the centre right at the moment. It's an issue, an interesting one, to assess the real capacity of political dialogue that centre-right parties have at this stage with the population, with our constituents.

If you sum up all these things—the positive capacity that the socialist government had to deal with Covid-19 and with the previous crisis, and then if you add other difficulties that centre-right parties have nowadays in communicating their plans for the future of the country—then you will have also the reasons why people have chosen to vote in a Socialist Party and not other parties.

*I'm now going to turn your experience in the European Parliament, as a member of the agricultural and fisheries committees. You have contributed to debates and reports in the parliament on pesticides, organic agriculture, biodiversity, animal welfare and the 'blue economy' when it comes to fishing. Of course, agriculture and fisheries still remain a significant source of livelihoods in Portugal, too. Social democrats have largely ceded political dominance in those parts of Europe dependent on agriculture and fisheries to the centre right, or even the populists, relying on support concentrated in urban agglomerations. How do you think, with so many issues of biodiversity loss, pollution and so on coming to the fore, social democrats can go on the front foot with a progressive agenda for the rural world?*

That's really a very good question. I'm very concerned with this 'geography of abandonment'—this rural world that feels put aside, alienated from the political process. Unfortunately, our mainstream parties—centre-right and centre-left—have been responsible for that in European terms. This is something we have to accept and we have to fight against.

I'm also worried that, unfortunately, these more conservative and populist and far-right parties have been able somehow to take advantage of these populations and to spread this idea that social democracy is against farmers, is against the rural, is against fishermen, which is not so—it's the opposite. They have been selling this dangerous

myth that, if you want to fight for farmers and for their interests, then you have to split their interests from the environmental dimension.

We have to be better in communicating that when we fight for the environmental dimension, this is also thinking about our farmers, because nature is the very basis of their work. They need nature: they need good soils, they need water, they need good forests. We are still very inefficient in communicating that we do want to conciliate the social and economic dimension with the environmental dimension.

It's so wrong to sell the idea that you don't need to put the environment in the equation. You have to put the environment in the equation. There really is a loss of biodiversity. This is not an ideological issue—this is not about left or right. It's the scientific evidence. We are losing the quality of life of our oceans. We are running down the quality of our soils. We have to face climate change.

It's not even a question of fighting and [defeating] climate change. We just talk about mitigating the impact of climate change because we have reached such a level of destruction that it's [all] we can say at this moment. It's important that we take this message to people, but also to tell them that this has to do with resources. The way they can [make] this transition into more ecologically-friendly practices, in agriculture, for instance, is by helping them with counselling. They need technical support for this and they need money.

That's something that sometimes is difficult for some more radical friends in the socialist areas to understand. They have a very green agenda, which I completely understand, but at the same time they have to realise that we are talking about populations with very low social and economic capacity to [address] this environmental urgency. We need to help them. For instance, in my country the average age of farmers is 65 and so we are talking about older people, less educated, with less schooling, with more difficulties.

The conservative parties take advantage of this fact and they say that we [on the left] don't care about these older people: we're just waiting for them to die. One way to show that we want everyone to be included in this transition process is to help out these people. We

have been doing our best in the parliament, struggling for a better Common Agricultural Policy. It's not perfect, but we did struggle to include smaller farmers and so forth because it's important that our rural world understands that we're not against them.

The best way to communicate this is also to show the possibilities that they have in terms of financial support that they can get to make this transition. Otherwise, they will think that we are leaving them behind. Socialist parties never want to leave people behind, especially those who are on the margins, those who are less empowered. This is very much about empowering people.

Conservatives and populists and far-right parties are giving this illusion of empowerment, but they are not offering anything. They're just vocalising, giving expression to this discontent. It's very easy ground because people feel discontent and they say: 'Wow, these guys, they say what I want, what I would like to say.' But they are not giving answers.

We are providing answers, providing measures and strong public policies to help out these people. This is a big responsibility that we have, to make sure that we don't lose our rural world. It does not belong to the past. Actually, it's the geography of the future if we think about the recovery of nature, for instance—so we really need vitality in our rural world.

*Let me come back to the government in Lisbon that was formed after the election earlier in the year. That government has 18 ministers, of whom nine are women and nine are men. In Spain next door, the socialist-led government now has 14 female ministers out of 23. Apart from making it easier to highlight issues such as the gender pay gap and unshared and unsocialised care, what difference does it make to how progressives govern if the progressives doing the governing have at least an equal presence of women around the cabinet table?*

It's really important, first of all because it's a strong political message. We want to increase gender equality in our society and one of the ways to do it is [by] those who are governing [setting] the example. Portugal has gone a long way and we still have a long way to go.

At this moment, we are somewhere in the middle of the ranking for gender equality in Europe. In a comparison among the 27 countries, we are in 15th place, so we have been steadily and gradually increasing our gender equality, which is good.

We still have issues to solve—one of the reasons why we still have a long way to go has to do with domestic violence—but there are very important steps that we have been [taking] over the years. For instance, look at the figures for 2017 regarding co-operative leadership. We only had 17 per cent of female presence and in 2021 it already increased to 28 per cent. So, step by step, these things are changing, and mentalities are changing.

One aspect that says a lot about the progress that we still need to [make] has to do with the distribution of time. When you look at the distribution of time, especially for domestic activities between women and men, we are still very [poor] in comparison with other European countries. Something like 77 or 78 per cent of women are in charge of taking care of their children, so we still need a lot of progress.

This has to do with changing attitudes in society. Whatever we can do in a top-down approach to make sure that the structure of opportunities changes, in the future you [will] see more bottom-up improvements. These changes of mentality, of attitudes, of behaviour, they will progressively be more evident in the future. So it is important that those who are governing [set] the example.

The fact that we have around 40 per cent women in the *Assembleia da República*, the national parliament, is also a positive aspect. This is very controversial: some people think that quotas for women are not enough; others think that they shouldn't even exist. But I see them as positive. If you have to create these mechanisms in the beginning of a journey, to make sure that women are more present in political life, in leadership in companies and so forth, then let's do it.

In the future, most likely it will not be necessary, but as a leverage point it's really important. Especially parliaments—national and local parliaments—have to express the 'intersectoriality' of life, of society.

So it's not just about gender in parliament. We also have to think about other dimensions of diversity that should be present. Perhaps this will also happen in the future.

These women are also, and first of all, very competent women. They are not in these positions as ministers and secretaries of state, or as deputies in the national parliament, because they're women. They're also very intelligent, very competent women. (It's amazing that somehow I still need to say this, because we never feel the need to say it about men—this also shows how much work we still have to do.)

In a top-down approach, as governments, as politicians, we can [make] some change in people's lives. For instance, we have in Portugal the 'pact of conciliation', an attempt at conciliating family life, professional life and personal life. It's quite interesting to see the receptiveness in society of companies, of institutions and so forth to this idea of conciliation of these three dimensions of life.

So I see very positively what has been happening in the European Parliament in this regard. I was very happy because we already had this approach before it appeared in the European Parliament. We had realised the importance of having political measures that will incentivise the conciliation of these three dimensions of life in our companies, in our schools, in all spaces of labour where we find women.

*You did mention other axes of diversity. My final question was about an issue which has been a big one for social democrats in recent decades, and that is managing cultural diversity in a more individualised and globalised world. Costa is, of course, himself, partly a product of Portugal's Indian imperial connection. When he became mayor of Lisbon, he moved his office into Mouraria, the area of the city where formerly those known as the 'Moors' were confined. In 2007, under the then socialist government, Portugal developed one of the first integration plans in Europe. Under the current plan, the secretary of state for integration and migration co-ordinates the work of ministries, public institutions, civil-society organisations and local authorities in*

*this arena. There are 19 municipal plans for migrant integration. There are also local plans for Roma integration. There are 106 local centres to support migrants and three national one-stop shops. At arm's length from government is the Office of the High Commissioner for Migration, which provides a repository of impartial expertise.*

*This is a very elaborate model that has been developed in Portugal to manage cultural diversity. Is this something social democrats elsewhere in Europe should learn from? Or does the recent rise of the far-right Chega tarnish this success-story?*

That's a very good question and one that would deserve a longer answer. First of all, we all can learn from each other, so it's not that Portugal can give lessons or receive lessons.

If you look at this as an opportunity structure, it is very institutionalised. It's mostly a more top-down approach, but it works, so it's a very interesting case, because you could have more organic, more bottom-up answers. It's not that they don't exist—but this umbrella has been helpful in the way society associates and expresses itself. I find it a very good case study.

I'm not saying that we don't have issues to solve—there is a long, complex list of past colonialist issues that we could talk about. But I'm proud that a country like ours, with a big diaspora, with an emigration tradition for not decades [but] centuries, has managed, in a relatively small period of time, to create an *immigration* profile with relatively good results in terms of institutional answers, governmental answers.

It was one of the reasons why, over the years, we have been ranking high in the MIPLEX index [of performance according to various indicators of migrant integration]. There has been improvement in terms of political integration, social integration, labour integration. We still need [to go] some way in terms of access to healthcare.

Only a country like Sweden usually stays in the first [index] place and we stay in the second, so we are in the top ten. This must say something about the success of our delivery model—'delivery' in the

sense of capacity to help our immigrant communities to integrate economically, socially and politically.

This does not mean that I'm disregarding the existence of problems, because the structure does not solve all the problems of agency. For instance, we have had anti-racism laws since 1999 but the fact that you have a law doesn't mean that you don't find discrimination and racism on a daily basis.

We still very much—even younger people—have this legacy of the 'luso-tropical' ideology of the *Estado Novo* (new state) of the dictatorship. This conveyed the idea that we were not racist, because somehow we were able to have this intercultural approach with people from different parts of the world, different ethnic backgrounds and so forth.

My parents, my grandparents, myself, we are all the result of this legacy. It gets ingrained and it's very difficult to contradict. We have to work at this in schools, for instance, [from an] early age. That's why I find intercultural experiences—not in the bad sense of [assimilating] the other, the paternalistic approach, but in the sense of learning with each other—so important from the early stages of our life, when we are children and our eyes are clear from these biased veils that come afterwards.

I don't think that all that we have achieved over this, since 1996 when we first created the high commissioner for migration and intercultural dialogue during [the premiership of] António Guterres, and all this evolution over the years, is lost or is at stake. No, it has been developing, progressing over the years, and we are in a good direction.

These last years of crisis affected the capacity to give more attention to political integration of our immigrants and ethnic minorities. It was no longer on the political agenda as a priority, because there were so many other issues: social and economic issues. But it is also up to the agents—to immigrant associations, to ourselves as academics—to push forward and to say: 'No, this has to be on the agenda.' We also have to create the political momentum.

The emergence of *Chega* does not translate into a change in

people's perception about immigrants. Racist people, xenophobic people, homophobic people—they've always existed in our society. The only thing was that they didn't have a political expression in an organised party, so they were diluted in other right and centre-right parties, even in other parties. They are not significant in numbers but they have been there, so we have to learn to live with this reality.

It's like looking in the mirror and saying: 'Yes, we have to recognise we are also this.' Of course, you can say many of the people that vote for *Chega* are discontented. Those I agree we can do a lot of work to recover, because if their vote is protest voting then if their life improves—socially, economically—they will [make] different choices.

But there will always be [a rump] that will stick with the party. Not because they have social and economic issues—many of these people have no economic issue at all—but because this is the way they look at society. They have this conservative approach. They are even mad with Pope Francis because they think he is too open to homosexuality. They think that we're losing identity because we have too many ethnic minorities.

These people will go on existing, but we can't be taking too much time looking at them, because we are giving them what they want, which is great public visibility. We're losing the opportunity of giving attention to those people with low salaries, minimum salaries, sometimes unemployed, who are still voting in the Socialist Party.

TWO  
RECOVERY AND REFORM IN SPAIN

JONÁS FERNÁNDEZ

Jonás Fernández MEP is a Spanish economist and a member of the European Parliament Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs.

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YOU COULD DESCRIBE *the Recovery and Resilience Facility* which the European Union established in the context of the pandemic as a venture in the direction of 'EuroKeynesianism'. Spain has a big interest as a significant recipient of support from the facility. One aspect of that funding is the requirement to spend a significant proportion on the green transition. In this Spanish administration and the previous one there has been a dedicated minister for the ecological transition, Teresa Ribera from the PSOE, the socialist party. What is your take on the RRF and the plan which the Spanish government, led by the PSOE, has put forward to use the monies from Europe to good effect?

Since the Maastricht treaty, the eurozone has needed a real instrument to help member states—and indeed to help the European

Central Bank—to manage the economic cycle. We had this problem from the beginning, we had real problems in the financial crisis and when the Covid-19 pandemic started the Spanish government, and indeed the president, Pedro Sánchez, was very, very keen to focus most efforts on convincing other national governments to create the instrument, NextGenerationEU, funded through European debt, to help member states face the crisis.

NextGenerationEU has represented a real, transcendent change in the nature of the monetary union but it's true that, for now at least, the instrument is only temporary. Nowadays, we have a reversion in monetary policy from the ECB and we have seen the fragmentation of the eurozone. The ECB is thinking what it can do about the fragmentation but at the same time it is reducing the expansionary nature of monetary policy. We miss a European fiscal instrument, because in that case monetary policy could be implemented easily without any fragmentation of the monetary union.

In any case, Sánchez' government was very intelligent in focusing its effort on the European arena. In July 2020 there was agreement in the European Council and the European Parliament and the Council of the EU agreed on the legislative proposal of the European Commission to put in place the Recovery and Resilience programme. The Spanish government from the beginning [represented] one of the countries with most interest in this instrument.

Indeed, the national plan was presented publicly in January 2021. That document was negotiated directly with the commission, to increase the possibility to have a fast approval by the commission and the council. The Spanish plan was the first to be approved and indeed Spain was the first to receive the first tranche from the Recovery and Resilience Facility in August 2021. Spain has received close to €20 billion to finance the plan.

Coming back to the ecological transition, the plan invests more than [the] 37 per cent [required under the RRF] to accelerate the transition. Renewable energy in Spain represents a bigger share of the [electricity] market than other countries in Europe. And the

government wants to advance faster on this matter, with more investment, more investment also in [retrofitting] buildings and more investment to facilitate the transition in industry—green steel, green zinc. So the plan has a real commitment to this and the vision of the vice-president and minister responsible for ecological matters is clearly represented in the plan.

*One issue which has been very important across Europe in recent years has been the rise of platform companies and hence the moves to have a directive addressing platforms at the European level. In Spain, a 'riders' law' has been introduced requiring platforms to treat their workers as employees with rights. But already since that law was passed a number of companies have been trying to find ways around it and to avoid recognising the rights that workers have. Do you think there is any experience there that others can learn from across Europe, in terms of dealing with the platform companies?*

It is not right to give lessons on labour markets to other countries in Europe because we had a stable labour market for many decades with higher unemployment rates than other countries and with very, very high temporary contracts in the context of the total workforce. The People's Party government made a very aggressive labour-market 'reform' [in 2012] and it's true that the reform helped to create jobs but these jobs didn't have enough security or rights. When the Spanish socialist party took over the government, we had a commitment to review the labour market and the revision of the labour market was approved at the beginning of this year, because this reform was part of the conditions that the Spanish government committed to in the context of the recovery plan.

With the new labour reforms, at least what we are seeing up to now is that we are creating jobs as fast as the previous law—which was of course from a completely neoliberal perspective—but we are creating these new jobs with more rights. Temporary contracts were the basis of the labour market from the late 90s. That disappeared in the current framework and most of the jobs have been created with permanent contracts.

In that context, the government approved before this reform another law to regulate the riders as platform workers. We recognised that there were different kinds of jobs linked with platforms. Of course, from the left, we have to focus on how we improve the conditions of the workers linked with platforms—they don't have rights. But I don't like to put the platforms directly in the centre of every problem because some of the platforms create good jobs. The problem is the other platforms [where workers] are very badly paid without any rights, without holidays or whatever.

The Spanish law is working well and it has been an experience that the European Commission took [on board] to regulate on this matter. And this is one of the elements we need to face directly if we really want to recover rights in labour markets and reduce inequality.

*The figures I have seen recently suggest that the change in the law to make it much more difficult for employers to rely on temporary contracts has indeed had a significant effect, with quite a big increase in the number of workers on permanent contracts compared with the situation before the law.*

The neoliberal labour reform that the People's Party made years ago reduced so much the rights and entitlements of workers, thinking that in reducing costs there will be more jobs. It's true in theory that you could see this trade-off: if we increase the cost, in theory there will be [fewer jobs]. So we need to find the correct trade-off. At the end of the day our unemployment rate is high in European comparison. We need workers with more rights and we need to find the balance point.

As you say, we have seen the numbers after the reforms: jobs are increasing as quickly as they did before, so the new rights didn't reduce the willingness of companies to hire people and indeed these new jobs have of course more rights than before because most of them are permanent. Until now around one third of the labour market was temporary workers and now the temporary contracts disappear from our legal framework and most of the new workers entering the labour market have permanent contracts—without any

reduction in the level of new contracts. So the balance was found and during this crisis we have had better numbers from the labour market than we had in previous crises.

*At the European level, the Socialists and Democrats group in the European Parliament, of which you are of course a member, has been seeking to uphold the rule of law in the context of episodes, particularly in Poland and Hungary, where the rule of law has been abrogated. It's been topical recently in terms of Poland's access to the Recovery and Resilience Facility and the issue of conditionality. What is your sense, on the wider European scale, of what social democrats need to do to ensure the rule of law is established throughout the European Union much more consistently than at present?*

This is vital, this democratic validity. At the end of 2020, the parliament and the council agreed on the new regulation on democratic stability. This regulation was appealed to the European Court of Justice by the Hungarian government. We were waiting for the final decision and the commission was also waiting to find if it was able to apply this regulation directly or not. There are many legal doubts about what the commission did, because it was not completely clear that the commission was able to stop the implementation of this regulation.

But apart from this regulation, in the regulation itself on the Recovery and Resilience Facility we introduced more democratic conditionality. So now we have a democratic conditionality *inside* the Recovery and Resilience Facility and we have the democratic conditionality through the democratic-conditionality regulation.

That has been working well, more or less. At least you feel this instrument helped to convince the Polish government to reduce the ambition to change completely the legal system. It's true they didn't do most of what we would like, to come back to normal, but at least they stopped. The point now is if the halt to these reforms in Poland is enough to approve the national plan.

The commission proposed the approval of this plan. In the council and in the parliament we have other ideas, because we saw

Poland blocking the implementation of the directive to fix a minimum [corporate] tax rate—[which is] not developing the international agreement. It's true they reduced their ambition on the legal and constitutional steps, and the commission approved the plan, so they changed and now the Polish government is in favour [of the directive]. Now it is the Hungarian government which is blocking it.

I understand the work is not easy, if I were in the commission. The trade-off between the stick and the carrot you need to manage with these countries is not easy to develop. But the Russian threat is clear to the east, and of course to all of Europe. And there are high incentives in this part of Europe to be a better partner in the union.

THREE  
HARD LABOUR IN HOLLAND

CATHERINE DE VRIES

Catherine de Vries is professor of politics at Bocconi University in Italy and an expert on comparative European politics.

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IN A RECENT SOCIAL EUROPE COLUMN, *Robert Misik had a rather optimistic take on the state of social democracy in Europe, saying that parties of that family were in government throughout the Nordic countries and the Iberian peninsula as well as the Ampelkoalition in Germany. But things have not been so positive for social democracy in the Netherlands in recent years. The Labour Party, the PvdA, has lost a great deal of support. While that initially seemed to transfer to the other parties of the left—the Green Left and the Socialist Party—they also fared very badly in the 2021 elections, which left all the left parties with less than 6 per cent support each. So, why have these parties on the left fared so badly?*

I think it's a good question. If one had the perfect answer to that question, I could develop a perfect strategy for the Dutch social-

democratic party, which is difficult—but there are particular factors that make it very difficult in the Netherlands.

We have a highly fragmented party system. It's one of the most proportional systems in the world, so basically the percentage of votes you get is about the percentage of seats you get in parliament—slightly different but almost there. So there is a lot of volatility in the system from one election to the other, as you referred to, as well.

That leads sometimes to an issue about the *amount* of issues that feature in electoral campaigns. Take the Spanish example—a very successful left-wing coalition under the leadership of Pedro Sánchez, in which Sánchez was able to co-opt the competitor on the left [*Unidas Podemos*] and create the election very much about left-right and progressive issues. He was [advancing] a left message, plus pro-immigration, pro-feminism, pro-diversity—a pro-cosmopolitan message.

In the Netherlands, basically, you have two orthogonal dimensions, so it's left-right and this cosmopolitan-versus-more-parochial politics. That has been very difficult for the social-democratic party. They have a competitor on the left when it comes to the economic issues, the Socialist Party that you mentioned. But they also have several competitors on the cosmopolitan one, which is the Green Left party you talked about but also BIJ1 ('Together'), which has the first black Dutch leader in parliament. That is very cosmopolitan, anti-colonial, in the context of 'Black Lives Matter' where it really became very, very prevalent. We have a party for the animals. We have D66, which is a more centrist party, more [UK] Liberal Democrat but very 'left' on the second dimension, very cosmopolitan.

It has been very difficult, in that crowded field, for the social-democratic party to have a unique voice, whereas in some other countries, like Germany and Spain, that are less proportional you can have this 'cosmopolitan plus left' type of message. In the Netherlands that's separated out, so then the question becomes: if you already have a left party dealing with workers' rights more explicitly than you are—as a party that has just been in government and, therefore, has

had some critiques—can you make up for that by a very pro-cosmopolitan message? But that [political location] was also taken, in the Dutch system.

So you have the Labour Party, that has been in government, had to make compromises and, therefore, wasn't able to position itself very strategically in this two-dimensional space. It has been very difficult for the social-democratic party in the Netherlands to figure out what exactly, electorally, to do.

*If you were trying to construct a narrative for the Labour Party over the coming decade, which was to embrace successfully, in a coherent way, those two orthogonal dimensions—the left-right and cosmopolitan-versus-parochial—how would you go about it?*

What I would try to do is to learn a little from those other examples in Europe that we're seeing. We saw an example which has been successful, but almost only by accident, because a lot of the research suggests that it's not a good strategy. It's the Danish Social Democratic Party, which had a more parochial message, an anti-immigration message, together with a left-wing message.

That seems to have been a particularity of the Danish system: a lot of research suggests that that's not a very good formula for the social democrats, because it's not so clear what their progressive nature is, whereas in Germany and in Spain you saw much more—also, in Italy, the *Partido Democrático* that's doing very well again—this very progressive element.

The way in which you can combine those two dimensions is to say that, as a person, you cannot make free choices economically, etcetera and do well as a member of society that's more diverse when you don't have economic possibilities. So you can link those two dimensions.

The Socialist Party in the Netherlands is a kind of Danish social-democratic [party], so quite parochial on that cosmopolitan dimension but then quite left. [Labour] has neither been very cosmopolitan nor very left. That has made it—as in Dutch you would say—'neither fish nor meat'. We don't really know what it looks like.

The election where the Dutch Labour Party did well was the European Parliamentary election in 2019, led by Frans Timmermans, now the commissioner in Brussels on the environment. He was a good candidate. He's a traditional social democrat and his message was: 'We need to make a social Europe that also allows us to deal with problems that don't stop at the border.' So the idea that we can just stop the border, stop immigration—it's just a fallacy. It doesn't work, so what we need to make sure is that people who are in our country, or problems that arise that have a diversity or cosmopolitan angle, we try to provide a social answer to that.

At the core, what he did quite well is to say that we cannot be a pro-environment party when we don't think about people who are in the poorest parts in society that are not able to green their house, that are not able to pay increased gas prices. So there is a distributional aspect to this second-dimension politics, which is more green, pro-immigration, pro-EU—these kinds of cosmopolitan issues. That was a very clear message, with a very clear candidate who symbolised that in his own biography. He was very successful in that election. So it's always a question of getting the message right but also getting that message to fit the person who is leading the party.

The Dutch Labour Party has also gone through a lot of iterations of different leaders. The last leader has also stepped down and that has been very much about the strategy that the party should take. There are now discussions about creating co-operation on the left, so having a social-democratic party that co-operates, especially with the green party, the Green Left. The Dutch green party always had a very left-wing faction within it and the question now is: should there be co-operation? They're going to do it in the Senate, the Dutch upper chamber. The question will be if they will also do it in elections.

That has to do with the specific element that I mentioned. The Dutch polity is so fragmented that maybe it's also good to say: 'Okay, if you're a left voter, these are the parties that you need to support so that actually we can form a government after.' Because what happens

now is that even, sometimes, left parties do well but they don't do well enough to form a centre-left coalition. Then it goes to the right anyhow, so it's a wasted vote for a lot of voters.

Those are the things they [should] try to do. Get a clear message that talks about issues that are important on the cosmopolitan dimension, but from their distributional impacts so that it's a clearer left message. Secondly, a candidate that fits that. And, thirdly, because it's such a fragmented party system, do we need to do some organisational innovation and maybe some electoral pacts prior to the election, to say we're going to co-operate with [others to] the left? That latter is controversial but it's definitely discussed within the Dutch context.

*And, of course, it has become much discussed, if not commonplace, elsewhere in Europe, for example with the coalition in Portugal after the previous election, which was dismissed as a 'contraption' when it had a red-red-green character but seemed to do very well. So what you are implying would be that the language used elsewhere, such as in France, of the 'social-ecological state' should be the kind of language that should be used, too, in the Netherlands to describe the goal that social democrats have.*

*I want to also ask you specifically about the issues of diversity and inclusion because, apart from being a professor of politics, you have a role at Bocconi University as the dean of diversity and inclusion. You've also pointed earlier to the Danish case, where the social democrats have taken a quite negative position on these issues. You seem to be implying a more positive position should be taken. I wonder if you could spell that out a little more in terms of what diversity and inclusion should mean from a social-democratic point of view in this decade.*

Yes, I don't think it fits a progressive, left-wing agenda to say that certain people are more worthy of certain kinds of policies than others. Having solidarity is an important element. Does that mean that we have to have what certain people would [call] an open-door policy? There might be a lot of practical issues that we think about.

But I'm going to be very explicit about the Danish social democrats. In the time that Syria is experiencing a major war, you cannot send Syrians back to Syria. That I don't think has a place in left-wing politics. It might create a short-term, small gain, but in the long term you're going to get an unclear reputation or a blurring of your party profile.

It's exactly what some people analyse as the origins of the problems of the Dutch social democrats—that they started to move in a more anti-immigration [direction] as we had this big upheaval with our radical-right political [figure] Pim Fortuyn post-9/11. That created a little bit of unclarity for people [as to] what the social-democratic party really stood for.

Rights of recognition are as important as rights to a job. Which has always been the Dutch tradition on the left: we've been very early in terms of gay rights; we've been very early thinking about prostitution and about all forms of diversity-related policy.

So separating out a person is wrong: 'That part of you I like, that other part of you less.' We really need to take into consideration that people are whole beings. They have a lot of different needs: they have to have a good income and they need to have a secure safety net, but they also need to be able to feel welcome within the society they live in.

That is something that's important for LGBTQ+ rights, for trans rights, for people of colour, for people of different kinds of religions. Does that mean that we need to be uncritical about certain things? No, but the issue often is that social-democratic parties want to be a for a lot of different people. You have to take a stand. If you had a traditional link to the feminist movement—and some early feminists had issues with trans rights—you have to then be very clear which side you want to be on. You can't be that for both [sets of] people.

What often happens is that social-democratic parties, because they feel electorally in decline or under pressure, think from a position of weakness: 'I'm not going to take a position.' But actually a lot of research shows that people want to hear quite clearly where you

stand. What you need to do is to pick your battles and say ‘this is what I feel very strongly about and this is what I have a position on’ and not try to have an entire [laundry]-list of things. Voters want to know: ‘What are your three most important issues and what are your positions on those? What are you and what aren’t you?’

The problem for social democrats is that they often saw diversity as an add-on to what they were doing. It’s not an add-on. How can you give a person a decent life and a safety net when they’re not recognised as full people within a society? Those two things are intrinsically connected. That basically requires a philosophical push.

Also, for social democrats, the world has changed. We cannot be [adopting] exactly the same positions that we used to have X number of years ago, in the heyday of social democracy, but we need to have a clear position. In the Dutch case, people did not see a clear position— not on the environment, because you had the green party developed, and not on ‘how cosmopolitan are we?’: D66 had a much clearer position on that than the PvdA. And then on social rights you also had the other competitors, so everything that was competing with the social-democratic party got room because the social-democratic party started to move a little bit and wanted to be too many things to too many people. That is where you need to start from.

Of course you’re going to disappoint some people, but it’s like if you have a product you need to innovate it. In some ways, your political ideology is a ‘product’ that you’re trying to ‘sell’ to a voter and you need to innovate in that sense. We also need to have value-based discussions about what it means to have a fulfilling life in, let’s say, west-European or European societies. What does that entail?

It cannot, for a left-wing party, entail that we [send] people [back] who have moved out of conflict areas or who are under pressure in the countries that they’re from, and don’t grant them some form of asylum or some long-term status within a country. I just don’t think that’s compatible. Those are choices that social-democratic parties need to make and part of the problem in the Netherlands is exactly this lack of clarity on some of these key issues that voters care about.

*One final question about diversity, and that concerns feminism. The social-democratic family is gradually being feminised in terms of its leadership, with more female leaders emerging. One thinks, for example, of people like Jacinda Ardern in New Zealand and the success that she has had. But also, of course, in the Nordic countries that has been very evident and in the trade union movement: for example, the new head of the German trade union federation is the first ever woman—and, indeed, Turkish-origin woman—to be so. Is that same process going on in social democracy in the Netherlands? Is there an awareness of the need fully to take advantage of the freshness and innovation that, perhaps, a more feminised leadership can bring?*

We had a female leader of the social-democratic party [Lilianne Ploumen, from January 2021]. She just stepped down. She had been a party insider for quite some time. Some of the examples that you [give] are women who've more recently popped up or have been also younger. Sometimes, if you want to reinvigorate the party, it's better to have someone who's a little bit from outside, not who has been a minister for X number of times in a previous cabinet.

Within the Netherlands it's interesting in comparison with the Nordic countries or what Ardern is doing in New Zealand, but also the very advanced period leave in Spain which the left-wing coalition has [introduced] there. Again, the social-democratic party in the Netherlands has not been so clear on this issue. It has moved.

Maybe gay marriage and adoption rights is an example of some of these diversity-related issues which happened quite early. People were then [thinking]: 'Okay, we're done. This is it.' Then a lot of different issues started to develop. Even if you look at LGBTQ+ rights, Spain is now above the Netherlands on some of these issues. We would not necessarily think that, traditionally. That, again, has been a missed chance for social democracy.

There's a lot of mileage to be made because the Netherlands has a very high educational and labour-market attainment of women, but it's mostly part-time. I've always been a person that has said: 'I don't think that aspiration to work part-time or full-time is gendered, neces-

sarily.' So is it really a choice of women to always take that position, or should we think about how we can organise a society where men also feel very comfortable taking part-time jobs or where we are basically providing better ways of combining work and care, different ways of structuring family life?

There are a lot of things to be done. Childcare is very expensive. A lot of women are not necessarily reaching the top parts of the echelon. There have been discussions about how our prime minister of about 12 years has treated female ministers differently than male ministers within the parliament. Coming back to Spain, 65 per cent of Sánchez's cabinet ministers are female. That is a clear signal in a country that was traditionally seen as much less progressive on these issues.

Previously, if you look at government participation by social democracy within the Netherlands, that has not necessarily been clear. It has been often led by men and a lot of the ministers were male. That has been a question that now should be addressed and should be taken more seriously. That will be an important area to think about, also, within Dutch social democracy.

FOUR  
SWEDEN'S LOST SOCIAL-  
DEMOCRATIC MOORINGS

JENNY ANDERSSON

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LET'S *begin by going back to a classic you wrote, The Library and the Workshop, about the state of social democracy in Sweden, with the comparison of Britain in mind.*

*In that 2010 book, you suggested that social democracy in Sweden—arguably the most successful in the European postwar context—had rather lost its way. I wondered whether you think that's still the case or whether there are some positive trends in the Social Democrats we should be aware of. Critics have pointed to rising inequality—for example to the inegalitarian effects of the system of educational 'choice' introduced by the Moderates but accepted by the Social Democrats; they have also raised questions about the privatisation of social care. But what is your take on the current situation?*

When I wrote this book, now a fair few years back, I was not aware—and I don't think that many people were aware—of the

galloping trends in inequality in Sweden. We became aware of that with an Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development report [in 2011].

That trend did not stop then and it has become steadily worse since, so this is today an acute phenomenon, a really important problem. Sweden is top of the league in the inequality [growth] statistics in the OECD. It's by far the most unequal of the Nordic countries.

There are different ways of looking at these statistics. One is to look at the lower part of the income spectrum, where you have a steady decline in the real revenue of poorer households. The other way—the more shocking way actually—is to look at the very upper part of the spectrum, where Sweden today has the fastest-growing number of billionaires in the world.

That is a development fuelled by many of the economic policies I did talk about in the book—by the turn to what was called the 'knowledge economy', which was always a high-end idea of economic innovation and growth, and always presumed that knowledge-led growth would filter down towards the lower levels of the population, which is not actually true. We know today that 'human capital' investments got stranded in the upper-income classes.

That's something that we've really witnessed in Sweden. One of the explanations behind this billionaire phenomenon is very productive innovation industries. Some of them are in the tech business—things like Spotify, for instance. Other huge fortunes have been made in what I call the 'welfare industry', the private companies that are today active in the welfare state in Sweden and have had huge margins in terms of profit in recent years because of demographic changes.

So do I think that things are better? No, I do not. There have been positive changes in the party. One of the lows was the so-called 'January deal', which is now three years back, where social democracy, for reasons to do with the fragility of electoral support, was put in a situation of having to accept a set of things that came from the

liberal right. That turned out very electorally costly and also rendered the party even more fragile from within.

At least one of the effects of that was to trigger a conversation inside the party. It also triggered a new organisation within the party, very much like *Podemos* in Spain or Momentum in Britain, called *Reformisterna*. And *Reformisterna* has been a very successful group within the party.

So there has certainly been a shift in debate and there has been a return—not least by Magdalena Andersson [party leader since November 2021], who has personally really given voice to the theme of inequality. She has said on at least a couple of occasions that she would very much like to see this trend stopped and that she would like, for instance, to reintroduce forms of taxation for the very richest and revise the capital-gains tax. But the electoral situation is still extremely precarious.

A debate did begin about restoring welfare-state services, constraining the room for manoeuvre of the private welfare actors—including capping their profits and putting in place new regulations on shareholder actors in the welfare state. I, along with many other people, thought it would be the defining issue for the election in September. Alas, the NATO situation has completely overwhelmed Swedish politics.

*We'll come to NATO in a moment but you mentioned Andersson there. I wanted to ask you about her assumption of the leadership of the party, because it has reflected a trend in the Nordic countries, of feminisation in the leadership of social democracy. I wondered what your thoughts were generally on that trend and its significance for Europe as a whole.*

I'm not convinced that it means all that much, frankly. For instance, Sanna Marin is a very popular figure in Finnish politics. She stands as a national icon, in a way that Andersson so far does not. Andersson is a very competent party leader, a very competent economist, former minister of finance, was for a long time the adviser of the former party leader and prime minister, Göran Persson, very

much the architect of many of the Swedish 'third way' reforms during his time.

She also happens to be a woman but I don't see that the gender question is the defining aspect of her leadership. She's a pretty hardcore politician. She believed firmly in the Third Way reforms. She has demonstrated that time and time again, although this terrain is shifting and I hope that Andersson is someone who will continue to shift that terrain.

But I don't see in any way that the feminisation of the leadership issue would bring back the 'heart' issues of social-democratic politics—of care, for instance. I don't think those were ever Andersson's key concerns.

That is fair enough. I would love to see Andersson very clearly on an economic-policy platform to reduce inequalities and on hard issues like taxation, or EU policies or monetary reform. That would be terrific.

*One of the trends certainly in social-democratic party behaviour in recent years has been a shift in their voting constituency in gender terms, towards a stronger proportion of women being involved. How do you think the Swedish party performs in that regard and in recognising that? Do you think that, again, there are any lessons to be learned elsewhere among social-democratic parties across Europe in how they specifically address the concerns of women? For example, one of the points that has been made by a number of people is there needs to be greater focus on the care economy and a recognition that that is central to the lives of women, in a way it has not been, historically, for men. How can social democracy relate more effectively to an electorate that is much more female than it used to be?*

Yes, the Nordics would be on a different timeline from many other countries—New Zealand, for instance—because the care economy is a 100-year-old concern in the Nordics. So, it's not a theme that female party leaders have brought in.

There are a lot of gender dynamics going on in social-democratic politics and also in the Swedish and Nordic electorate. One of the

really important gender dynamics is the ‘right-wing-isation’ of working-class men. I’m not sure what the causality in the trend is. Is it women turning to social democracy or is it a feminisation of the electorate because some of the male electorate have been leaving, mainly to the right?

But it is true that the welfare issues, the care issues, have a very strong echo in the female electorate. Social democracy in Sweden has had heavy competition here from the Left Party, which is by far the most outspoken advocate on those issues. That reflects also in the electorate, so the electorate of the Left Party is more feminine than the electorate of social democracy.

*That raises two interesting points. First of all, on the far right, in Sweden there has been the dramatic growth in recent years of the Sweden Democrats. These parties, as you’ve hinted, have even been referred to elsewhere in Europe as the Männerparteien—the ‘men’s parties’—because, for authoritarian men, they seem to have a particular attraction. What do you think social democracy needs to do to reverse the rise of these authoritarian, populist, right-wing parties, such as the Sweden Democrats?*

We need to stop playing on their part of the field. We need to go back to issues that have to do with reformist politics. That means, for instance, tackling the macroeconomic framework. It means allowing for budgetary investments and for restoring investment politics in a whole set of [parts of] the economy, which, by the way, [has really been] the programme of social democracy for the election—investment in fossil-free steel, a very big thing now in Sweden, also heavy investments in battery production for electric vehicles, so there is really a green industrial-policy revolution.

In connection with that, [it means] moving the front line on all of these issues that have caused the inequality that is an explanatory factor also behind a turn to the far right—which is that large groups in Swedish society felt that they were abandoned by the welfare state and by social democracy as a party too. That is the way to do this: it is to do whatever can be done to restore equality levels and it

has to start with economic policy. Andersson is very well placed for that.

And it has to be bringing back the questions that are about care and an investment in the welfare state. But the welfare state in Sweden today has to allow for the fact that Sweden is not a white country: it is a country that [includes] a very important segment of immigrant population, a country that received 200,000 people in 2015 very quickly, a country that today is receiving Ukrainian refugees, like Poland and Denmark and Germany and so on. So we also have to think of the welfare state as something that is not the property of the white, working-class male.

What is a mistake, and has been a mistake in Sweden and in many other social-democratic parties as well, is the idea that when the far right is making headway in the electorate you need to adopt their positions or to echo their discourse. This is now a very significant part of the electorate, so that is quite simply not working. It only plays into their argument, so that should come to a stop.

Then there is a set of very difficult issues. It's very difficult to think about how to maintain the quality of what we like to call the universal welfare state where the most fragile groups are not necessarily even Swedish citizens and are people who lack legal status and so on. That is a very difficult problem, and that should be in the things that we think about too.

*Going back to what you said about inequality, my understanding of the statistics would suggest that, apart from the growth of wealth at the top of the spectrum, one of the factors behind rising inequality in Sweden has been the impoverishment of those on the margins of the labour market, of whom there have been rather more in recent decades than in the past. Obviously, migrants and refugees would be one of the groups who comprise that population.*

*You also mentioned earlier the Left Party and I also wanted to ask you about coalition politics. Across Europe, we're moving away from the days when social democrats could think of themselves as mass parties with huge vote banks which could, essentially, govern*

*on their own or with some token support. Now we're talking about coalitions with other left and green parties or, in the German case, with liberals. What's your sense of where progressive coalition politics will go in Sweden, perhaps with the aftermath of the election in mind?*

That's the million-dollar question. An assertive social-democratic party has the power to define alliances in a different way than in 2019. In 2019, in the January treaty, social democracy had to give up a lot. A very small party in Swedish politics, the Centre Party, which is hovering around the limit for parliamentary existence—that's a slight exaggeration—was given an influence disproportionate to its electoral score.

I'm hoping we don't see a repeat of that. Andersson is extremely cautious of [repeating] that, but what also happened in 2019 was that social democracy had to accept to treat the Left Party like the Sweden Democrats—as a non-decent democratic player. The Left Party was excluded from the January deal. That was absolutely devastating because, in a time of extremely fragile electoral majorities, social democracy cannot afford to think about a pro-welfare-state, pro-egalitarian party like that.

Ideally, we could see a social-democrat-green-left alliance, with some component of the Centre Party, which is a little like the middle of the road but has turned to a quite [extreme] interpretation of neoliberalism in some of its economic policies. But the Centre Party (the former Agrarian Party) has an historic electorate that is very pro-welfare state—that, historically, feels an affinity to social-democrat voters. So that would be a possibility but really it all depends.

It doesn't all depend on social democracy. It also depends a lot on the Swedish right, which has its own set of existential dilemmas and which has also been fractured by the existence of the Sweden Democrats. The Centre Party is one of the few players on the right that has very clearly said it does not want to govern with the Sweden Democrats.

Then a logical alliance would be a liberal-left or centre-left

alliance but that was not the case in 2019. It really will depend a lot on even very small changes in parliamentary majorities.

*Finally, I can't talk to you today without asking you about the issue of neutrality, because it has been such a shock to the Swedish social-democratic system—the invasion of Ukraine by Russia and the way that has led to a dramatic change in thinking about neutrality from the traditional view that social democrats took, which was that neutrality was the inherently progressive policy to adopt on international security issues. Given that now Sweden is in the process of joining NATO, as with Finland, in response to what has happened in Ukraine, what do you think a progressive international security policy for social democrats looks like, if neutrality isn't what it is anymore?*

That is a very difficult question and it would have been great if we had spent ten years thinking about that, which clearly we did not. A lot of people in and around social democracy, and in general in Sweden today, have extremely mixed feelings about this.

Obviously, there was shock after February 24th. There is also a huge sympathy and a historically entrenched solidarity with Finland that has played a huge role in leading to this extremely hasty and unprepared decision to apply for membership of NATO. Who can say whether this is right or wrong? What is clear is that it totally abdicates an entire space for thinking social democratically about foreign policy. This is now gone.

It will have enormous ramifications in interior politics. We learnt about a Turkish demand for extraditing an unknown number of unknown names of mainly Kurdish Turkish alleged terrorists. We do not know who they are but most of them are probably Kurdish dissenters in Sweden. It appears that Turkey has, in these negotiations, included people who are elected to Parliament, who are politically active in Sweden.

There are a lot of Kurdish people in the social-democratic party, so this is now a huge issue which was not foreseen at the moment of hastily—due to circumstances—coming to the conclusion that the

way of preserving security for Sweden was to apply for membership of NATO. So that was an unforeseen that will really have extremely messy ramifications.

Neutrality was never just a passive stance: neutrality in the cold-war era was an active stance. It was about being part of the 'non-aligned movement'. It was about trying to think about futures for a world that were beyond the bipolar system. I find it quite breathtaking, really, that that whole legacy of reflection—50, 60, 100 years of thinking about what neutrality means—was not at all present.

There were certainly very vocal critics, with longstanding positions in social democracy, who outspokenly said: 'We need to think about this because this is a situation that is very reminiscent of the cold-war situation.' But I find it amazing that there was not the habit of thinking about foreign policy as something that is beyond a bipolar worldview, beyond a 1990s 'end of history' argument—something that necessarily involves thinking about a world that is much larger than NATO.

Whether this turns out to be right or wrong, I cannot say. I'm not sure, but my real fear is that it completely closes down an entire field for thinking more offensively about what Sweden can do to be in the world, the way that the world clearly is going to look, which is not a very pleasant place—a place in which there are threats that we thought were gone but that were not gone. That is a real problem.

FIVE  
GERMANY: STEERING  
TRANSFORMATION

MAX OSTERMAYER

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WE HAVE *a new addition to the very large vocabulary for native English speakers to learn of German compound nouns—Zeitenwende. This word, which seeks to encapsulate the changing times we live in, has a focus on the socio-ecological transformation, with the implication that—because of what the science is telling us, episodes such as the floods a year ago in Nordrhein-Westfalen and what has happened with the invasion of Ukraine—this whole process must be accelerated quite dramatically. How is it possible to really accelerate that transformation in the way that needs to be done?*

Actually this acceleration was under way already, at the beginning of the year, before Russia launched its attack on Ukraine. In Germany, we had two major legislative packages scheduled for this year, to remove certain obstacles to the scaling [up] of renewable energy and getting ahead with the mobility transition, but also partic-

ularly energy efficiency. Now the Russian attack on Ukraine has changed some of the fundamental pillars of the German pathway towards decarbonisation.

It's not entirely clear how this is going to play out, but what we are going to see for sure is a reconfiguration in Germany's transition path and probably also a further acceleration. But there are developments that at the moment pull in both directions. The dilemmas we are facing with regard to the ecological transformation in Germany in the wake of the current crisis [may] speed up the transformation or maybe slow it down. It will depend on the political actions ultimately taken.

*In the short term, things are happening, such as the bringing back into action of some coal power stations and an expansion of liquefied natural gas as temporary solutions, which could in a pessimistic scenario hold things back. On the other hand, there is a political sense in Germany that in the past there was too much naïveté about what was happening in Russia and a failure to recognise quickly enough what needed to be done to reduce Germany's dependence on gas from Russia. So this could go either way. What is your best guess at the moment as to how things will pan out?*

My guess is, in the short run, there's going to be, surely, a temporary return to coal-based energy. If we manage to keep the carbon-trading scheme in Europe in place, it might not have a really bad impact in the long run—due to the price mechanism, at the end of the day, and the capped emissions [meaning] we are not going to emit more than we would have otherwise—but it might have an additional effect on energy prices, that's for sure.

You mentioned the build-up of new infrastructure, particularly when it comes to liquefied natural gas. This includes the forming of new energy partnerships with countries that could potentially supply that energy, and also maybe even the exploration of new natural-gas projects. This new focus on energy partnerships and diversification of them might hold the key to speeding up the transformation, in the sense that that might be able to deliver the amount of energy that we

need but also set the course for the production and export or import of green hydrogen in the long run.

If we make sure that the infrastructure is compatible and does not end up as stranded assets, particularly in countries of the global south, then we might definitely succeed. In Germany, and in Europe in general, there was in the last years and months a strong focus on the question of how to scale up green-hydrogen infrastructure and how to build up these supply chains. That has got a really big push.

The only thing is that we really have to be careful not to get into a situation where, if we would like to still meet our climate targets, we build up particular fossil infrastructure which we're only going to need into the 30s. And if it's not compatible with green hydrogen beyond that, we're going to face severe challenges. The countries that we are trying to form these partnerships with might also face severe challenges—from a progressive perspective, this could also not be in our interest in the long run. The key is basically to engage in these partnerships in an equitable way and really to have fair and very balanced energy partnerships in the future.

*One concern that's been expressed is that in the rush to obtain new sources of green hydrogen, including via the global south, there might be a lack of awareness of the relationships of domination and subordination that have historically applied. And there might not be what you are calling a fair and equal partnership in that situation. How do you think that that can be avoided—that we can ensure these partnerships to secure green-hydrogen suppliers are genuinely fair and equitable to all concerned?*

From my experience and the conversations that we had, what is key is that, when it comes to framing the terms of these partnerships, trade unions and also civil society get a seat at the table. We have seen in the past that many of these partnerships were government and business-driven. But since they have the potential to really transform the energy sectors, for example in countries that are currently fossil-fuel exporters, and also they have the potential for a large-scale

environmental impact, it is extremely important to engage civil society.

From the European side, something that we should bring to the table in this discussion [is that] there's way more room for a just transition in this regard in the countries that we currently target as potential partners—'just' for the local population and also the local workforce. For example, in some countries that are actually in focus now, large parts of the population do not have access to stable electricity and rely on diesel generators.

The question is: how can you frame these partnerships so that they also contribute to sustainable development, ecologically but also economically in these countries? Renewable energies do have that potential. But it's clear that we cannot approach these partnerships only from the perspective of European energy security.

*The other question I wanted to ask, following what you had said, was about the domestic context. What you're implying is that there will have to be very high public investment over the coming years and indeed decades in Germany to provide the infrastructure for a renewables-based energy system. There has been considerable debate in Germany in recent years as to whether there can be an easing of the Schuldenbremse (the debt brake) and a move away from the obsession with the Schwarze Null (black zero) in budgetary policy. Is your sense that the mood is changing—that maybe there'll be more openness over the years beyond the current emergency situation to accepting that borrowing for investment is okay?*

We saw this shift in the paradigm over the last couple of years but the current situation might throw us back. From a progressive perspective, there's some feeling of grief that we lost a decade in which we had rather low borrowing costs, rather low inflation, which could have really helped to raise the money for this large investment agenda—particularly because, in these macroeconomic conditions, it was easier also to make compromises 'across the aisle', particularly if you look at Germany's new governing coalition with the liberals, who, in terms of their economic agenda, pursue a classical ordoliberal

narrative where a balanced budget is basically one fundamental concern.

Now, before this crisis, due to the favourable conditions, the three governing parties agreed that they would run up a rather large deficit this year again, to put this money in a climate fund which could then be later used to fund this transformation. Now, with the changing tide—rising inflation, rising borrowing costs—we already do see that we might return to this ordoliberal narrative: now we are in a situation where the government should not overspend, it should not overinvest, [as that] might further incinerate inflation.

This narrative is also coming over to us from the United States. And we might see that, due to higher borrowing costs, the argument could go: ‘Yes, we had ten good years, but now we really have to come back maybe even to more austere fiscal policies, because the borrowing costs are increasing.’ There are definitely many, many counter-arguments to that. But for progressives we have to brace for a stronger return of the narrative and have to be able to respond to it. The challenge is that it resonates very well because it has been around for so long and we were only at the brink of shifting the narrative before this crisis hit us.

*That brings me on to the other question I wanted to ask you. Across Europe, we're moving away from the days of the old Volksparteien (mass parties), where social democrats could expect to govern either alone or with very little recognition of minor partners. Coalition politics with genuinely pluralistic coalitions—red-yellow-green, like the Ampelkoalition, or red-red-green, as in other situations—is very much the order of the day. In Germany the SPD has been involved in two coalitions recently, of very different types: the Große Koalition with the CDU-CSU union on the right and now the Ampelkoalition with the liberal FDP as well as the Greens. What do you think the SPD has learnt in recent years from these experiences in terms of coalition politics, and how social democrats can pursue that to their best advantage and that of the public at large?*

Looking back at the grand coalition, at least the last four years, it

was more borne out of necessity than of both parties really wanting to co-operate. And it had to do with the failing coalition talks [on a 'Jamaica', black-yellow-green coalition] between the liberals, the Greens, and the German conservatives. We saw that potential compromise was at an end between the conservatives and the social democrats.

With regard to the ruling coalition now, in general there is a modernisation potential in certain policy areas that have always been very important to social democracy. But, depending on the partner, you will have to compromise on other key issues. For example, there is definitely modernisation potential on migration policy, abortion, drug policy, criminal law—a lot of contested questions where the majority of the population has actually favoured a more liberal approach for many, many years.

And if you look at the coalition agreement, it was celebrated in these policy areas, because it would mean a really progressive push for Germany that had been long overdue. So in terms of coalition building, this is something when you look at [genuinely] liberal parties—not only liberal in the economic sense but also when it comes to other policy areas—obviously, they can be partners for social democrats.

In the area of economic policy, this is the field where it's going to be rather difficult. The differences between the German conservatives and the liberals are not all that big, when it comes to this ordoliberal approach—the German conservatives are ideologically a little bit more flexible at the end of the day.

A coalition option for social democracy that has always been around was with *Die Linke* [which stems from the once ruling party in the German Democratic Republic]. But there, on the other hand, you might have a fundamental difference when it comes to foreign policy—beyond the fact that *Die Linke* at the moment is in internal disarray. So when it comes to coalition-building for social democracy in Germany, the Greens are the natural coalition partner.

With regards to all other options, you will always have to compro-

mise on one key policy area and you will have to prioritise. The challenge at the moment is that all of these things—[including] the transformation of foreign policy, security policy—are currently inter-linked, and therefore it is incredibly challenging to form a coalition that is coherent across all of these policy areas, particularly for social democrats. But we have seen that at least in Germany the SPD is capable of forming such a coalition. And it makes me hopeful for the future that we are going to see also coalitions that are not [merely] partisan.

A big advantage of the current coalition is it is bipartisan. So even if you have a shift in power, which would then get the conservatives involved again with maybe the participation of the liberals, there are things you could not go back to—because for the liberals what they have decided, this coalition agreement, what they have agreed to, they wouldn't want to lose face [by disowning]. Maybe you can't then make some decisions that would be really disruptive or as transformative as you would like to.

To keep this kind of bipartisan moment in the governing coalition helps to maintain stability in the long term. And if that is not there, sometimes you see in the United States what it can lead to, eventually, if things get too partisan.

SIX  
UNITED STATES: POLITICAL  
GRIDLOCK

SHERI BERMAN

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GIVEN *your knowledge of social democracy on both sides of the Atlantic, how much does American exceptionalism, in your view, hinder US progressives in learning from the cradle of social democracy in Europe? I'm thinking of issues such as, for example, the country's appalling murder rate and how to win the argument about guns or indeed the (related) question of its very high level—certainly by European standards—of social inequality.*

That's a great question and one of longstanding interest to people on both sides of the Atlantic. The way I would start off is by thinking about different ways in which folks on different sides of the Atlantic think about things like liberty and freedom. For a variety of reasons, 'negative' freedom—individual autonomy—has been a much stronger

value in the United States than in Europe. So oftentimes when folks on different sides of the Atlantic look at the same question, they're prioritising different values or different views of what makes for a good life.

Folks in the United States tend to think that the highest priority is to preserve individual liberty and individual freedom. We have a history of being much more sceptical towards government intervention in general, with much greater belief in the individual's ability and responsibility to make his or her own way and, therefore, less of a tendency to jump towards government intervention to create what Europeans would think would be the [level] playing-field that allows individuals to flourish. That's the idea of 'positive' liberty—that governments should help provide the environment within which individuals can live their best life.

A lot of this comes from the different histories of Europe and the United States. Europe had to learn the hard way—through wars, through fighting against tyrannies—that it was necessary to protect citizens. It was necessary to form a sense of community. It was necessary for government to provide a lot of the things that could allow individuals to lead a good life.

We in the United States have been relatively free of a lot of those things. We didn't have to fight against domestic tyrannies. Wars were not fought on our own shores. We have less of a history of looking to the government to help solve our problems—a banding together to collectively deal with social challenges. That history has led to different values and different priorities.

Nobody in the United States looks upon, for instance, our high murder rates as a good thing—that's obviously nuts. But what happens is that people who are against further government restrictions on guns truly seem to believe that governments restricting an individual's ability to own weapons is somehow a fundamental impingement on their freedom. Most people in Europe don't see it that way.

Part of the problem in bringing the United States closer to some

of the social-democratic policies and priorities that have become the standard in Europe is just that these kinds of questions are approached with different values and in different historical contexts.

*In American politics there has been very obvious polarisation in recent years, although you could say it goes back decades—you've written quite a lot about it yourself. That polarisation has made it very difficult for the Democrats to win elections and you could argue it also encourages factional divisions inside the party. From the Democrats' point of view, how do you think these external and internal tensions can be diminished, as in the more consensual politics characteristic of the most progressive Nordic societies in Europe?*

That's a really great question also. Polarisation, and intense partisanship, is probably the most important problem facing American democracy. It lies at the root of a lot of the pathologies that are currently ripping apart our political system. There are two different ways of approaching this—both are equally important and valid.

Some of this is institutional. There are a lot of scholars and observers who believe that some polarisation could be diminished by certain institutional innovations. I'm not talking here about the big things that often get the most attention—the undemocratic nature of the Senate, the archaic and sometimes anti-majoritarian electoral college [for the presidency]—not because those things are not problematic from a 'small-d' democratic perspective but because those things are going to be hard to change. But we have a whole variety of other institutional norms now in the United States that increase, or contribute to, polarisation and partisanship.

One of them is our primary system which, inadvertently at this point, has created a real incentive: it has facilitated more extreme candidates winning. Part of this is because you can do that without winning a majority in a primary. Part of it is because gerrymandering has made so many districts safe: everybody knows whether a Democrat or a Republican is going to win.

The candidates running in primaries have really no incentive to appeal not just to voters in the other camp but even to voters in the

middle, because the incentive is to turn out the extremists, the people who are most likely to vote. So if primaries were devised to require a) [that] a majority would actually win the vote, [while] b) doing something about gerrymandering to diminish the safe seats, you might get the incentives for more moderate candidates. This also lies behind a push for rank-choice voting, which has become more of a cause for people who are interested in diminishing polarisation and extreme partisanship.

The other part of the problem is social: in addition to institutions that have increased the incentives for extremism, we now have a country that is extremely divided—geographically, by neighbourhood, socio-economically. Now these are longer-term problems, trends that have been building up over decades. But no matter how many institutional innovations we come up with, we are going to have to deal with the underlying socio-economic trends that have created such divisions in our society.

Americans are interacting with, living with, participating in civil-society organisations with—rather than a cross-section of their fellow citizens—people who are very much like them. Until we address these underlying divisions, it's going to be very hard to push back against the negative partisanship—not just dislike of the policies of the other side but the sense that the other side is not a legitimate participant in the democratic process—unless citizens learn to understand each other, interact with each other and recognise that we're all part of the same small-d democratic system.

*A recent survey showed that around three-quarters of Democrat voters and about three-quarters of Republican voters saw those who voted for the other side as people who would bully to get their way if they could. In other words, a very high proportion of Democrat and Republican voters simply do not see those who vote for the other party as legitimately doing so. In all the recent arguments about voter suppression and so on, this sense has come to the fore. That would tend to bear out your claim about this lack of contact, this lack of dialogue between people from different persuasions.*

Absolutely, the survey data are consistent on this. It's about, as you said, equal for both Democrats and Republicans. If you ask questions about which party represents the greatest threat to the democratic system today, you get relatively equal numbers of Republicans and Democrats saying: 'It's the other party.' Are they willing to play by the rules of the game? Again, large percentages of both parties believe that the other side is unwilling to do so.

There are important differences. Whatever you think of the policies of the Democratic Party, it is indeed now the Republican Party that is committing the most obvious and dangerous violations of the rules of the game—the rules that enable our democratic system to flourish and persist, that allow us to compete from one election to the next. I don't want to equate those two things: the Republicans have a lot more to answer for as far as protecting our democratic system [is concerned].

But this is a real problem. We can see it, for instance, in the reaction to a bunch of Supreme Court decisions.

It is extremely problematic the way the conservative majority on the Supreme Court was appointed—the fact that the Republicans played fast and loose with the rules of the game to avoid allowing the appointment of one Supreme Court justice in the end of [Barack] Obama's presidency and then rushed through Coney Barrett at the end of [Donald] Trump's. That is absolutely an egregious breach of the norms of democratic policy.

That said, the problem now has become that decisions that you could see good cases for on both sides now no longer are judged on their merits. The assumption is—partially for this reason—that these decisions are not based on legitimately differing interpretations of the constitution, of the rule of law, of the correct balance between the legislative and the judicial branches, but rather are simply partisan.

So Democrats just approach these decisions, not from debating the legalities, debating what it is that the constitution says, debating what types of decisions should be decided by the political process as opposed to the judiciary, but simply based on the assumption that the

judges are making decisions because they are Republicans and radical conservatives. This makes it impossible for us to come to compromises. Because, as you said, the starting point is that the other side is not putting forward legitimate arguments but is simply arguing out of a desire to screw the other side in a reactionary—and I mean that in the literal sense—kind of way.

*From a European perspective, you would say the answer to the problem of a very partisan and divided Supreme Court is to have members of your supreme judicial authority appointed by an independent judicial commission—or some similar body which guaranteed that judges were impartial and weren't simply there expressing a particular political perspective. Indeed, you'll be aware that what's been at issue in Europe in recent times vis-à-vis Poland has been precisely the desire of the Law and Justice party in power to make political appointments in the way that is understood as the norm in the United States but is very much seen as threatening the rule of law from a European perspective. I can see why the Democrat response to what has happened is to say 'we need to pack the courts with our judges', but that doesn't seem to move the argument forward. What is the right solution in that context—as there is a huge crisis now—to the Supreme Court problem?*

Packing the Supreme Court is not only anti-democratic—it's just a dumb idea, because what that means, of course, is that the Republicans will do the same thing. Democrats are acting out of frustration.

One other issue that has got a lot of press recently in the United States is Democrats in a variety of races, at the state and local level, supporting with money, with ads, extremist Trumpist candidates, on the theory that these people are going to prove to be less electable than their moderate Republican counterparts. So the goal is just to win, despite the fact that that might require promoting people who are really trying to undermine the liberal and democratic nature of the United States. This is the kind of thing—and again I'm not equating the two parties—that we have devolved into, which is

wanting to win at any cost, come hell or high water, regardless of the long-term implications.

Ideally, as you said, you would have judges appointed in an impartial way. Given the United States' history, you have to think about the political reforms not just that are ideal but are possible. Other things that have been suggested that might help—that are non-partisan in the sense that they have no direct bearing on who will win the most number of judgeships—are to limit the terms and ensure that they're staggered in such a way so that each president, at the very least, gets a certain number of judges. So they don't have the ability to manipulate the rules of the game—that one president, as happened with the Republicans, gets to appoint more than his or her fair share.

There are institutional reforms that would not favour one side over the other but would allow some tamping down of the intense partisanship that has come to mark almost every aspect of our system. There are reforms that are feasible in the sense that they could actually be passed, given the American political system, that would eliminate some of the high-stakes, pressure-filled aspects of Supreme Court nominations.

But even things that are sensibly non-partisan become so difficult to do once that level of polarisation and extremism becomes high, because everybody sees any victory by the other side as potentially problematic, as a loss rather than a reasonable compromise. It's a vicious circle that feeds upon itself—with the loser being the American people and the small-d democratic system.

*You mentioned the Senate earlier. That's been one of the sources of argument where, because of the way that the demographics to which you pointed in the US work out, it's very difficult for the Democrats to get a majority, even if they have greater votes in Senate elections than the Republicans. One argument that has been made in that context is at least agreement could be sought on bringing an end to the use of the filibuster, which has prevented decisions going through which would have had, perhaps, majority support. Is that something that can be*

*addressed as one of these more modest reforms that might make some progress?*

These are such vexing questions in a contemporary context. The filibuster is a ridiculous institutional measure. It's obviously anti-democratic in a whole variety of ways. But the problem is short-*versus* long-term and how those two can conflict in intensely polarised situations.

The Democrats have control, theoretically, of both houses of Congress and the presidency [in advance of the mid-term elections]. The filibuster means that the amount of things that they can get passed is very limited. That is anti-democratic: they won—they should be able to do things. However, if the Democrats scrap the filibuster now, let's say to pass a federal law protecting *Roe [v Wade]*, what's going to happen? When the Republicans come back into office, and they get a majority, which there is every reason to believe that they might, they will do exactly the same thing.

Then you will have a federal law perhaps that bans abortion even more widely than it's currently being banned at the state level now. This is really the problem, which is things that make sense in the short term have problematic implications over the long term if you cannot trust your opponent, if you believe that they are a threat to the system. The same argument about the filibuster was made before. Biden really wanted to pass all these electoral reforms to protect our system. But of course the problem was that if the Democrats eliminated the filibuster to do so, it would make it much easier for the Republicans to do the same when they returned to power and enact laws that the Democrats would then feel were threatening.

I don't know what the right answer is. I know that the filibuster is bad because it stymies the ability of the political system to get stuff done. It stymies the will of the people in so far as parties that win elections can't do what they said to the voters they would do.

But in a situation where your concern is that the other party is going to come in and do something that you cannot accept, that you feel is not just bad policy—higher taxes or changes in social policy—

but [is] to eliminate a woman's right to choose or push through Supreme Court nominees that you think are extreme, then you start to think: 'Maybe it's better for me not to eliminate the filibuster now, because I don't trust my opponents not to do something even worse should they get power.' We're in a kind of doom loop that cannot be broken unless we first figure out some way to moderate these parties so that they can co-operate with each other a little bit more and see the long game, as opposed to just the short one.

*You have given a number of reasons why Democrats might feel frustrated at the moment despite, nominally, having control of both houses of Congress and the presidency. But there clearly is a worry that there could be losses to the Republicans in the mid-term elections coming up, such that the House of Representatives could be lost as well as the Senate. There is even, of course, the nightmare scenario of a return of someone like Trump, if not Trump himself, to the White House in 2024. How do you think these scenarios can best be avoided by the Democrats—given the difficulties, with the best will in the world, they have faced in trying to implement their agenda since the election of Joe Biden?*

That's really a great question. I think that scenario is not at all implausible: the Republicans make real gains potentially in both houses of Congress at the mid-terms and we have the next presidential election between Biden, who says he wants to run despite his age, and someone [who is] perhaps not Trump but Trump without the extra lunacy—a [Ron] DeSantis kind of character—which seems very likely. Given Biden's approval ratings, the chances of him winning I wouldn't bet my retirement savings on.

What can be done? This is the debate that's going on within the Democratic party. A lot of people think that, in addition to the institutional problems that we talked about, Biden's inability to pass a lot of the legislation he wanted [to enact] and therefore to improve the economy, which by all accounts is voters' most pressing concern—Can I pay my bills? Is my rent going up? Do I have the money to send

my children to college? What is my healthcare costing?—is bad for [him].

The other issues the Democrats tear themselves apart over are social and cultural issues, which are of course the ones that Republicans stress the most—precisely because these are the issues where they feel, correctly, that the Democrats are weakest. Republicans talk about how terrible the economy is, but their own policies tend to be not particularly popular. They tend to really focus on these social and cultural issues where Democrats are quite vulnerable. Trying to tamp down on the salience of those would do Democrats a lot of good—but that’s a very sensitive topic within the Democratic Party.

SEVEN  
ITALY: (STILL) NOT FOLLOWING  
RUSSIA'S CUE

NATHALIE TOCCI

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IT WOULD BE *fair to say that the social-democratic Party in Italy has a quite specific trajectory: emerging from the Italian Communist Party, which had taken a 'Eurocommunist' distance from Moscow, it morphed over the decades into the Democrats of the Left and now simply the Democratic Party. While there have been ups and downs in popular support over that time, however, the trend has been one of secular decline. And I've lost count of the number of left-wing activists from the NGO world who have bemoaned what they have seen as the PD's misplacement of its moral compass. Do you think the party has a clear sense of where it goes in this decade, and does it have the capacity to recover its one-time strength?*

It's useful to divide this period up, beginning with the end of the cold war and therefore eventually the morphing of the Communist

Party into what has now become the Democratic Party. In that journey, it's useful to first mark the evolution during the 'liberal international order' period and then try to understand and unpack what happened afterwards—with the demise or, at the very least, the weakening of that liberal international order.

If you take the first 30 years after the end of the cold war, you have a social democracy in Italy that goes along a journey that is not dissimilar to the journey undergone by other social-democratic parties. So at the time in which indeed this was the liberal international order—'the end of history'—inevitably, perhaps, given the international context, you had a social democracy that moved from the left to the centre.

The journey that the Democratic Party has been on has been fundamentally the same—*mutatis mutandis* depending on different national contexts—as the journey that the Labour Party has been on in the United Kingdom or the social democrats have been on in Germany or in other countries. I don't see something that is fundamentally different in that respect.

The move to the centre, in the Italian context, has essentially meant the morphing of the left of Christian democracy [and its] joining together with the right of the Communist Party. That's basically what the Democratic Party is. [So] indeed people that recognise themselves more [on] the left of the centre-left feel increasingly unrepresented.

The moment in which this came to its apex in Italy was under Matteo Renzi [as PD leader and prime minister]. In many respects, Renzi was [Italy's] Tony Blair. But—and this is why I would divide it up into different periods—that period came to a close.

A defining moment would be the elections in 2018, which saw for the first time the coming into office of a government that did not represent the traditional division between left and right, but rather the new 'vertical' division: the open/closed, internationalist/nationalist, establishment/anti-establishment divide. All of a sudden the Democratic Party not only had moved to the centre, but also became

increasingly [associated] with the globalist, Europeanist and therefore anti-nationalist, anti-populist agenda.

Now, this meant that on the one hand it gained back some support among those, including of the left, that felt uncomfortable with the nationalist variant—mainly captured by the Five Stars Movement—but it also alienated others. Not only was there a movement to the centre but there was also an increasing association with the establishment.

Added to this is the fact that essentially the Democratic Party has been in government since the fall of [Silvio] Berlusconi. Since the [Mario] Monti government in Italy, [it] has been in government most of the time—and often not having won elections. Without getting into the nitty-gritty of Italian politics, this has largely been the product of the fact that the Democratic Party has increasingly become associated with the state.

The way in which the Democratic Party would put it is that it represents responsibility in the perma-crisis that we're living in: the eurozone crisis, migration, Brexit, the pandemic, now the war. This is how they portray themselves.

In the journey that the Democratic Party has been on—in the context of this rise of nationalist populism, not only in Italy and Europe but also the United States—this has marked a different period. It has gone beyond 'only' the shifting of the Democratic Party to the centre. It's also an increasing association of the Democratic Party with the state, with responsibility, but also with Europe, with the international community. It's the anti-nationalist party, by definition, very clearly also in terms of its positioning now with the war in Ukraine.

It's the only party that has taken a very strong and firm stance against Russia. Other parties, for very different reasons—whether it's because of the nationalist-populist nod and wink to the Kremlin, business interests, energy interests, you name it—have all been rather ambiguous on the war. The Democratic Party has really kept the bar

straight. And this, as I said, has won it support on the one hand but has also created new problems on the other.

*That reminds me of how in the period of the Soviet Union, the Soviet Communist Party condemned the Italian Communist Party for some expression of dissidence which was not deemed legitimate. L'Unità, the Communist Party newspaper, replied: 'There are no Communist Vaticanans.' And from what you are saying, it still seems the case that the Democratic Party has a healthy scepticism about what comes out of Moscow in that regard.*

*I want to turn now to the international level and your prime area of expertise, because the war in Ukraine has obviously reminded all of us that international solidarity has to be at the heart of any social-democratic project. And probably more than anyone else in Europe, you have been thinking through over the years what a progressive European international policy means in today's world. So can you sketch what that looks like? And, specifically, since the phrase 'feminist foreign policy' has entered official discourse in social-democrat-led countries—in Sweden eight years ago and latterly, under the new German coalition—how do you think foreign policy can indeed be feminist?*

Okay, three points and then a few words on feminist foreign policy. Point number one: what is a progressive foreign policy?

As European countries, it's a European foreign policy, meaning it's a foreign policy that acknowledges the fact that there are no national, and therefore nationalist, solutions to the major global challenges of our age. Whether this is security, digital, climate, energy, demography—you name it—there are no nationalist solutions. That recognition automatically means that we need to try and project national interests through a foreign policy within a European setting.

The second pillar of what a progressive foreign policy is should be that it puts climate and the energy transition at the core. This means giving far greater emphasis than what has been done up until now to especially climate-adaptation policies. Climate-mitigation policies can largely be leveraged through the private sector, whereas

climate adaptation—which is less profitable in many respects—does require the role of the state and the public sector, of institutions, in a far greater way. Looking at the other side of the coin, putting climate and the transition at the centre also means developing a foreign policy that accounts for the social, economic and therefore also political and geopolitical implications and consequences of the transition.

The energy transition is going to go ahead regardless. Other transitions have happened in the past. There's been the transition from wood to coal, coal to oil, and there will be the transition from oil and gas on to renewables, and from renewables to something else. Probably even in our lifetime, we're going to end up looking at renewables as being prehistoric forms of green technologies. So the transition will go ahead. The point is that, given the climate crisis, it needs to happen at a much, much, much faster pace than previous transitions. Given the magnitude of the change and given the speed at which it needs to take place, this is a revolution.

All revolutions have winners and they have losers. The losers have to be compensated and they have to be brought along on this journey. This means compensating the losers inside our own societies—this is obviously not the subject of foreign policy—but also compensating the potential losers within and between countries of the transition in neighbouring countries in the wider world. This is something, which has not at all featured in the foreign-policy discussion, which should be at the core of what a progressive foreign policy should look like.

The third pillar, which brings us closer to the debate over the war in Ukraine, is how to reconfigure the relationship with the 'global south'. It has been quite striking how, notwithstanding the obscenity of this war and the fact that, looking at it from a European standpoint, the right and the wrong is just so blatant, that has not been that obvious in other parts of the world. A progressive foreign policy needs to ask itself difficult questions as to why that is the case.

I don't think there is one answer and I don't think there is one policy in response. It has partly got to do with self-criticism. It has

partly got to do with acceptance. There has to be a degree of acceptance, because otherwise we will never go beyond a Eurocentric foreign policy—an acceptance that our wars are not everyone's wars.

But there also has to be an element of outreach and engagement and trying to unpack all those many shades of grey, trying to avoid as much as possible that the world recrystallises into a *west-versus-rest* dynamic—in which, let's face it, we're going to have the short straw in tomorrow's world. So we have all of the interest in unpacking those shades of grey, rather than pushing countries necessarily to belong in a black-or-white world.

Now, [as to] what feminist foreign policy should look like, [there is] the obvious—getting more women involved. Which is always a good and important thing to the extent that there are not enough of them, particularly in certain sectors of foreign policy: security, defence and I would add industry, energy and finance. I'm looking here at foreign policy as the external dimension of all policies, and that's what we should have in mind when we think about foreign policy.

But a feminist foreign policy should also—perhaps principally—be about how you insert in the way in which you do foreign policy ways and means that can be more 'female' in nature (which means that men can have them too). And as applied to those three areas that I was referring to earlier, how do you inject that greater degree of empathy and listening and understanding?

These are all qualities which are stereotypically associated with women more than men. But, of course, it does not mean that men don't and can't have them. That's the main way in which I would understand feminist foreign policy: it's the way in which foreign policy is done, rather than only how many women you have sitting around the table.

EIGHT  
FRANCE: A PHOENIX FROM THE  
ASHES?

BRUNO CAUTRÈS

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THE PARTI SOCIALISTE, *the main force for social democracy in France in recent decades, has certainly not had its challenges to seek. In the 2017 presidential election, the outgoing president, François Hollande, did not stand again, so unpopular had he become, for a second term. The socialist candidate came fifth in the election. The party's public funding was reduced and it had to sell its historic headquarters in Rue de Solferino in Paris. This year, things got even worse as the mayor of Paris, Anne Hidalgo, who was well known, contested the presidential election on behalf of the Socialist Party and failed even to secure 2 per cent support. How have things come to this point?*

You cannot explain such a collapse because of the socialist candidate. You cannot explain such an amazing, negative result with only one factor. It would be just too easy to attribute the situation to the candidates. I'm talking of the candidates in the plural, because actu-

ally it is two elections: five years ago with Benoît Hamon and this year with Anne Hidalgo—two very different candidates.

It is the presidential election where the individual factor—the capacity of the candidates to fit the expectations of French citizens towards the role of the French president—[comes into play but] you cannot explain it just by that. It is much more fundamental.

One long-term explanation is that over recent decades the left, and particularly the centre left, [was] used to governing the country. If you take the last 30/40 years, the *Parti Socialiste* was running the country for many years. When you govern the country for many years, at one stage it is quite difficult to renovate the political message. Maybe also people have the past in their minds.

There is another explanation which is medium-term. The mandate of Hollande, the last socialist president elected in 2012, before Emmanuel Macron, [became associated] with a lot of disillusionment inside the left—with the left, and particularly the Socialist Party, amazingly divided on the economic issues. Part of the left has a very negative evaluation of that last socialist mandate, saying it was not the ‘true’ left: it was too preoccupied by economic competition, [including] at the European level.

In France, the left is not completely united on the European question. Part of the left would like to get another Europe—Jean-Luc Mélenchon and his *La France insoumise* but also part of the socialists. They consider that we have talked too much to the French population [about the] need to fit with economic competition, because of the European level.

It is probably all of that—outside, of course, of the most important [explanation], which is [beyond] the case of France, the crisis of social democracy in Europe. It is not only in France that social democracy has so many difficulties in talking to citizens about what exactly it means to be left today. Everyone is going to tell you that ‘left’ is social justice and redistribution but, once you say so, that doesn’t tell [you] anything about the means and the recipients of social justice—who deserves, who needs social justice. Not only the French but also the

other European social-democratic parties are in a difficult position responding to these questions.

The other thing, which is a more short-term consideration, is the Macron factor. When Macron was elected, he was saying: 'I'm going to take the best of the right, the best of the left.' Particularly during Covid-19, with 'whatever it costs'—the position of Macron, supporting the French economy, supporting French citizens, whatever it cost—was a message that probably responded to part of the left, which is the centre left, that the state needs to be there in case of major crises. This is what Macron did during Covid-19, so all of that created a negative spiral for the socialist candidate.

Long before the election, Hidalgo had a very good profile. She managed to be re-elected mayor of Paris—which is not nothing, to get elected mayor of the capital. She also had a position at the intersection between social justice, ecology, citizenship, democracy and public service. That is quite a good position for the centre left.

She had never been a minister before, so she was quite fresh, quite new. Also, a positive aspect was that she's a mayor. When you ask the French if they trust politics, the only level they trust is the mayor, the local level, because the mayor is the incarnation of responding to concrete questions and problems.

Some people would tell you that the way Hidalgo was selected did not create a very positive mood. She was nominated the socialist candidate without an open primary. It was just a vote of the party members, with only two candidates, Hidalgo and Stéphane Le Foll (a former minister of Hollande). That was not a proper open primary, yet five years ago Hamon was elected with an open primary—and it was again a very, very difficult result.

So I don't think the mechanism of selecting Hidalgo was the problem. It's much more a fundamental question of what it means to be left when you have Macron saying 'whatever it costs' during Covid-19 and when Macron is also saying that the state should be strong—not only strong but also efficient.

It is those fundamental difficulties that explain such an amazing

collapse. And it is just amazing that the socialist candidate in France gets less [support] than some perfectly unknown candidates. It is saying something about the situation of the Socialist Party and probably that we have seen in that election a complete switch in the different weights inside the left.

The socialists, over the last decades, were habituated to being the dominant actor of the left, when the communists or the ecologists were the minorities inside the left. Today, the situation is completely different. *La France insoumise*, the party of Mélenchon, is the dominant one.

*La France insoumise is now, as you say, the principal party on the left. Before the elections to the Assemblée nationale it was the core of a new alliance formed to contest the elections, La Nouvelle Union populaire, écologique et sociale (NUPES), which the Socialist Party, the greens and others joined and which obtained quite a respectable result in the parliamentary elections. Indeed, now Macron, re-elected as president, finds it quite difficult to secure a majority in the Assemblée nationale.*

*A few years ago there were the gilets jaunes manifestations in France. Since then, the idea of trying to find a way of bringing together the ecological and the social, rather than those being counterposed, has been a lively discussion on the French left. That phrase 'ecological and social' is clearly in the name of the new alliance. Do you think that this may offer a way to renew social democracy and the left in general in France and does it have any lessons for social democracy elsewhere in Europe—where, as you say, there are many challenges too?*

The creation of the NUPES, the new left coalition, is one of the major surprises of that election. The strategic actor was Mélenchon, the far-left candidate, who for the second time got a very good result in the presidential election: in 2017 he got nearly 20 per cent of the vote; this year he got 22 per cent. On the night of the first round, at one stage we were thinking that maybe he would qualify for the second—it was not a big margin [*vis-à-vis* the far right candidate, Marine Le Pen].

In a very few days, the other actors of the left, the socialists and the ecologists, just admitted defeat—admitted that the dominant actor was now *La France insoumise* and Mélenchon. That recognition obviously facilitated the creation of the NUPES.

As you said, there were, for many years, some tendencies among left voters to call for unity. During the electoral campaign this year there was a ‘popular primary’. It was a citizens’ initiative coming from the left. They wanted to oblige the candidates of the left for the presidential election to unify. That was quite successful in the [left] electorate. Nearly half a million voters decided to select Christiane Taubira, a former left minister who finally decided to abandon [her independent campaign] before the presidential election.

There were obvious signs within the left [of] asking for unity. I know that asking for unity doesn’t say anything—it’s not because you have one candidate that there is a unified programme—but that was a clear sign that inside the left there was an expectation to respond to the Macron phenomenon [with] more unity of the left. All that context probably facilitated the creation of the NUPES, when Mélenchon said to the other actors: ‘We are going to go unified to the legislative elections, but you will get your own parliamentary group—we are not going to absorb you.’

The relative success of the NUPES can be explained because we have a majority system. With the majority system for the parliamentary election, if you have only one candidate of the left in every constituency it is much easier for that candidate to qualify for the second round.

We know the NUPES is not fully unified. The way that the socialists, *les insoumis* and the ecologists look at the socio-economic issues is not exactly the same, but it is a very new political construction. It’s really too early to evaluate the future of it. Is it going to create something new, which is a feeling inside the left, particularly the new generation of MPs who know that they have been elected because of that unity? Is it going to create a feeling of identification with the NUPES, so that in five years a new generation of deputies

are going to say: 'I am NUPES: I am not socialist or ecologist—I am NUPES'?

That's the major challenge for the NUPES, which is to create a feeling of unity not only to win seats but on public-policy issues. For the moment, we can see that they are keeping their unity towards Macron. Macron would like to attract the centre left by saying: 'Because I am not in an absolute majority, I'm going to navigate between centre left and centre right to create an absolute majority.' The socialists and the ecologists are resisting that attraction to Macron.

We are not facing yet the very hard time of the legislature when we are going to talk about reforming the pension system—particularly the finance law and tax. Macron said that there will be no new tax: he's not going to increase deficits, he's not going to increase tax. But we know that the socio-economic situation of France is going to get harder and harder because of inflation, because the conditions [under which] France is getting some loans on the markets are going to be more difficult. The debt is going to get higher. Very difficult decisions are going to be faced by France, so we shall see.

But for the moment, [the NUPES] has created something quite positive inside the left—not only for the left parties but also the left voters. The situation of the left since the end of Hollande—I would say 2016, when Hollande renounced running again—for six, seven years has been very, very difficult. Finally, it has a positive message.

*Let's finish on that positive note, with the prospect of a future which might be one of a pluralist left, as Lionel Jospin talked about many years ago ...*

Yes, that's true.

*... and represents indeed a challenge not just for France but elsewhere across Europe, where other social-democratic and radical parties have to find ways to liaise and deal with each other positively.*

NINE  
BREXIT AND BRITISH LABOUR

PATRICK DIAMOND

Patrick Diamond is a professor of public policy at the Queen Mary University of London and fulfilled a number of roles in the Labour governments in Britain prior to 2010, including in 10 Downing Street.

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*IT'S hard to avoid starting any conversation about politics in Britain without beginning with 'Brexit'. But I wanted to start with it specifically in terms of where the Labour Party stands vis-à-vis the wider European social-democratic family. The prevailing view in Labour has been simply to accept Brexit as a fait accompli. But how do you see relationships between Labour and the broader social-democratic family in Europe developing over the years in that context—given that, even in the past, they weren't always very close?*

Yes, that's true. The history of Labour's contact with other European social-democratic parties is one in which there have been periods of closeness and contact and influence, but more often there

has been some distance between the British Labour Party and the continental European centre-left parties.

Where we stand today is that there are quite different processes under way. One relates to the Labour Party's policy position on the question of Brexit—whether the Brexit settlement that the Conservative government under Boris Johnson negotiated is sustainable, and what Labour should say about that at the next general election. And then there's another quite separate process, which is about the contacts that take place between British Labour and other national social-democratic parties across Europe.

Of course, while we might suggest that those issues are separate, they're also intimately connected, because if Labour's stance on Brexit is one in which it is nervous and afraid of talking about the European question, then that makes it less likely that it will have constructive ties to its sister parties across Europe—that is the situation we're currently in.

The Labour Party is very worried about the European issue. It fears that if it talks too much about Europe it will alienate a crucial element of its working-class electoral constituency, so the general mood in the party is to say as little about Europe as possible. And that means that constructive contact and dialogue with other centre-left parties in Europe is becoming much more difficult.

Labour has in the last 12 years experienced four consecutive general-election defeats. People on the left and right of the party would agree that it needs to fundamentally rethink its position—its ideas, its programmes, its strategy, its message. And the evidence from history is that such a task is done well in part by having sustained contact with other centre-left parties, which provide constructive influences and ideas and intellectual stimulus. So if Labour wants to get its act together and be back in an election-winning position, then it needs to have that contact with the centre left across Europe, which at the moment frankly it doesn't do enough.

*One aspect of that wider debate in Europe about the future of social*

*democracy touches on the very issue you mentioned, which was the concern within Labour about its working-class support and the degree to which it seemed to be eroded by Brexit in the seats in northern England that have been described as the 'red wall'. Elsewhere in Europe, there's been a whole debate about that. For example, Thomas Piketty has argued that we've seen the emergence of a 'Brahmin left' of parties which appeal to university-educated supporters and seem unable to sustain the support they traditionally drew, particularly from the manual working class; he would argue that what needs to be done is to push a more egalitarian agenda. Others might take the view: look at what was done by Olaf Scholtz in Germany in the elections, with his idea of cultural recognition, the so-called Respekt agenda. So that would be an example of what you're talking about, where other parties are involved in discussions about how social democracy can revive, and that's a European-wide debate rather than a purely British one. Supposing that the Labour Party in Britain was more part of that debate, how do you think that would change the discussion about the Red Wall seats?*

The debate about the so-called Red Wall seats implies that the strained relationship between Labour and its working-class support is somehow a new problem, but any cursory glance at history would show that Labour's always had a deeply-contested relationship with its working-class constituency and that continues to this day. There have always been a significant number of working-class voters in Britain who've supported the Conservatives for a variety of reasons.

This underlines why politics can be as much about culture and national identity as it is about economics and class. And there has been a lively debate, really since the late 1950s, among different social-democratic parties across Europe—in Sweden, in Germany, in Britain in particular—about what changes in the class composition of advanced industrial societies mean for social-democratic parties.

This controversy around the Red Wall is just another iteration of that debate and it underlines the ways in which you cannot, as a social-democratic party, take any element of your electoral constituency for granted. Where Labour goes from here is a question

that should be addressed in a European context. British Labour has been interested in the way that Scholz approached the election in Germany and the rhetoric and programme he was developing around the concept of 'respect'—respect for those who do manual jobs as well as for those who do middle-class jobs and have a university education.

So there is definitely an element which is about finding the right language, but also you have to find the right policies. And that comes down to questions about redistribution, about how to make the labour market more egalitarian, about how to deal with some of the challenges around housing, education, the future of industry and the economy. All these points just underline why the dialogue between the British party and other parties in Europe is so important.

*You gave a double answer to my first question. I want to come back to the first component of that—whether the Brexit settlement that has been achieved in Britain, the 'hard' Brexit pursued by Johnson and his colleagues, is sustainable in the long run and whether, by implication, Labour should support it. An argument against that would be that there's been a major economic hit to Britain because of Brexit, as was anticipated by those who argued against it in the first instance. Another would be that the Climate Change Committee in Britain has given a very negative audit of the performance of Britain on its commitments so far and it seems difficult to see how it can really address climate change seriously on a purely national basis, given it's a global concern—without being part of something like the European Union, which can address it on a transnational basis. But is that debate possible in Labour or is this fear still too strong?*

It's a great question. There is some space within Labour for acknowledging that many of the big policy issues of our time do need to be addressed through transnational channels. Climate change is one of those; the other relates to the security situation in Europe, not least because of the crisis over Ukraine and the obvious implications for security of the current actions of the regime in Russia.

Where there is more confusion in British Labour circles is around what to do about the economic dimensions of the European project,

because the current government has gone for a hard-Brexit approach of pursuing maximum regulatory divergence from the EU on the basis that this will increase the competitiveness of the British economy: in an area like financial services, you would be able to break with the rules and regulations that would be used by European financial centres and offer the world a cut-price financial-services proposition that at least some politicians on the right think would generate growth and prosperity.

Even that approach is being exposed as illusory, but what is also happening is that the consequences for trade of being outside the European single market are becoming more evident every day. The current government is also pursuing a 'levelling up' agenda, which is about trying to reduce regional inequality and make the north of England and the Midlands—where these red-wall seats are concentrated—perform better economically and gradually level up performance across the national economy. But all the evidence is that what Brexit has done is make London and the south-east, where there is a strong service sector, pull away even harder from the rest of the country.

So, sooner or later, there is going to have to be a major national re-evaluation of the whole purpose and impact of the Brexit project. But it may well be that we have not reached that point yet—that things will have to get worse before they can get better. Labour has to decide whether it wants to lead that debate or follow it. For reasons not least to do with electoral concerns, at the moment it looks like it's more in the mood to follow than to lead.

*Speaking of electoral concerns, in the two by-elections in June in England—one in a more middle-class constituency in the southwest, which fell to the Liberal Democrats, and the other in the north of England, a more working-class constituency which fell to Labour—there was very heavy tactical voting, under the first-past-the-post British electoral system, in favour of the winning candidate. In the aftermath, Andy Burnham, one of the leading figures in the Labour Party in the north of*

*England, said the party needed to talk about proportional representation. Is it possible, given that the British system is so much of an outlier in Europe, to have that debate seriously now—rather than the old view still prevailing in Labour, that it aims to take over the ‘commanding heights’ of the economy and that demands one commanding party to do it?*

The experience of the Labour government between 1997 and 2010 is very salutary in this regard. Although electoral reform was considered by that government and the [Roy] Jenkins commission was established in 1998 [chaired by the former Labour minister and European commissioner], which looked at the argument for an alternative electoral system for UK-wide elections, in the end the Labour government decided to abandon any proposal for reform of elections to the House of Commons and to stick with the first-past-the-post system.

Some historians will conclude, rightly in my view, that was a major missed opportunity, because if a PR system for the House of Commons had been introduced then that could have had all sorts of beneficial implications for the whole culture of how politics is conducted in Britain. But the opportunity wasn't taken, the rest is history and we are where we are.

It is interesting you mentioned Burnham making clear his position on proportional representation. And it's very striking that some of the major trade unions which are affiliated to the Labour Party are also changing their position. Unison, the big public-sector union, has voted in favour of proportional representation as a policy, [as has] Unite, one of the bigger industrial unions.

So, similar to what happened in the 1980s and early 1990s, the centre left in Britain is being forced by events to rethink its position on whether the correct route to power is to go for absolute majorities in the Commons, but only to be in power sporadically, or whether to seek a more pluralist, coalition-building approach. And the latter is definitely coming more into favour. But it does challenge some of the basic assumptions and culture of the 'Labour movement', because the

Labour movement is all about gaining power via the Labour Party as a majoritarian force.

So the idea of sharing power with other parties—whether it's the Liberal Democrats or the Greens or indeed other political movements—is one that does raise a lot of questions for people in Labour. But there is a sense that the culture is changing. Events, Brexit, the executive-power-hoarding nature of the Johnson administration, the threat that it's posed to the constitution of the UK and some of the basic civilities of politics mean that some major rethinking is under way and there is a chance now for Labour to adopt perhaps a new position on PR, which would put it more in line with the other major European democracies.

*You mentioned threats to the UK constitution and the leader of the Scottish Government and of the Scottish National Party has repeated the call for a further referendum on Scottish independence following the narrowly-defeated referendum of 2014. Labour itself has lost most of its traditional support in Scotland, which at one time was very strong, including quite a bit to the Scottish National Party. Again, some would say that that requires Labour to rethink constitutional reform more generally, including the possibility of a move towards a written constitution which would make for a federal UK, which might be enough to satisfy concerns for autonomy in Scotland and might be an alternative way to address some of the alienation in northern England that's expressed itself through English nationalism. Is that something that can be talked about?*

There is discussion under way about two dimensions of this debate. One is to do with Scotland and the prospect of Scottish independence. The first minister of Scotland, Nicola Sturgeon, has announced that there would be an advisory referendum in September 2023. So this is going to be a very live issue in the coming period. Alongside the question of Scottish independence is also the very important question about the governance of England, which the devolution settlement of the late 1990s introduced by the then Labour Government didn't really address.

As you'll recall, there was devolution to institutions in Wales and Scotland and in a different way in Northern Ireland. There was some discussion about regional government in England and there was a referendum in 2004 on whether to create an elected assembly for the north-east, which failed.

*It failed partly because the devolution plan for the north-east of England was opposed by one Dominic Cummings—one of the prime campaigners against devolution who went on to become one of the prime campaigners for Brexit.*

It's an excellent point. Cummings ran the campaign against the assembly on the basis that more government institutions would waste taxpayers' money and wouldn't deliver any positive outcomes for voters in the north-east of England. He certainly learned how to run an effective campaign in that referendum in 2004 and no doubt applied some of the lessons to the Brexit referendum in 2016—and there was some crossover in the themes between those campaigns.

The other problem was that the model of regional devolution for England that Labour was pursuing at the time was in many ways a very limited one. The devolution of powers would not have been very significant under the Blair government's proposals. They certainly wouldn't have involved any thoroughgoing decentralisation of fiscal power, for example. So many voters took one look at it and said: 'Well, it's not radical enough to be worth the resources and the effort that would be required to really establish the new institution successfully.' And so it was rejected.

But on your question about the direction that Labour takes on constitutional reform and the question of a federal Britain, it does need to rethink in terms of giving more fiscal and policy-making power to Scotland and to accompany that with thinking about what to do in England. The case for a major decentralisation of power is very compelling. But again, just as Labour finds it culturally difficult to envisage sharing power with other political parties, there is also a very strong centralist mindset. Some of the strongest opponents of devolution in the UK historically have come from within

the British Labour Party, so there is also a need for a major rethink there.

I sense that things are moving but there is still some way to go. [The former party leader] Gordon Brown has been tasked by the current leader of the Labour Party, Keir Starmer, to come up with a new constitutional blueprint. He's running a constitutional commission to look in particular at this question of whether there should be a more federal Britain. I think that commission will report sometime next year.

TEN  
POLAND: STRUGGLING FOR A  
HEARING

ANNA PACZEŚNIAK

Anna Pacześniak is professor of politics at the University of Wrocław in Poland.

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ONE OF THE *difficult challenges facing social democracy across Europe in recent times has been populist parties which lack commitment to universal norms, such as the rule of law. How do you think social democrats and other progressives across Europe can help their friends in Poland who want to see the rule of law upheld in the country?*

External support is always welcome. Democrats should help each other and stand in solidarity when populists undermine the rule of law. The left in Poland feels that it is not alone with this problem of populism, neither at the level of the European Parliament nor at the level of civil organisations in Europe—which have taken action against the strict abortion law and hate speech against the LGBT+ community and in defence of migrants' rights at the Polish-Belarusian border, freedom of the media and independent courts.

When Jarosław Kaczyński and his party, Law and Justice, took power in 2015, they made several moves to change the institutional system without changing the constitution. In response, Polish society started to protest. The media in Europe [reported] this protest really well. Street demonstrations were focused not only on issues that see high politics interfere with our daily existence, as in the case of the abortion law, but also on issues that were not linked to people's direct experience, such as the independence of the courts.

Illiberal politicians in Poland were forced to slow, a little, their plans, by the pressure not from Polish citizens but from the European Union, followed by financial threats and the freezing of European funds. There is certainly an expectation on the Polish left that the European Union institutions will not make a rotten compromise with the Polish government, for example, over the payment of money from the recovery fund.

This is the task of social-democratic commissioners and members of the European Parliament—to see to the rules. The matter does not end with the recovery fund: this mechanism, which makes it possible to stop payments to member states that do not respect the rule of law, applies to the whole European Union budget. Europe cannot afford to have populists [snubbing their noses] at it and consolidating their power with European collective money.

Being uncompromising when it comes to respect for universal norms is one thing but European progressives and social democrats should start discussing how to help civil society in member states like Poland or Hungary. After all, one of the ways the populists in power are strangling civil society is by the cutting of public funding. In cases like Poland, it is possible to find a way to channel some of the funds to citizens without going through the populist government. Let's start thinking about it and discussing the benefits and risks of such a solution. That, perhaps, is a task for social democrats and progressives in Europe.

*So you are saying, effectively, that when the European Union says that Poland must meet certain 'milestones and targets' for the monies*

*which are due under the recovery plan to be dispersed, you want to see the European Union institutions be very tough and rigorous about those milestones and targets and not to make compromises which should not be made.*

Yes, for example, Frans Timmermans, a social democrat, is not agreeing to, as I said, a rotten compromise and progressives [should] follow this way.

*Yes, there were divisions in the European Commission over the response to Poland, with Timmermans being one of those dissenting.*

*Let me move on to how the PiS, the Law and Justice Party, has managed to sustain support. One of the ways it's done so has been through its socio-economic policies. You have said, for instance, that for civil-society organisations in Poland life has been made very difficult but some-civil society organisations—those seen as friendly to the government on abortion or family policy—have received lots of support. More generally, welfare policies adopted by the PiS in government have promoted the idea of the family and childbearing and a conventional role for women as wives and mothers. The party has labelled people who have been opposed to this as liberals or, indeed, Communists who are still there somewhere in the system.*

*I know you have said one of the problems that faces the Polish left is the way that the political spectrum in Poland has been defined as the populists versus the liberals and the left has been rather squeezed out. How do you think the left can best respond to this situation, where the populists in power have manipulated their control over the budget to try to win support from people who might otherwise support the left?*

The answer seems simple, although its implementation is not. Poles should understand that, thanks to the progressives, to the left, the [value] the populists in power have [placed] on their socio-economic policies is extremely high. They have to understand that, thanks to the left, people do not have to pay for granting family-linked welfare benefits with the end of the rule of law or human rights or civic freedoms. Leftist parties must convince people that

they are the political force which will guarantee both the welfare state *and* the rule of law.

Definitely the progressives will be more credible in this discourse than the liberals in Poland—although all political parties have understood that to secure popular support, despite the difficult economic situation due to the Russian invasion of Ukraine ([though] not only the Russian invasion), they have to promise something concrete and not leave the impression that only Law and Justice is the friend of ordinary people. Left-wing rhetoric has already begun to be used even by the liberal leader of Civic Platform in Poland, Donald Tusk, who has announced that he will introduce a pilot four-day working week if he wins the next election.

You also touched on the problem of labelling the left as Communists. It is a refrain that recurs less and less frequently because it refers to the old division of the Polish political landscape into post-communist parties and anti-communist parties in the 1990s. Now, with the exception of some of the oldest age groups of voters, such a label hits a void. People are no longer afraid of Communists but they are not waiting and looking out for Communists either—that is clear.

We can return to this issue but it's true that the objective situation of the Polish left is not easy. It is not a question of party organisation, leadership or programme. Of course, it's not a question of seeking external excuses for the parties' problems but, rather, explaining them.

Since the 2005 parliamentary election, a fundamental transformation has occurred in the structure of the context of the Polish political landscape. The left-wing versus right-wing opposition axis, along which political and electoral competition had [hitherto] been organised, has been relegated to the background.

What has become significant and, as we already know, permanent is another dimension of the opposition—between a solidary Poland and a liberal one. The problem of leftist parties is they are in between, because this division is managed by two parties, the nationalist-populist right party, Law and Justice, and the liberal centre-right

party, Civic Platform. For the left, it's an extremely difficult situation because, on a socio-economic level, it is closer to a vision of solidary Poland but [in value terms] to a liberal one. The problem is that, in the minds and emotions of many voters, such an option does not exist.

*One of the things that has been characteristic of social-democratic parties elsewhere in Europe in recent years has been the increasing embrace of gender equality—not adequate from a feminist point of view but increasingly high on the agenda, associated with women taking increasingly prominent positions in social-democratic parties and trade unions and so on. In Poland, however, as in Croatia and in some other countries in central and eastern Europe, there has been a backlash in recent years and the phraseology 'gender ideology' has been used by those who would try to oppose feminism and any progressive ideas around gender. How do you think the left and feminists can best respond to this attack, on 'gender ideology'?*

Indeed, in Poland, progressives and feminists have to fight for basic issues, such as access to sexuality education, safe abortion and respect for minorities. These are issues that have long been settled in European countries, although the example of the United States shows that even in consolidated democracies reproductive health issues can set the public debate on fire.

In Poland, it's also [been] the case from the beginning of the democratic transition. Poland now has one of the most restrictive laws on abortion, which is in practice impossible to perform legally in the country. This is a consequence of a new interpretation of the Polish constitution by the Constitutional Tribunal captured by the ruling party, Law and Justice.

This new interpretation of Polish law was the reason for the huge street protests in the autumn of 2020. The anger and rage, not only of women, then translated into political polls in which the conservative populists from Law and Justice were visibly losing support. The problem is that there have been no elections in Poland since these street protests, so these emotions have so far not removed them from power.

The Polish left failed to make political capital out of this street protest. For me, a clear example of the gap between social change and support for political parties in Poland is the example of young voters. Although now a third of them declare to be left-wing, only one in ten wants to vote for the leftist party. Changes in Polish society, such as increasing secularisation and liberalisation, are not reflected in who is in power.

Voting-behaviour research shows that the priority of progressive parties has to be to mobilise the progressive electorate, to convince them to take part in elections and vote. This electorate is really numerous in Poland but it is discouraged and passive. Previous elections in Poland have shown that the right-wing parties were better at voter mobilisation, so now it is time to change that.

We can expect ‘gender ideology’—of course, it’s not a true definition—to come under attack again before the next election. Already now the leader of Law and Justice, Kaczyński, is mocking transgender people, as if he plans to redirect the election campaign on [values] issues.

With ‘stagflation’ predicted and the economic concerns of average citizens in Poland, who may no longer believe that the current government will get them through difficult times, such a diversion of people’s attention is to the advantage of the ruling national conservatives. What we may yet witness before the elections is pressure from the ultra-Catholic circles on the ruling right-wing parties seeking re-election in 2023.

This was the case in the 2019 general election in Poland, when this milieu used the election-campaign period to force those in power to introduce a law criminalising sexuality education, [presented] by this radical circle as a tool for paedophilia and the demoralisation of children. This is a good indication of the ideological tension in contemporary Poland.

*You have said, and it seems this way from the outside, that you think the Constitutional Tribunal went too far with its ruling in terms of public opinion in Poland and, even beyond feminist circles, many*

*people found the ruling very extreme. Is that also true, do you think, of the attack on LGBT+ rights? We've seen, for example, some local authorities in Poland describe themselves as 'LGBT-free zones'. Is there, perhaps, some hope that maybe those on the extreme right are going too far in that regard as well or do they get a ready audience for that homophobic rhetoric?*

The actions of the right wing in Poland towards the LGBT+ community, by state and local authorities, not only violate European norms but above all hurt people—because LGBT people are not ‘ideologies’, as the president of Poland, Andrzej Duda, said during his campaign in 2020. Discriminatory laws, excluding them from the community by introducing ‘LGBT-free zones’, cause life dramas for specific individuals. So saying that, perhaps, the rhetoric of the Law and Justice Party will go too far and, finally, it’s good news for progressives is a little bit odd but in some way it’s true.

We have to understand that social democrats in Poland are not the main opponent for the national conservatives. As I said, the division is not between right and left: the division is between a solidary Poland identified with Law and Justice and a liberal one represented by Civic Platform. With such a highly polarised landscape the left even had the difficult four-year experience of being an extra-parliamentary party between 2015 and 2019.

In 2019, it was the only political formation in Poland so far to return to parliament. It was [made] possible by the building of a big left-wing coalition between post-communist social democrats from the Democratic Left Alliance, progressives from the new party Spring (*Wiosna*) and the socialist party, Together (*Razem*). The left’s electoral lists also included feminist activists. The building of a big coalition was a good idea for the election.

Now the left faces another electoral dilemma, because the leader of the largest opposition party, Civic Platform, Tusk, is pushing the idea that the democratic opposition should go to the next parliamentary election together, as in Hungary but of course the context was different.

The argument is that, with a proportional electoral law with the d'Hondt formula [for allocating parliamentary seats] as in Poland, only such a strategy has a chance of removing Law and Justice from power [since, applied to multi-member constituencies, d'Hondt somewhat favours larger parties/blocs]. We do not yet know what the left's decision will be.

To a political scientist, it is worth thinking in this direction, because politicians cannot abstract from institutional conditions and the political context. If they want to improve this context, they must first remove from power the people who spoiled the democratic institutions. Perhaps this aim has to push the democratic opposition to go together.

ELEVEN  
HUNGARY'S SOCIALISTS: THE SCARS  
OF REGIME CHANGE

ANDRÁS BÍRÓ-NAGY

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HUNGARY SEEMS to present social democrats—and your think-tank is part of the Foundation for European Progressive Studies network—with a stark version of the challenge across the former Soviet-bloc countries more generally. After the fall of the wall, the predominant western focus was on privatising the state and deregulating markets rather than building civil societies. In that context a populist domestic alternative, combining state authoritarianism and oligarchic capitalism, became politically viable—including for the one-time young liberal Viktor Orbán, as a route to capturing and retaining power, including power over the media.

And Orbán is still there. What narrative do you think Hungarian progressives need to develop to win the argument for Hungary finally becoming a normal democratic society, committed to universal norms, including the rule of law?

To understand why Orbán's illiberal project became viable we have to go back to what Hungarians thought about the regime change and how we evaluate that regime change of 1989 and 1990. And actually what happened was a huge disillusionment—not only with democracy but also with how capitalism worked for Hungarians in the two decades after the regime change.

Unluckily for the Hungarian left, the Hungarian Socialist Party has been blamed for much of the failure of the regime change in the two decades after it, as the Socialist Party was in power in 12 out of those 20 years. So when Orbán had the opportunity to come back, in 2010, Hungarian voters were pretty disillusioned with basically everything that those two decades represented.

They were characterised by decreasing social mobility, increasing social inequalities and very heavy austerity packages. Normally the Hungarian left was the one that had to make these very difficult measures in crisis situations—in the mid-'90s and during the 2008-09 financial crisis as well.

So when Orbán came back, Hungarian people were disillusioned with what democracy could offer to them, because their experience in those two decades was that democracy didn't fulfil the promises of 1990. When the regime change happened, most Hungarians thought democracy would bring economic prosperity, a more stable economy, more secure and well-paid jobs, more social mobility. And in general they wanted to compare Hungary's prospects to what they saw in Austria, which was the role model for many Hungarians at the end of the 80s.

When this didn't materialise—in fact a very difficult period followed the regime change—this disillusionment came. And Orbán lived with this opportunity and from 2010 he introduced a completely new regime.

And why is this disillusionment with democracy so important? It is not because a dictatorship or autocracy would have become popular among Hungarians, but because many Hungarians thought

that if Orbán can offer some protection from all the negative potential changes and dangers in the world then fundamental freedoms or the quality of democracy are secondary—what really matters is existential security and economic prosperity.

*And if I understand you correctly, you are hinting there at some of the more populist social policies that would have been pursued in recent times under Orbán as in Poland—which might be quite conservative from a social-democrat point of view but might have, as you say, offered some sense of security to some people who supported them.*

One of the pillars of Orbán's policy is of course to offer protection from cultural liberalism, as Hungary is a conservative society from a cultural point of view. Orbán is fighting everything which can be considered as culturally liberal. Most recently, the LGBT community has been a target in Hungary—just like in Poland. But also the huge anti-migration campaigns that Orbán has been doing were targeting this core conservative audience.

But, at the same time, what you have to know about Hungarian society is that, when it comes to economic and social issues, this is a left-wing country. The demand for state intervention is quite high. The demand for free healthcare is pretty high, for an active role of the state in decreasing inequalities is also high. The support for progressive tax is also high—and so on.

So, economically speaking, Hungarian society is demanding left-wing measures. And where Orbán proves to be quite pragmatic is that, when it comes to economic policy, [while] it is true that he is quite neoliberal concerning labour rights or the tax system, at the same time he introduces measures that are interpreted by the poorer segments of society as [indicative of] a government which cares about them.

A very good example is the 2022 electoral campaign, when Orbán introduced price caps as a measure to fight inflation—at least in terms of petrol prices and some basic food products. There is another landmark policy of Orbán, one of the most popular—freezing

utility prices. This is not related to the most recent economic crisis: it is a nine-year-old policy measure that Orbán has been putting forward. But it is absolutely popular in Hungarian society.

Even left-wing voters think that this is a good decision, that Orbán is trying to freeze utility costs—not only gas prices but also water and electricity. In the current economic crisis, the Orbán government will not be able to maintain it in its original form, but it has been clearly one of the pillars of Orbán's support during the last decade.

These are just a few measures which show that if some important parts of the Hungarian left are linked in Hungarian society's minds to neoliberal policies, to austerity, to increasing unemployment, to decreasing opportunities for the poor in terms of social mobility, then it is very, very difficult to climb back. This is a major difference to some of the more successful western-European examples—like Spain or Portugal, or we could even mention the Scandinavian countries—where the left can claim credibility when it comes to economic and social left-wing ideas.

The Hungarian left has to fight its legacy—the legacy of those 12 years when it was in government. Despite the fact that the Hungarian left has been trying to come back with more left-wing ideas over the last decade, the moves of Orbán—also the moves of the formerly far-right, now a little bit more centre-right *Jobbik* party, which is also economically left, by the way—make the economic and social left a very difficult and very competitive field.

*You touched there on some of the support which Orbán has secured, first of all on illiberal grounds, as with anti-LGBT+ arguments, and then also on social grounds. And I am conscious that there is quite a big division in the demography of that support which I wanted to discuss with you.*

*In a way, while it is perhaps again an extreme case, this challenge is for social democrats not just in central and eastern Europe but across Europe as a whole. That is to say that they are strong in the*

*cities, especially the big cities and particularly in the capital, where social networks are strongest. That is where progressives are hegemonic. But in the small towns, especially the villages and particularly in rural areas, households are more disconnected and even isolated from one another and populists hold sway with little opposition. And so in the recent election the leading progressive candidate was actually a small-c Catholic conservative from a provincial town, in recognition of this barrier to extending support for progressive politics in Hungary. How do you think progressives can become better at offering a message which can be more widely supported across what in France they would call 'the popular classes', throughout Hungary as a whole?*

Where Hungarian progressives are is the result of a decade-long process, which cannot be reversed from one day to another. And what you have to understand about the major trends, when it comes to the support for [Orbán's] *Fidesz* and also for more progressive forces in Hungary, is a major change in the composition of the voting bases.

What happened with the *Fidesz* voting base over the last decade is that it became more rural than ever. Orbán's voting base also became older than ever. And the *Fidesz* party became more over-represented among lower-educated segments of the society than previously.

The more progressive side of Hungarian politics ran as a united opposition at the last election, so we could not talk about a separate green party or a separate liberal and left-wing side of the political spectrum—all of them united their forces and ran together. The voting base of this united opposition became more centred in the big cities, especially in Budapest, which became the biggest stronghold of the more progressive Hungarian political forces. The Hungarian progressives are more popular among the youngsters and also became the frequent choice for the higher-educated people.

Unluckily for Hungarian progressives, this is a minority that I am talking about. There are more people in the countryside. There are

more lower-educated than higher-educated people. Also the older segments of the society are more active at elections than the younger segments.

In other parts of the European Union and in western Europe you know very well these trends. It is not unique what we see in Hungary, but it is true that what you saw in the last election was very, very extreme.

A good example is what happened in Budapest: out of the 18 electoral districts in Budapest, the opposition won 17 and lost only one, while in the countryside, out of the 88 districts, the opposition won only two and *Fidesz* won 86. This shows very well how divided this country has become, geographically speaking as well—so not only in terms of values or other cleavages but also in different demographics.

What can be the solution? This situation became possible because the opposition basically disappeared from the small settlements in Hungary. In small villages and in small towns it is distinctly possible that people don't see opposition politicians or activists for years between elections. They only become active when the election campaign comes.

Also the infrastructure of the Socialist Party, which was two or three decades ago very strong all across the country, has weakened quite significantly—especially since 2010 and especially since the Hungarian opposition has been starving, financially speaking. They had to give up many of their rural offices and their party membership is becoming older and less active.

Other, newcomer parties, which became more active or even started to exist after 2010, never managed to build a national network of infrastructure. And this gives a monopoly for *Fidesz* in large parts of the Hungarian countryside. For large parts of the electorate the only reality that exists is the *Fidesz* reality, Orbán's reality.

What doesn't help the Hungarian opposition either is the media landscape, because the opposition is only competitive in the online

sphere: news portals and 'social media'. These are the two major grounds where they are competitive with the Hungarian government. In terms of regional newspapers, radio channels and television, the pro-government media are in a huge, huge majority in this country.

To reach these segments of the society, the lower-educated segments, the more rural and older segments of the society where *Fidesz* is particularly strong, the only way forward would be stronger grassroots activity. And this is not something that can happen from one day to the next. This will be a long process and it will take several years to lay the grounds for a comeback.

*One final question—what help Hungarian progressives need from the rest of Europe. In the European Parliament, the Socialists and Democrats and the liberals have been appalled in recent years by the ways the rule of law has been transgressed under Orbán. There have been the delays in approval of the national recovery plan. There have been endless complaints about the denial of the rule of law in Hungary and arguments between the European Commission and the parliament as to what needs to be done about Hungary in that context. What do you think, looking at it from the inside, Hungarian progressives need in terms of external solidarity, in the face of the challenges Orbán continues to present?*

In the current situation, the only real limitation to Orbán's power is Hungary's EU membership: if Hungary is a member of a club, then Hungary has to respect the values of this club and has to behave as a constructive member of the European Union—not as one which is using veto threats for blackmailing.

Hungarian society's majority is on the side of the opposition in this respect. Hungarian society's western orientation has not been in doubt. My think-tank, Policy Solutions, has been doing quite a lot of research on the attitudes of Hungarians towards the European Union. And in terms of the popularity of EU membership there is always a confident majority on the side of membership.

But here comes the reason why Orbán can get away with being

Eurosceptic in a fundamentally pro-European country. As long as Orbán is not playing with 'Huxit' (Hungary's potential exit from the European Union) but he is criticising the European Union from within—the 'Brussels bureaucrats' and the direction the European Union is taking—then his policies have substantial support, at least among his own voters.

Our most recent survey showed that support is quite low for a potential 'Huxit'. But support is pretty substantial when it comes to the future direction of the European Union—whether we would like more Europe or whether we would like more national sovereignty within the European Union. When you put this question to the Hungarian people, this is quite a competitive fight between the two sides.

Then only roughly half of the Hungarian society is pro-European, in the sense that it not only supports EU membership but also supports a deepening of European integration. The politics of the 'Europe of nations', which is the politics of national sovereignty, has substantial support, at least among *Fidesz* supporters. And this is the reason why Orbán can be Eurosceptic in a political campaign and not lose his core voters at the same time.

But it would be particularly important now—even for Orbán—to reach a compromise with the European institutions, because in the current economic circumstances the Hungarian economy, the Hungarian budget, desperately needs EU funds. Hungary is the only country in the European Union which hasn't signed a recovery plan with the European Commission so far. And if this agreement will not come into place before the end of the year Hungary is losing 70 per cent of the recovery funds—forever. It is now a must for Orbán to show some more openness towards compromise in the second half of the year.

This is why *Fidesz* reactivated a former European commissioner, Tibor Navracsics, as the minister responsible for EU negotiations. His role is to show a more human face of Orbán's regime to the

European institutions, to secure access to EU funds for the Hungarian economy.

Therefore I believe that in the next few months we will see some more openness from the Orbán government towards the European institutions. They will do whatever they can to ensure that the Hungarian economy will not only benefit from the recovery funds but from the funds available from the seven-year EU budget as well.

TWELVE  
COLOMBIA, THROUGH A  
GENDER LENS

JULIANA HERNANDEZ

Juliana Hernandez is executive director of *Artemisas*, an organisation focused on political influence and innovation from a feminist standpoint in Colombia.

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THE RECENT ELECTION *has seen for the first time in Colombia's history the election of a left-wing president but also the first Afro-Colombian woman to become vice-president. She is to lead a new equality ministry. Why is it that gender parity in government has been discussed across Latin America, including in Chile—not just in Colombia? Why is it so important?*

In Colombia and in Latin America less than 30 per cent of congresspeople are women. That has to do with the politics and the laws that are created in these places. Parity is a measure of redistribution, of recognition and reduction of inequalities, that men unfortunately cannot see because of the patriarchy system, because they have been in power during the whole history—that has to change.

So here in Latin America, given the inequalities that we have to

live with, it's very important that 50 per cent of people in power are women. And not only white women, cisgender women, straight women—we also have to talk about black women and indigenous women to talk about reduction of inequalities.

Francia Márquez is going to be our vice-president and also the minister of equality. It's important that women are in these places—not only Congress, but also as vice-presidents, as ministers—so we can see that we are represented where men have always been deciding for us. This year, for example, we are going to legislate for the interruption of pregnancy and that is going to happen in the Congress.

If men are going to take decisions for us, there is no possibility to live in a society that recognises that our problems are completely different to those men live every day. That's why it's very important—not only in Colombia or Latin America—to talk about parity. We can change the way we deal with conflicts. We can change the way we see the other and difference, [recognising it] as something that strengthens democracy and is not a threat to it.

*What do you think will change or can change about the political agenda in Colombia, if we have a gender-parity government in power—for instance, on issues like reproductive rights or gender inequalities in income and pay, or the position of women in the informal economy?*

This is a very important moment of history in Colombia, not only because of the last elections but also because this year we're going to know about the Truth Commission report, and that is like a history of the conflict in Colombia. It's very important that women—especially women who have been part of the conflict, been raped, been displaced—can make decisions about their own lives. It's talking about peace—the peace process that has been left behind by the president, Iván Duque, who doesn't care about what happened with the conflict and what the consequences are of the war that we have been living with for years.

So it's very important that in the government, in the ministers that Gustavo Petro is going to [choose], we can see women in the

main ministries: agriculture, education, defence, culture. Because historically, we have only been in the culture ministry and those were ministers who hadn't been important for the governments or didn't have enough money to do things. And it's important for the implementation of the peace agreement that women are taking part in those decisions. It is not going to be enough to have parity in the ministers: we also need parity in every single part of the executive power of Colombia, in the Congress, in different places.

This moment of history has to deal with the fact that we are facing the truth of something that we don't want to know, that we don't want to see face-to-face. That is conflict. That is the history. That is the names of the people who were behind massacres, killing, murders, displacement—it threatens people who are very important.

Parity is going to produce in Colombia, at least in the ministers, the chance that women in different parts of the country, who live with political violence every single time that they try to run for politics, see themselves represented by women. It's very important that you can identify with the people who are in power.

That is going to happen with this government and it is going to have an effect on young people who are very interested in participating in politics, especially since the last year when we have had these massive mobilisations around the country. These mobilisations [demonstrate] that young people, mainly young women, are interested in politics. Only if we have women in politics can we reduce the gap that makes women feel not interested in participating in politics.

[But] it's not only about feeling identified with the women who are in power. It has to do also with the agendas that we bring as women. This government is talking for the first time about a national care system, and that is something very new because it's about reducing the inequalities that we have lived with as women forever.

Equal political participation in the government, in the cabinet, in the caucus that Petro is going to have in the Congress, is [also] very important [because] it is going to allow civil-society organisations,

[with] women in leadership, to talk directly with the power. There is a gap when we try to go to the power and explain to these congressmen and to the president that our problems, our lives, are completely different from what they live—that we are raped, that when we are in conflict we are like a weapon for men to threaten communities, [bring about] displacement, [pursue] different business.

So parity is also a measure of the redistribution of power, of money, of opportunities, of education—not only in the main cities but also in the countryside of Colombia. If we are not in power, we cannot change things for us.

*Two key things you mentioned there: the overhang of the conflict and the idea of a national care system. Let me ask you first about the way that the conflict in Colombia, which went on for decades, cast such a huge shadow over the society. Is what you were suggesting that having a Congress that is half women and half men, having this commitment to gender parity, will allow the conflict to be approached in a more honest and maybe less polarised way than so far? Do you think that having more women involved in that discussion may make it more productive discussion, more willing to face difficult truths?*

I don't know if we are going to reduce polarisation, because the truth that we are going to face has to deal also with the state and with the entrepreneurs—it has to do with very important people in Colombia. It's going to be very hard for this society to accept that the state also murdered people and was part of the massacres that we lived for years in Colombia. But the participation of women in the Congress and in politics is going to help to [mend] the broken social fabric [stemming from] the armed conflict that we have been living for years.

These women, especially the women who are going to be in Congress for the next four years, are women that represent different causes: a black woman, an indigenous woman, people from the countryside, farming women, teachers. The approach that they are going to have to the conflict is going to be completely different from what we have lived for the last four years, with a government that said that

there was no conflict in Colombia—and that stole billions of *pesos* which were meant to help people to implement the peace agreement.

So I don't know if we're going to reduce polarisation, but at least we're going to change the perspective that we have about the truth in Colombia and what happened to women in the conflict. [We can] also dream about the future, thinking about a society where women have power over their bodies, over their lives, over their families—not only thinking about being displaced, about their children getting murdered on the streets.

*One of the ways in which the conflict is not in the past is the number of killings there have been in recent years, since the agreement with the FARC (the main guerrilla group), of various representatives of NGOs, including human rights defenders—including, of course, in some cases, women. Do you think that the new government will be able to bring an end to those killings? They have been devastating for civil-society organisations in Colombia and have seemed to indicate that violence is not, as far as the state is concerned, a thing of the past.*

It's very difficult to change things in four years, also because the state hasn't been [operative] in so many parts of the country and those parts are governed by armed groups. You [have to] go to the structural problems that we have: it's also about drugs; it's about the security-politics approach.

[The new government may be able] to reduce the assassination of demobilised people from the FARC. There is a huge chance to change the way we are protecting our environmental leaders, and also to [introduce] warning systems that can allow us to know who is going to be murdered—in so many cases, if you are in leadership, you know who your conflict is with.

So Petro has a huge challenge, and also Márquez, going to the structural causes that produce conflict in Colombia, to do with inequalities and the drug problem. If we don't change the perspective on the national-security politics that we have, nothing is going to change, because we believe that the group we are facing is our enemy. And those groups are not our enemies: they are people who don't

have the chances or the opportunities to go to a school, to not be poor. That is what produces the conflict.

Some agendas of Petro can go to the main causes that have produced conflict in Colombia. It has also to do with the land, with the concentration of wealth. What he proposes that is going to be a huge problem for the people who have held power since forever [is that] he's going to attack these inequalities.

He's going to produce maybe, by doing this, a reduction of the assassinations and a recognition [they are] a way to control territories, control people and the accumulation of wealth that there is in Colombia. But it is not going to happen this year or next year: it's long-term public policy and long-term security policy.

*Let's come back to your point in social-policy terms, when you were talking about a national care strategy. Now, presumably the idea of a national care strategy is that women are responsible for almost all care in the home and you want this to be more shared with men and more socialised, so women can be freer to pursue their own projects in life. But what does a national care strategy mean to you and how would that be transformative of Colombian society?*

This is a huge agenda for feminists. It has to do also with the feminisation of politics, when we recognise that women work an additional seven hours to what men work in their lives: we have to go to our jobs, we have to be there for eight hours and then we have to get home, to clean, to cook, to be with our children, to be with our husbands.

No society can live without care systems. And this is the main agenda because it recognises, and this [new] government recognises, that we [women] are working without recognition. It includes a payment for women—not only the women that are working [in paid employment] right now, but [Petro] is also talking about a pension for women who have been working all their lives caring for their families, in their houses.

This recognises that we as women have been behind the power, behind the society, taking care of it. So this is going to be a complete

change for society. It's going to help to reduce poverty and the feminisation of poverty in Colombia. It is going to help also the economy, because women don't have money, because we are not participating in the formal labour market: we are participating in the informal labour market and that means that we don't have the rights, like the labour rights, that we should have.

That is something that is going to change with this government. It's long-term work that feminists have done in Colombia since the 1970s. They have been talking about a national care system. They have been introducing this topic, at least in the political conversation. So that gives hope. We can see that something is changing in politics with this national care system that Petro is going to implement during the next four years.

*Finally, supposing you were able to have the power to install in Colombia tomorrow a feminist democracy and no men were getting in the way. How would this look? How would it differ from the Colombia of today?*

For us, in feminist organisations, a feminist democracy is about redistributing the power, the wealth, the resources that have belonged to men during the whole history. We are talking about recognition and we are talking about measures that [recognise] that we are victims of the armed conflict, that there is no possibility of having a democracy in Colombia if we have war and that it's not possible to have peace or democracy if women are not participating in the decisions that are made in different places of power.

A feminist democracy that is possible for the next four years is a democracy that puts care in the centre of the agenda, because we are taking care of society, we are taking care of the national resources, we are taking care of peace processes in the different regions in Colombia. But we have never been recognised as main actors, as people who are [maintaining the social fabric] that has been broken during the conflict.

It's also about recognising the obstacles that we face to participate in markets, in work, in politics, the formal education system—that we

have the right to have a health system for all of us. That's what we are talking about when we talk about feminist democracy. We're not talking about a democracy only for women. We are talking about democracy for all the people—for the 99 per cent that Nancy Fraser talks about, [who] in Colombia live in poverty, in invisibility; they don't have a chance to have dignity in their lives. That's what we have been fighting for these last years.



# PART 2

## THE THEMATIC CHAPTERS



ONE  
SOCIAL DEMOCRACY AND PUBLIC-  
POLICY REFORM

DIMITRIS TSAROUHAS

It is hard to be an optimist nowadays. The raging war in Ukraine has shattered the geopolitical complacency of yesteryear and threatens to unleash an energy-driven economic cataclysm that will hit the working and middle classes particularly hard, not to speak of rising food insecurity in the developing world. Rising inflation, partly linked to the war but mostly originating in pandemic-related, supply-demand imbalances, is already eating into most households' savings and assets, and is prompting debates about a return to 1970s 'stagflation'.

Climate change, rising inequality and the threat of right-wing populism appear as less urgent problems only because immediate socio-economic prospects have recently become so dire. In such a dramatic context, social democracy is nothing less than a historical necessity, an antidote to the fascist tendencies and nationalist isolationism which threaten to push the planet even closer to the precipice.

Indeed, in recent years socialist and social-democratic parties have recovered some of their electoral strength: Germany has a social-democratic chancellor for the first time in 17 years, the Iberian penin-

sula is led by electorally popular progressives who are determined to enact meaningfully progressive public-policy reforms, and Scandinavia, the stronghold of left-wing politics throughout the postwar era, is similarly in left-of-centre hands. It would be deeply illusory, however, to argue that social democracy is back.

First, its share of the vote in Europe is still substantially down, compared with its postwar heyday (Polacko, 2022). Secondly, and more importantly, the life-defining reforms of a previous era—especially the construction of a universal welfare state and the ability to tame capitalism in the interests of the majority (Berman, 2006)—may generate nostalgia and sympathy but no longer reflect the priorities, programmatic appeal and organisational orientation of social democracy. The crisis of social democracy has yet to be overcome and although its demise has been wrongly predicted in the past its ability to recover the ground lost over the decades is questionable.

Public-policy reform was, and remains, one of social democracy's strongest cards in the arena of electoral competition and the project of societal transformation. Its decision to compete on the technocratic grounds of capacity to govern (Pfaller, 2009), however understandable, has proved self-defeating. Learning from mistakes and engaging with democratic, participatory, mass politics to produce long-term reforms is the surest way to escape the pitfalls of the 'cartelisation' of political parties—not least the growth of anti-system parties (Katz, 2022).

In parallel, the European Union needs to be subjected to meaningful reform, taking advantage of the opportunities offered in the context of Covid-19 to steer governance towards a new institutional settlement that will combine regulation with redistribution. The stakes are simply too high for social democracy to miss the chance of renewal at this crucial juncture.

### Why public-policy reform has mattered

The history and evolution of social democracy is intimately linked to public-policy reform. The postwar era ushered in an economic paradigm conducive to worker mobilisation and the formation of a cross-class alliance which furthered social-democratic policies, with the welfare state the jewel in social democracy's crown.

First, Fordism meant mass production and a powerful role for industry in the growth mix, facilitating the recruitment of workers to trade unions and thus the potential of mass worker/voter mobilisation in support of policies taming capitalism. Secondly, redistribution was possible, and became reality, to the extent that 'embedded liberalism' (Ruggie, 1982) meant capital was nationally oriented and bound, allowing for various forms of social partnership and emphasising the relevance of trade unions. Thirdly, class and nation were the primary identities on the basis of which politics was played out. Gender, race and other forms of identity started emerging on the scene of most states only later, as female employment rose after the 1970s (Taylor-Gooby, 2004) and the globalisation of economic activity, along with European integration, facilitated cross-border movements.

This advantageous set of circumstances allowed social democracy to exert a degree of political and ideological dominance in a number of countries. Its fundamental premise of combining growth with social justice through full employment and generous benefits appealed to the masses and enabled meaningful progressive reforms across the board. Undoubtedly, such reforms came in different shapes and sizes, largely as a result of the nation-specific institutional configurations of the political economies of European states (Hall and Soskice, 2001). Contextual factors allowed for deeper and more comprehensive reforms in some states (the Nordics being the best example), compared with underdeveloped, patrimonial capitalist states in the periphery of Europe. Even so, by the early 1980s social democrats had managed to fulfil many of the movement's original goals, in so far as they were able to demonstrate how rising prosperity

could be managed to the betterment of the collective and be combined with social justice.

The end of the golden age, through stagflation and rising unemployment, challenged however the consensus of the postwar era. Economic orthodoxy re-entered the fray and identified the state and its functions, especially the welfare state, as the contemporary economy's problem, not its platform. Accelerating globalisation, post-Fordism, financialisation and the personalisation of politics had real, deleterious consequences.

A new generation of centrist social democrats, best represented through the Third Way paradigm (Giddens, 1998) of the 1990s and 2000s, threw the baby out with the bathwater and helped undo many of the postwar socio-economic and political achievements. If the working class was now smaller and less homogenous, it could be ignored in favour of the (ever-shifting and hard to pin down) 'middle class' voter. If capital had become footloose, the best on offer was no longer centralised collective bargaining and welfare protection but education and training so individuals could remain employable. If higher inequality was the price to pay for continued (unbalanced and unsustainable) growth, public investment and minimum-wage policies would be the hallmarks of the new progressives.

Finally, if public-policy reform through the exercise of power (Korpi, 1983) was no longer desirable, technocratic managerialism through policy communities and issue networks could do the trick instead (Taylor-Gooby, 2004: 235). No wonder right-wing populists saw an opening and wore the left's clothes on issues of redistribution and the protection of the vulnerable, catapulting themselves to the top of the political debate by the early 21st century (Berman and Snegovaya, 2019).

### Coping with the new challenges

Over the last 20 years, successive crises have proved the fallacy of the neoclassical economic paradigm and the inability of turbo-capitalism

to preserve earlier social-democratic achievements. The global financial crisis of 2007-08 shattered the previous consensus. Yet, after an initial mobilisation of state resources to defend the system and avoid a fatal crash, no new paradigm has emerged. Western leaders (and often social democrats too) scapegoat migrants for contemporary woes, despite the fact that footloose capital is as deregulated as ever and transnational corporations continue to function with impunity (Crouch, 2019).

Meanwhile, public policy has continued to be driven by a technocratic logic which deepens a profound sense of alienation from the political class and encourages the depoliticisation of public policy in the name of efficiency (Hay, 2007). If losses are socialised and profits directed to the '1 per cent', citizens turn against political elites of different ideological persuasions. Liberal democracy, until recently recognised as a precondition for membership of the EU as a model of soft power, is now under serious threat in a number of countries, east and west.

The challenge facing social democracy is therefore profound and consists of interrelated issues which demand urgent answers. First, organisationally, daring more democracy is imperative. Policy communities and expertise are vital for the design of well-oiled policies but inadequate on their own. Social democracy needs to listen to the public and democratise its decision-making processes. Democratic decision-making forces policy-makers to explain and convince ahead of the election cycle, to appeal to the heart as well as the brain and to anticipate popular reaction. It is a recipe for re-engagement with a wary and insecure audience, which can shatter the image of the cartel party and allow fresh ideas to shine through. At a time of profound uncertainty, democratising the public sphere and committing to genuine debate, persuasion and learning is a *sine qua non* for progressives.

Trade unions are an obvious starting point. The pandemic has forced millions of working people to reconsider their life-work priorities and exposed the gross inadequacies of an economic system that

disregards workers' legitimate demands for fair pay, free time and the equal sharing and socialisation of care. The 'great resignation' is the best expression of rising worker consciousness and offers social democrats an important opportunity. Committing to generous funding for essential public services and essential workers, through genuine social partnership and forging new links with the unions, will make social democrats pioneers in the post-pandemic settlement.

Secondly, from a policy perspective, social democrats can no longer be identified with 'structural reforms' which are euphemisms for welfare retrenchment and residualised support targeting the 'deserving' segments of the population. Those reforms, the discourse that accompanied them and the manner in which they were executed led to the decimation of the left in a number of European states. Going back to universal principles on welfare, such as implementing basic-income schemes (Antonucci, 2019), will allow social democrats to differentiate themselves from their political rivals and make a meaningful impact on large numbers of squeezed citizens.

This is not to deny the salience of the social-investment state (Ferrera, 2009) in dealing with 'levelling up' through genuine equality of opportunity. Similar to a technocratic approach to reform, however, this is no longer adequate in dealing with the plethora of problems faced by the new precariat and a shrinking middle class. Spain's enactment of new labour legislation which offers millions of workers the security of open-ended contracts is a good example of how voting for the left can actually make a positive difference.

Finally, linking reform to welfare-state expansion and new forms of protection will allow social democrats to place such issues at the heart of election campaigning and their political message. Dressing up as the 'law and order' party has been synonymous with decline and near-insulting attempts to imitate the right. Research shows that placing social-democratic themes at the heart of the agenda correlates with better electoral results for the left (Polacko, 2022).

Thirdly, large-scale reform at EU level has become inescapable. The nature of EU policy-making provides a structural constraint in

implementing widescale progressive policies, in that policy contention takes place between pro- and anti-integration forces, instead of the traditional left-*versus*-right divide (Ladrech, 2000). The centrist consensus has been dealt major blows in recent years as centrifugal forces have risen, epitomised by the ‘Brexit’ process, while the need for a clear social-democratic path to recovery has been apparent.

The institutional and policy changes implemented during the eurozone crisis further restricted the room for manoeuvre at the disposal of progressives, particularly the Fiscal Compact and the European Semester, which subsumed social policy under the union’s economic-governance imperatives (Crespy and Menz, 2015). The economic crisis which followed the acute phases of the pandemic has however created an important window of opportunity to steer economic governance in a redistributive, as well as regulatory, direction and the NextGenerationEU plan offers the space to realise that goal (Ladi and Tsarouhas, 2020). The institutionalisation of new forms of solidarity between and across member states can count on considerable public support (Alcaro and Tocci, 2021), in turn inviting further steps towards fiscal solidarity through new forms of tax-and-spend in the union (Fabbrini, 2020).

Social democrats across the EU now have a concrete, solid set of policy instruments on which to expand achievements realised since 2020. They can thereby enable an EU recovery that will break with the orthodoxies of the Maastricht treaty of three decades ago, which diminished the prospects of ‘social Europe’.

## Conclusion

The avalanche of crises facing the international community has no easy answer. War, poverty, inequality, energy insecurity and climate change constitute but the most immediate public-policy challenges in an ever-expanding list. In the background looms the long shadow of a disastrous pandemic, which has not gone away and whose conse-

quences will be played out for a long time through its impact on prosperity, mental health and socialisation skills, especially for young cohorts.

And yet social democrats are well placed to steer the ship through the storm: combining expertise with compassion and a willingness to marry economic imperatives with socially just outcomes, they have proved capable of facing the challenge of Covid-19, regaining lost trust. On the back of the public-health emergency and with yet another economic crisis looming large on the horizon, social democracy has a unique opportunity to articulate a new concept for the state in the 21st century (Skrzypek, 2021) and demonstrate the practical as well as political advantages its approach can offer to vast swaths of the population.

There is little doubt that the pandemic and its repercussions will be with us for some time, inviting pertinent questions as to the balance between efficiency and justice, individual liberties and societal wellbeing, the use (and abuse) of scientific expertise and how trust and policy capacity steer governance in one or other direction (Zahariadis *et al*, 2022). Judged on their record and by daring to move further and faster, social democrats have everything to gain by articulating a new progressive vision of reform, which addresses not only the young and dynamic segments of the population but also stretches out its hand to precarious workers, immigrants, the vulnerable and the excluded.

Across Europe and beyond, a new socio-economic settlement, marked by robust state intervention in the economy and a crackdown on tax evasion and other asocial practices, has the potential to emerge. Social democrats need to rediscover the courage of their convictions and put into practice the value-driven slogans long confirmed in party meetings and election campaigning. It is hard, but necessary, to be an optimist.

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TWO  
A SOCIAL-DEMOCRATIC ZEITGEIST IN  
EUROPE?

ANIA SKRZYPEK

European election campaigns tend to see excessive use of labels such as ‘historic’ or ‘a turning point’. These are meant to convey urgency and duty to the citizen, yet there is persisting anxiety that the vote for the European Parliament (EP) remains a second-order one (Reif *et al*, 1997). This translates to lower turnout and higher volatility among the electorate.

What adds to the challenge for political stakeholders is that the parliaments subsequently emerging have become gradually more and more polarised, and more fragmented, than their predecessors. Their final composition and the number of the parliamentary groups have remained unclear until the first sessions, leaving partisan observers dejected or overjoyed by the outcome.

The latter was the case for social democrats in 2019. From contemplating the possibility of third place on the electoral podium and being somewhat fearful about the gains radical forces would achieve, they came out of the elections with a strong position as the second group in the EP. And for a while, their top candidate—Frans Timmermans—was ‘in the game’ for the position of president of the

European Commission (Andor, 2020). This was already a sign that the mandate to come would be an *époque inattendue*.

Going beyond the initial setback

What happened next was harsh. It turned out that just two member states could block the appointment of one of the *Spitzenkandidaten* as commission president and that the European Council could choose to reinterpret the Lisbon treaty according to what seemed expedient (Müller, 2022). The nomination of Ursula von der Leyen was badly received as a sign of disregard for the whole effort to make European elections count for the citizen. Many saw in it a relapse in the fragile process of rebalancing supranational and intergovernmental institutions. It cast a shadow on the positive development that the 2019 elections were marked by the first rise in turnout in 30 years.

Though for social democrats the way the new playing-field was shaped was an obvious setback, it did not mean nothing had been achieved—on the contrary. First, even though there was no change in the treaties, the ‘college’ of commissioners was no longer strictly apolitical. Timmermans became not only the first vice-president but also an informal leader of the team of progressive commissioners.

Secondly, the vote on the new commission and its work programme was the subject of a serious political debate. The president-elect had to adjust and make concessions to accommodate the demands, which social democrats (and greens) articulated in a set of letters they issued. This was a novelty and came as close as one could to jointly drafting a governing-coalition programme for the European Union.

Thirdly, progressive commissioners obtained some key portfolios. Some turned out to be even more relevant than anticipated because of political and economic developments.

Fourthly, there was a change in mood. Progressives didn’t outnumber conservatives, but they were no longer insecure about

their standing. They had a solid position, a team of capable and high-profile representatives across the institutions and a relevant number of votes. Moreover, they were looking at framing some of the upcoming EU presidencies and continuing with initiatives such as the Social Summit, which had started with Stefan Löfven as prime minister in Sweden and was to reconvene in Portugal under António Costa.

Finally, the position of the social democrats on the centre left was well defined, including *vis-à-vis* the radical left and the greens. This was a comfort neither liberals nor conservatives could enjoy. The liberals were trying to figure out the ‘Renew’ formula and what the proposals for Europe of its leading figure, the French president, Emmanuel Macron, would effectively entail. The conservatives were faltering, while simultaneously entering a competition with the more radical forces about who would dominate the right side of the political spectrum.

Altogether this meant progressives could afford to think differently. They could move on from the effectively unattainable dream of landslide victories towards the ambition of leading on ideas and strategic dossiers.

‘We are in this together’

The new mandate would soon be defined by unanticipated hardship. Barely anyone saw the coronavirus coming: in popular understanding, a pandemic in Europe was a thing of the past. But there it was, real and taking many lives. While for many, professional lives were put on hold, a great many others came under unprecedented pressure—personal heroism, a sense of duty and the experience of solidarity enabled them to shoulder the excessive workload. While the history of the subsequent two and a half years is an aggregate of millions of personal experiences, the sense of ‘we are in this together’ connected and prevailed.

This threw into question taken-for-granted individualism and

prompted a longing for community. The state—not only as a crisis manager but as a purveyor and guarantor of standards—was back. Yet only a decade earlier austerity, adopted in the wake of the financial crisis, was associated with the widespread belief that welfare states of contemporary scope were unaffordable and old-fashioned.

While nothing could be taken for granted, in this new context social democrats could anticipate the opportunity to pursue a centre-left agenda—especially those who in government proved they had a steady hand, the necessary wisdom and a reassuring approach when it came to leadership through the pandemic-induced crisis. In several countries citizens came to see social democrats in a different light.

Progressives were also able to help the debate about common solutions connect with an overdue conversation about what kind of EU was needed in the 21st century. Most Europeans realised that a collective effort was crucial to develop and purchase vaccines and that civic co-operation was required on mobility and the Covid-19 pass. It was therefore only natural that the topics raised on the back of the pandemic—‘social Europe’, a health union, economic recovery—became enduring concerns. As always in times of crisis, the EU gained momentum to move forward on crucial dossiers, such as the minimum wage, the ‘Fit for 55’ package on reducing greenhouse-gas emissions and the new European care strategy, within which social democrats—such as the commissioners Nicolas Schmit and Paolo Gentiloni—played key roles.

This spirit was especially evident when NextGenerationEU was debated and a new approach taken towards the EU budget, which now included loans as well as member-state contributions. This did not come easily, especially given the persistent divergence on European macroeconomics between north and south, evident before the key European Council in July 2020 at which the scheme was agreed. Social democrats were sadly in disagreement among themselves as well, as they had been during the financial crisis. This points to a weak spot they have in defining what instruments the EU should have at its disposal to remain competitive, efficient and sustainable.

But even with that internal divergence, social democrats reunited in the understanding that the new financial envelope had to be used wisely. This was not about rebuilding the European economy but building back better. The progressive understanding of the art of governing manifested itself with important clauses included in the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) to focus investments on ‘greening’ economies, enabling social-policy reforms and managing digitalisation to put it at the service of citizens.

The RRF was also a chance to bridge the gap between the ‘hard’ (financial, economic) and ‘soft’ (social) powers of the EU. Social democrats had spent decades criticising the inadequacy of the union when it comes to imposing standards beyond market-clearing, so the RRF conditionality mechanism, allowing the withholding of payments if the country in question disrespected democracy and the rule of law, was significant and they were determined to use it. Timmermans and several MEPs (such as Katharina Barley or Thijs Reuten) became very vocal about the need for the commission to take a tough stand.

### An unrecognised transformation

The Covid-19 crisis demonstrated yet again that while the union may spin on its axis when not under pressure it develops in leaps and bounds when absolutely necessary. What was interesting this time was how far social democrats were the key stakeholders and played formative roles. Even if they remained only the second largest group in the EP, and even if in the second half of the legislative period they would have none of the top jobs in their hands, they seem to have been able to claim primacy in several cases. That would support the temptation to speak about a social-democratic *Zeitgeist*, of a qualitative change in European politics.

The data do show that pro-Europeanism is growing: a spring 2022 Eurobarometer survey found 65 per cent of Europeans describing Europe as a good thing. But this does not imply a swing

towards progressivism by default. After all, social democrats combine their pro-Europeanism with criticism of what does not function in the union—though they faced criticism themselves when they were in the majority in the Council of the EU around the turn of the century, when their contribution to the European project was not particularly distinctive or enduring.

Now, though, Europe is much more embedded in national politics, which may help overcome the historical criticism about the democratic deficiencies of the union. And because this is a part of a great systemic transformation and because social democrats are in many countries also changing, their socio-political positioning has altered.

The previous decade was marked by citizens' disenchantment with democracy and its processes and an even further decline in support for public institutions. This fuelled social mobilisations, some of which offered a boost to radicals, extremists and new and old protest parties. It underpinned demands to reclaim power, which proved particularly effective in campaigns such as the one ahead of the 'Brexit' referendum in the United Kingdom ('take back control').

In that context, social democrats have been considered accomplices in letting democracies decline, being the old parties of the dysfunctional system. Many analyses had already shown that their electorate was not only shrinking but also ageing (De Vries, 2011); that offered yet another reason for many to write about the death of progressivism (Lavelle, 2008).

Then, however, against the odds, social democrats in several countries underwent metamorphoses. This manifested itself in generational change (think of Sanna Marin in Finland or the composition of the new SPD *Bundestag* delegation), reviving internal processes and opening them up (the Austrian and Finnish parties opted for very broad, inclusive consultations around their new programmes) and reconnecting with diverse social movements (environmental, women's, LGBT+ rights and so on).

Some of the criticism was even turned to advantage: being a tradi-

tional party was also being predictable, having implicit integrity and possessing necessary experience. Those qualities spoke for the candidates who became prime ministers: Olaf Scholz, Magdalena Andersson or Costa. And they—together with others such as Pedro Sánchez—made sure that Europe was no longer a sideshow but a field in which they acted directly, extending their leadership transnationally while embedded in national politics.

Even with the views of such leaders sometimes clashing, the clear coherence in their respective approaches binds the different levels of governance. And that consistency—underscored by the Socialists and Democrats being the most unified group when it comes to their EP voting record—can prove a powerful advantage in pursuing social-democratic hegemony.

This is not yet true of all the parties and there are social democrats who struggle within their member states. But those who have transformed may be paving the way towards a new democratic model and defining what will become the prevailing culture.

Just a few years ago, there seemed to be a gulf between the shrinking political system and the protest forces, in their great diversity. Now there is a renewed need for political agency to forge another social compromise. The progressives' efforts to position themselves as natural allies of organised civil society and trade unions are timely, because all the evidence supports the hypothesis that deliberative processes will increase their significance in the years to come (Rangoni and Vandamme, 2022).

Social democrats have been strongly promoting the empowerment of citizens, in the context of the proposed transnational electoral list for the EP (Ruiz Devesa, 2022) or in relation to the Conference on the Future of Europe (with which Costa and a number of MEPs such as Gaby Bischoff or Marek Belka were prominently involved). Some say the conference did not live up to expectations, with no prospect of a constitutional convention or treaty changes, but social democrats have been clearly advocating further

discussions. The extent of citizen involvement was unprecedented and the process cannot simply be contained.

### The way forward

The next European elections are less than two years away. The situation is however unprecedented and many factors make it hard to predict developments in the interim.

The war in Ukraine will determine the strategic political orientation of Europe. In the first few months after the Russian invasion, the union remained determined and united. But as the conflict persists and there is no viable prospect of a ceasefire, views may diverge on how to proceed, with social democrats perhaps echoing their respective countries' geographical positionings and historical experiences.

There is a need for a deeper debate—a pan-European progressive peace conference—which would discuss the situation in normative, political and strategic terms. This could define a pragmatic pacifism and address how the movement can rise to such an historic challenge, considering that the key global figures of the EU high representative on foreign and security policy and the secretaries-general of the United Nations and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization are all social democrats.

This should be framed by an ambition to anticipate the postwar reality. Social democrats in Europe should mobilise efforts around four dossiers, where again they can be a credible force: the new global order, the postwar recovery (including a stronger commitment to neighbourhood and eastern-partnership policies and humanitarian aid), migration (which in the commission is in the hands of Ylva Johansson) and enlargement.

The broad spectrum of social Europe presents a set of challenges—ranging from the traditional questions of the labour market and social policies (working time, the gender pay gap, public services and so on), recognising the precarious socio-economic situation, to those associated with modernising ambitions (such as the environment and

digitalisation). While much progress has been made, social democrats would benefit from a reflection on their short-, medium- and long-term vision.

The last programme of that kind was the product of transnational deliberations, involving many fora and actors, under the leadership of Poul Nyrup Rasmussen and Jacques Delors, who wrote a report on 'a new social Europe'. It was presented in 2007 at the council of the Party of European Socialists—way ahead of the crisis and the geographical divisions that split social democrats subsequently.

The above-mentioned conditionality mechanism can help narrow the gap between soft and hard policies in the EU. This is another determinant of the union's capacity to act and defend the fundamental values on which it was founded. It is a tool, similar to that which allowed the social-democratic commissioner Helena Dalli to condemn the 'LGBT-free zones' in Poland and ensure that the municipalities which had manifested this repulsive discriminatory behaviour were cut off from EU funding.

Looked at in the round, from political radicalisation to such examples of prejudicial treatment, one has an impression of a socio-political, cultural war. It is about defining how individuals and communities come together, how people and institutions interact, how they take responsibility for one another. In that sense, the word 'respect' used in the recent SPD campaign in Germany and reappropriated on the EU level is an important notion, but more is needed to promote openness, diversity, inclusion and equality. Dialogue among the social-democratic parties and building a common understanding of which avenues lead to social justice is key.

There are many ways social democrats can shape the future of Europe. They have a solid representation in the EU institutions, the parties' leaders are involved in European policy-making and there is a culture of bilateral relations. But what is required—especially in this *époque inattendue*—is transnational co-operation which forges mutual understanding, promotes 'unity in diversity' and raises the political relevance of the movement in the EU.

Though it is difficult to anticipate where the union will be in 2024, one can assume that the need for a vision, for a strong and credible network of stakeholders campaigning together, for mutual support between those in government and those in opposition, will not change. In this its 30th anniversary year, the PES might consider how to transform and rise to the challenges—those which are pressing now and those which will emerge in the near or more distant future. This is key to sustaining the prevalence of progressive ideas and ensuring that the social-democratic *Zeitgeist* outlasts the current political season.

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## THREE

# EMPLOYMENT AND LABOUR POLICIES

SOTIRIA THEODOROPOULOU

Europe and the world face unprecedented challenges. This is the decade that will be critical for meeting commitments against climate change, to avert the worst-possible scenarios sketched in recent reports from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Technological developments such as digitalisation and the ever-wider use of artificial intelligence are expected to provide benefits, including in supporting a timely green transition—benefits which will, however, have to be balanced against the risks these pose for citizens’ and workers’ fundamental rights and ultimately for liberal democracy itself. The green and digital transitions will have to be managed against a background of inequalities, whose political and electoral salience have significantly increased since the global financial crisis and whose consequences became painfully apparent during the pandemic, and of a confrontation between liberal-democratic and authoritarian capitalism, coming to a head with the war in Ukraine.

These challenges are expected to have long-lasting political, economic and social effects, which will be partly channelled through employment, labour markets and labour relations. Tackling them will require action across a range of public policies. Employment and

labour policies will have to be adapted to facilitate, steer and manage the transitions.

### Social democracy and employment and labour policies

Employment policies may aim to meet such objectives as maximising job creation and promoting decent work, bringing together various measures, programmes and institutions which affect the functioning of the labour market. Labour policies are concerned with relations between employers and employees and the employment, training and distribution of workers, including income-replacement ('passive' labour-market policies) and integration measures for the unemployed or those threatened by unemployment. Together, these policies influence how labour demand and supply interact.

For most individuals, employment and its conditions largely determine the terms of their participation in the distribution of material resources in society, through the labour income they earn. Employment is also still linked in many countries to insurance against social risks such as unemployment, sickness, disability and old age. Employment and labour policies shape whether and under what conditions an individual is employed, what kind of support she receives against the risk of unemployment and non-employment and how relations between employers and employees are organised and governed. They correspondingly affect that individual's economic and social rights, their ability to exercise their civic and political rights and the quality of democracy at work.

Such policies have thus been important tools in the social-democratic policy arsenal. In the heyday of social-democratic economic management in the 1960s and early 70s, employment and labour policies complemented Keynesian demand management to deliver economic growth and full employment, for men at least, while protecting vulnerable segments of the labour force from inequality and insecurity. Generous income-replacement policies and active-labour-market policies for the unemployed, especially in Sweden,

provided a 'social wage' which complemented the labour wage set through centralised/co-ordinated collective bargaining and egalitarian wage policies.

Once distributional conflict arose against the background of full-employment, productivity slowdown and energy-price shocks, consensus over Keynesian demand management broke down; unemployment started to rise and in Europe especially this persisted until the 1990s. During the same period, advanced economies began to undergo structural change: employment creation shifted markedly to services, female participation in the labour market increased and a host of 'new' social risks emerged, such as long-term unemployment and skills mismatch.

The focus of employment and labour policies shifted towards reducing 'impediments' to the functioning of labour markets. The maturing of welfare states also meant that the social wage of non-employment benefits no longer appeared sustainable. Hence, labour-market policies also shifted. Integration in the labour market became the main path towards inclusion while income protection often diminished and became subject to conditions of activation—yet not necessarily towards decent jobs. While these policies were eventually associated with more participation in the labour market, they were also linked with increased inequality, despite unemployment falling, and with some discrediting of social-democratic parties as having shifted way too far towards the centre in the 'third way' / *neue Mitte* period, associated particularly with 'new' Labour in Britain and the German SPD respectively.

### Current challenges

New challenges for employment, to which employment and labour policies will need to adapt, are presented by contemporary complex transformations: the consequences of decades of dominance of neoliberal ideas in the management of the economy and the environment, the lasting pandemic and its effects and geopolitical develop-

ments. Of existential importance is the economic and social transformation necessary to make good the commitments undertaken in the 2015 Paris Agreement to reach a climate-neutral world by 2050.

This transformation will involve the phasing out of production and employment in some sectors, such as coalmining, allied to the emergence or growth of others, such as renewable energy. Elsewhere—such as in construction and vehicle production—there will also be change in inputs, technologies and processes, and in corresponding skills. Meeting the climate goals in the agreement will inevitably also require some reduction in planetary resources used, especially in developed economies, through greater use of recycled materials but also lower consumption and, therefore, production. The latter could translate into fewer necessary hours of paid labour.

Inadequate efforts so far, however, mean that detrimental, and for some regions of the world catastrophic, impacts of climate change will not be averted. Adaptation strategies will have to be developed. When it comes to working conditions in Europe, labour legislation tends to be underdeveloped in this respect. In other parts of the world, adaptation may not be sufficient and will consequently induce further migration flows from more to less heavily affected regions, of which Europe with its still mostly temperate climate is one. Part of the global adaptation will thus have to entail management of these migration flows and the integration of climate refugees.

Technological advances—such as automation, the digital transformation and the increasing use of artificial intelligence—pose further challenges for employment and the world of work. Automation, if unchecked, could substitute for labour. Platform work comes with questions regarding the status of workers as employees or freelancers and the associated rights, their management, their working conditions and ultimately their wellbeing. Artificial intelligence also poses challenges regarding surveillance. These advances will also, though, bring benefits. What is often not clear in the debate is that their direction and therefore at least the labour-substitution effects are not

inevitable; neither should the decisions be left to the private sector alone—especially since the research which heralds these advances is often publicly subsidised.

The issue of inequalities had already been gaining salience after the global financial crisis. While evidence suggests that global income inequality had been falling and in Europe not increasing before the pandemic (Bubbico and Freytag, 2018), this has not been the case when one looks at its evolution within countries, at the lower end of the income distribution and in terms of the inequality of opportunity which shapes inequality of market outcomes. The pandemic brought to the fore, in even starker colours, health, labour-market and gender inequalities (ETUI and ETUC, 2020). Women have borne a disproportionate part of the additional unpaid care work, which ageing populations can only make worse. Rising fossil-fuel prices will exacerbate energy inequalities and fuel poverty, while it is not always clear to what extent cleaner forms of energy and improvement of the energy efficiency of residential buildings will be affordable for everyone.

To complicate the situation further, the war in Ukraine and Russia's response to western economic sanctions has sent energy and food prices spiralling, entrenching already rising inflation around the world and bringing back the 1970s spectre of 'stagflation'. As Russia threatens to cut off the supply of gas to Europe, the war has led to what Fatih Birol of the International Energy Agency has called an unprecedented 'major energy crisis in terms of its depth and its complexity' (Bloomberg, July 12th 2022).

This puts immense pressure on Europe to wean itself off dependence on Russian fossil fuels and hasten transition to cleaner forms of energy and, until this is possible, to constrain consumption of gas. In the meantime, high energy and food inflation affect poorer households more, while an eventual recession due to severe rationing of gas in industry, and possibly another financial crisis within the eurozone, would also hit hardest those most vulnerable in the labour market, stoking popular resentment. At the same time, according to the United Nations Refugee

Agency, UNHCR, the war is expected to generate a wave of war refugees unseen in postwar Europe. Last but not least, the pandemic and the war have made stronger the case for European ‘strategic autonomy’ in certain technologies, in materials which would enable timely and orderly green and digital transformations, and now also in energy.

Overall, the challenges employment and labour policies will have to tackle in the coming decade are:

- in the short-term, a possible recession originating in the (private-sector) supply side of the economy, without the supportive policies central banks in developed countries deployed in the past decade in the context of low inflation;
- over the short-to-medium and longer term, the need to support shifts in sectoral employment and in the skills necessary for green jobs;
- a structural shift towards lower demand for paid labour;
- labour-market inequalities, especially across gender, earnings and types of employment, and
- large and increasing waves of war and eventually climate refugees.

Which way forward?

What kind of employment and labour policies should social democrats promote, given these challenges? The existential urgency of effective action against climate change means such policies should contribute to creating decent jobs in line with achieving climate neutrality by mid-century, while providing the political-economy conditions which would enable this to be realised. They should maximise the winners and adequately compensate the losers, while giving voice to labour-income earners and preserving liberal-democratic institutions.

Employment and labour-market policies should have enabling and active (social-investment and training) as well as passive (income-support) elements. They should as far as possible integrate features which explicitly promote green transition as employment objectives. While policies investing in the acquisition of skills have been put forward in various contexts—notably the implementation of the European Union’s Recovery and Resilience Facility—the focus on green skills has not always been explicit.

Shorter working hours should also be on the employment-policy menu, as this could help reduce greenhouse-gas emissions while, under the right conditions, mitigating gender inequalities in the labour market. Organised working-time reduction, coupled with ‘living’ wages (in Europe, building on the EU minimum-wage directive) and widely-accessible and high-quality public services, could mean that what is currently unpaid (care) labour could be provided with fewer adverse consequences for women’s work-life balance and career options.

Providing individuals with adequate buffers (Sabato *et al*, 2021) to cope with this transition, to not be marginalised and indeed to improve their wellbeing, will be equally important for building support for the green transition, especially in the current context of high energy prices. Such buffering policies could include a basic minimum income or even public-employment guarantees. Ultimately, employment policies should be geared to an economic system and jobs compatible with critical planetary limits and sustainable wellbeing (Gough, 2017). Labour law should also be adapted to the realities of extreme weather phenomena and their consequences, so as to ensure adequate occupational health-and-safety conditions for workers.

To ensure that the green transition is also ‘just’, labour policies should strengthen collective bargaining and increase its coverage, as well as social dialogue, as just transition is not only about outcomes but also about managing the process (Galgóczy, 2018) in a negotiated,

consensual manner. In Europe, the agreed text of the minimum-wage directive opens up that possibility.

Workers' and ultimately citizens' rights and wellbeing should be protected against any (unintended?) consequences of the widespread adoption of new technologies. The EU's proposed directive on platform work is a step in the right direction. Its envisaged protections against the perils of algorithmic management should be fine-tuned and expanded at the national level in line with national circumstances—and extended beyond the platform economy, especially when it comes to collective representation and bargaining rights (Kelly-Lyth and Adams-Prassl, 2022). Public funding of research in new technologies should include in the list of criteria for awarding funds the potential impact on employment, privileging those technologies which complement rather than substitute for labour.

Efforts should also be intensified to close the deficits in protection against labour-market risks, *vis-à-vis* standard employees, faced by the non-standard and the self-employed, especially women. The pandemic threw into sharp relief the inequalities between these groups. Yet while numerous temporary, *ad hoc* and not always adequate measures were put in place (Spasova *et al*, 2021), they have been phased out.

Provision should also be made for the reception and full economic integration of refugees of war or climate change. Beyond the inevitability of these flows, integration of these refugees would in both cases be a moral imperative for Europe, in a spirit of global justice, and in line with social-democratic values. Europe has been one of the regions of the world responsible for a large part of the greenhouse-gas emissions which have historically caused climate change. At and since COP26 in Glasgow, the commitments of developed countries to finance 'loss and damage' in the less developed ones likely to suffer catastrophic consequences from global warming have been underwhelming, to say the least.

In so far as social democracy is also the social-democratic parties for whom electoral success is a *sine qua non*, not all of the policies in

the above menu will necessarily be advisable to that end. Research (Häusermann, 2018) has shown that parties in different countries, given the diversity of their voters and their preferences, face different trade-offs and devise different electoral strategies.

Putting into place and maintaining adequate employment and labour policies in the next decade is likely to face headwinds. Increased spending on defence and the energy transition will likely put pressure on other public budgets. This will be even more likely if ultra-loose monetary policies do not return any time soon in Europe and no follow-up to the NextGenerationEU package emerges by 2027 or earlier. Similarly, if, as some predict, the Covid-19 pandemic paves the way for the wide spread of other pathogens, putting the world in a state of continuous health emergency, there will be further competition for public funds for healthcare or even for compensation against losses due to disruptions in economic activity.

More generally, employment and labour policies can only do so much in supporting job creation in a tanking economy. Their effectiveness and ultimately their affordability depend on the broader macroeconomic environment.

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# FOUR

## EU INVESTMENT FOR JOBS AND PROSPERITY

LÁSZLÓ ANDOR

Society determines its future through investment. Developing infrastructure, establishing productive assets or enhancing ‘human capital’ all reflect visions, require resources and serve to fulfil the ambitions of communities. Though the European Union only corrals a modest share of the total income of its member states, in the past decade EU funds have started to play a strategic role in implementing policies for sustainability and technological progress and to some extent have fostered social investment.

The pandemic and climate change have triggered important developments but the EU is still far from exploiting the full potential of collective action. Investment policy, including new European tools, remains a critical ambition of social democracy to ensure that progressive governance is truly transformative.

Making the case for public investment

Ten years ago, in 2012, the orientation of EU governance and the dynamics of the European economy were turned around. Following the return of the French socialists to power, the focus of macro-

economic policy started to shift from austerity to investment and growth. The EU adopted a ‘pact for growth and jobs’, associated with a capital increase for the European Investment Bank (EIB), which was invited to bring forward innovative financial instruments such as project bonds.

Though the reform of economic and monetary union (EMU) moved very slowly, advocacy of public investment took on a strategic character. In a 2014 report to the German and French economy ministers, Jean Pisani-Ferry and Henrik Enderlein offered a broader concept of investment co-ordination, more tailored to national specificities and policy agendas (Reuters, November 27th 2014).

This new orientation became necessary even though in 2010 the EU had agreed a long-term ‘strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth’—Europe 2020. An annual cycle of economic governance (the European Semester) was built around it, also framing intergovernmental negotiations about the EU budget. These however ended with cutting, instead of increasing, the budget for investment within the 2014-20 Multiannual Financial Framework, thanks to the intransigence of the most frugal net-contributing countries: the United Kingdom, Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden.

The belated correction of economic governance put the burden of stabilisation on the shoulders of monetary policy. The disintegration of the single currency was arrested in 2012 by the intervention of the then new president of the European Central Bank (ECB), Mario Draghi. Investment however remained subdued and growth sluggish as a result. A solution to this conundrum represented a collective-action dilemma.

In July 2014, investment was declared a priority by the newly-elected European Commission president, Jean-Claude Juncker. The following year, an investment plan was announced, which became known as the ‘Juncker plan’. The commission also gave a more prominent role in the European Semester to investment.

Shifting the focus of European economic policy to investment became necessary for cyclical and structural reasons. First, reform of

EMU was not deep or fast enough, which meant resources and confidence were still insufficient for dynamic growth and sustainable job creation in the private sector—the inadequacy in the face of cyclical downturns and asymmetric shocks was not addressed. A more flexible interpretation of the post-Maastricht fiscal rules and ‘quantitative easing’ by the ECB helped generate recovery but could not guarantee long-term sustainability.

Secondly, not enough happened to revamp Europe’s broken business model, although the Juncker plan did not simply shift the focus to investment but highlighted the paramount role of public investment. Financial-sector regulation made good progress but the banking union remained incomplete without deposit insurance. And more could be done on industrial policy, especially by connecting it with territorial cohesion and investment in human capital.

#### The Juncker plan and its aftermath

When it comes to budgetary questions, the EU has suffered from a credibility gap. Ambitions and expectations increased from one cycle to the next, but the resources serving the common objectives remained stuck under the glass ceiling of 1 per cent of aggregated gross national income (GNI).

The Juncker plan addressed this gap through a magic formula, by which the EU was to provide €16 billion from its own budget, supplemented by €5 billion from the EIB. With this seed capital, the European Fund for Strategic Investment (EFSI) hoped to attract almost €300 billion in private-sector investment. Apart from the EIB, the role of ‘national promotional banks’ was boosted by the new agenda. By the end of 2020, the EFSI did deliver the promised amount of projects, although its macroeconomic impact remains disputed.

At the end of 2016, the plan was extended until 2020 and in 2018 the commission proposed an upgraded replacement beyond 2020, under the name InvestEU. At the same time, with more

progressive influence on policy debates, calls for a euro-area fiscal capacity intensified. The necessary political support was however lacking and the proposed tools remained miniscule. Alongside a flawed Reform Support Programme with €25 billion for seven years, Juncker put forward a European Investment Stabilisation Function with €30 billion for the same period. The latter was supposed to maintain continuity of investment projects in times of crises—but in the end not even this small instrument was established.

Improving investment performance in the EU depends not only on new tools but on reform of existing ones. This applies particularly to cohesion policy. The wind of change in 2012 resulted in the rise of a new name—the European Structural and Investment Funds—but not much was done to boost the volume of EU funds serving this purpose.

An effort was made, nevertheless, to tackle systemic corruption, which can mean EU funds do not fulfil their goals of improving competitiveness, developing infrastructure and investing in human capital or better governance. The concept of ‘rule-of-law conditionality’ was popularised as a silver bullet potentially solving all related problems.

Yet in many cases the space for abuse opens up because EU structural funds are implemented through shared management. In the case of systemic problems, the EU would need to find an alternative to corrupted allocation channels, to stop financing cronies and oligarchs close to governments. Greater role for direct management on a temporary basis would be a possibility.

Alternatively, EU experts could be planted in national agencies without sidelining them. Such assisted management could be launched by the commission or requested by the member state under scrutiny. Suspensions would not end up punishing innocent beneficiaries and funds would not forever remain in limbo.

### Budget revolution: solidarity reborn

With the eurozone crisis, almost all the wrong policies were tried before the path of recovery was found in 2012, with investment one of the key ingredients of a more progressive agenda. Under the pandemic shock, by contrast, the switch to ‘emergency Keynesianism’ took place with the speed of light. Fiscal restrictions, as well as competition rules, were shelved in March 2020 and within two months the commission put forward a new budgetary tool which amounted to a giant leap.

The extraordinary crisis fund NextGenerationEU (NGEU) was created as a top-up, added to the seven-year EU budget, the MFF. In terms of size, the most significant component is the Recovery and Resilience Facility, which consists of large-scale financial support (up to €310 billion in grants and up to €250 billion in loans) for member states to support public investments and reforms, focusing on the green and digital transformations.

The European Council came close to including a serious and effective rule-of-law mechanism as part of the MFF deal. But the language eventually adopted did not go beyond the usual generalities, and the debate about the effectiveness of the mechanism and its appropriate use has continued.

In spring 2020, the Covid-19 crisis showed that the minimalist approach to the EU’s role in emergency management was not sustainable. The issue was not only *ex-post* co-ordination of solidarity, but also stronger safety and stabilisation mechanisms, including in finance.

As a strategic tool of the pandemic response, NGEU represented not just a proverbial step in the right direction. On top of various forms of passive support—such as suspending fiscal or competition rules in times of crisis—the EU has now been equipped with instruments to provide active support. A new type of fiscal capacity has emerged, made possible only by breaking some taboos.

To start with, the 1 per cent limit was broken, since the combined

share of the new instruments amounts to 1.8 per cent of EU GNI. Secondly, EU countries will borrow jointly and for the sake of counter-cyclical stabilisation. Thirdly, having heard a thousand times the refrain that that the EU is not a 'transfer union', cross-border transfers have now begun from the borrowed resources (to be repaid by 2058). While the upgraded European Social Fund (ESF+) was promoted as evidence of a boosted social dimension, within NGEU social goals however remain in the shadows, compared with the green and digital objectives.

An even more heated debate has emerged over rendering NGEU a permanent rather than temporary instrument. The same question had to be raised about SURE, the EU-level job-saving scheme promoting short-time work amid the pandemic-induced recession. Whether we speak about a budget revolution, or just an upheaval, is at issue, as is whether the search for new fiscal capacity will be reduced to delivering public goods or include genuine stabilisation tools as well.

### Financing the Green Deal and a just transition

The pandemic shock coincided with the ambition of the EU to implement a robust green agenda. Protection of the climate became the priority of the incoming commission headed by Ursula von der Leyen in 2019. The launch of the European Green Deal was perceived as a clarion call for a real turnaround in economic and social development. It has been positioned as the EU's flagship initiative and is structurally embedded in practically everything it does. All other policies (in energy, transport, agriculture, taxation, urban development and so forth) will have to be made consistent with it and coherent with long-term climate objectives.

Going much further than with earlier sustainability initiatives, the EU committed to reducing greenhouse-gas emissions by at least 55 per cent by 2030 (compared with 1990) and launched an impressive number of strategies and action plans over the course of 2020 on

the key building blocks of the Green Deal. The Just Transition Mechanism and Sustainable Europe Investment Plan were created as new implementation tools.

The coincidence of the pandemic and the Green Deal produced a much stronger link between climate policy and EU financial instruments. The MFF for 2021-27 and NGEU together earmark 30 per cent of expenditure for climate action. This translates to more than €500 billion in seven years to make Europe climate-neutral by 2050. The EU spending is supposed to be in line with the objectives of the Paris Agreement and will follow the 'do no harm' principle.

The Just Transition Mechanism represents an attempt to address the social dimension by investing more money in some of Europe's energy-intensive and coalmining regions and helping them establish alternative development strategies. Since certain jobs are expected to be phased out and replaced by others, reskilling assumes new importance. The European Skills Agenda is a plan to identify the key sectors disrupted by the green and digital transitions and to design upskilling and reskilling strategies with relevant social partners.

Nevertheless, social considerations should be embedded more structurally in everything the EU does, starting with better monitoring of the transformations and knowledge-sharing about their causes and consequences. Consequently, the union and its member states will need to invest more resources not only in the transition to a sustainable economy but also in improved understanding of the distributional outcomes of Green Deal measures, at all policy levels.

While it was quickly understood that the Green Deal is actually a record public-investment programme, how the necessary resources would be secured became the subject of an open-ended discussion. Initially, a 'green bank' gained currency but in the end the argument that existing institutions, especially the EIB, would be better suited to deliver the necessary functions prevailed. The EIB had already adopted an ambitious climate strategy in 2015 and this was supplemented by a roadmap in 2020 to support a €1 trillion investment programme, to be implemented by 2030.

## Funds for innovation and the digital revolution

Next to climate change, digitalisation has been promoted as a major objective of EU strategic investment post-2020. In this and the broadly defined area of technological innovation, the increase in funding has however not amounted to what was proposed by experts and stakeholders. To explore the EU's potential for funding and co-ordinating research and innovation, the former commissioner and ex-chief of the World Trade Organization, Pascal Lamy, was invited to chair a group on the matter. It proposed a doubling of relevant EU spending.

Horizon 2020, the main EU budgetary vehicle for this, is already the largest global fund for science and innovation under a single political authority. Its wide profile, covering curiosity-driven frontier science, support for start-ups and partnerships with industry, is unrivalled.

Lamy's group did not only lobby for more money but also advocated a new business model. This was conceptualised in work commissioned from the innovation expert Mariana Mazzucato (2018). Mazzucato argued that Europe could achieve the big leap forward to a competitive, knowledge- and innovation-based economy if it took advantage of economies of scale at EU level and applied her 'mission-oriented' approach: 100 carbon neutral cities by 2030, a plastic-free ocean, decreasing the burden of dementia and so on. What is at stake is Europe's relative position *vis-à-vis* the United States and China in the global economy.

The EU should move towards Mazzucato's 'entrepreneurial state', as long as it can ensure that it draws talent for the joint enterprise from all corners of the union and shares the benefits fairly. The full policy chain of investing in human capital, financing research and innovation and achieving balanced growth must be worked out, which will only be possible if innovation funding can be combined with place-based tools instead of replacing them.

While cohesion is a place-based growth policy, the EU budget

also promotes growth by allocating money to investment priorities, including sectoral choices. In new technology, the EU has funded some mega-projects—Galileo the most well-known—which member states could not have implemented separately. And over time the EU budget has become the main source for funding research and innovation in Europe.

For the EU to become a knowledge-based economy has been a manifest ambition for two decades, thanks in particular to the Lisbon strategy of 2000. The subsequent Europe 2020 strategy included flagship initiatives such as a digital-agenda and innovation union and maintained a headline target to increase the research-and-development expenditure of member states to 3 per cent of gross domestic product by that year.

But most member states found it very difficult to adjust their own budgetary allocations to the goal. The game-changer is the EU itself—as long as the recent increase in innovation finance and the ringfencing of funds for digitalisation represents a floor rather than a ceiling.

### Second chance for an investment union?

A long time ago, social democrats identified investment as an arena where progressive values, electoral interests and social exigencies justified determined political action. Yet while the long financial crisis and the return of socialist parties to government in 2012-13 created a momentum for a new investment paradigm at EU level, this did not leave the lasting impact which would have brought about an ‘investment union’. The urgency of stepping up has however grown spectacularly in recent years: the 2019 European Parliament elections opened the door to the Green Deal, the pandemic recession gave a boost to EU solidarity and the war in Ukraine created new necessities.

The green transition has been an example of connecting the beefed-up investment agenda with an ambitious industrial policy. A

more advanced investment union could stretch further towards corporate governance and introduce suggestions for reform initiatives, especially with stronger employee participation. A robust investment policy needs more detailed vision, as well as greater confidence about the availability of resources it aims to mobilise.

Its promoters also have to be aware that even if the EU-level effort for co-ordinated investment is successful it cannot be a substitute for EMU reform or a performance-oriented strategy, such as Europe 2020. Whether the EU can deliver more solidarity and help generate convergence with greater confidence is a key question today for both economics and politics, and the path it takes on investment will be decisive.

When speaking about investment, infrastructure is often cited, yet in most countries this is not the missing link. Excessive focus on infrastructure investment can often be well-intentioned but misguided. To sustain economic growth but also to reproduce the growth potential over the long run, governments should place greater emphasis on investing in human capital—particularly for countries in the eastern and southern peripheries and especially regions experiencing population decline.

Crucially, the war in Ukraine has highlighted the need for more robust funding to support investments outside the EU's (current) borders. Ideally, a Ukraine reconstruction programme would be developed in combination with investment in the eastern border regions of the EU and help create new transnational clusters.

A co-ordinated programme involving the trio of European multi-lateral banks could be deployed, with all playing their best parts. The EIB could help rebuild infrastructure in line with sustainability goals. The European Bank for Regional Development could support redevelopment of the private sector, meeting high standards of transparency. And the Council of Europe Development Bank could ensure that necessary social infrastructure would be delivered at high speed.

For older students of the EU, all this also means a shift of focus

from ‘negative’ (economically market-clearing) to ‘positive’ (socially-oriented) integration, defining the added value of the EU in a policy field particularly important for economic progress. A boosted fiscal capacity of the EU in innovation, sustainability and cohesion is a key component of reforming the European business model, with the ultimate aim to preserve our *social* model.

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## FIVE REFRAMING CULTURAL POLICY

MAFALDA DÂMASO

The invitation to write this text was accompanied by a question: do social democrats have things to say and offer regarding culture? After the second world war, social democrats reimagined politics as, among other things, guaranteeing access to culture for all. This principle remains relevant. The increasingly difficult context in which policy-makers operate however requires a redefinition of the scope of cultural policy and a repositioning of social democracy. This does not equate to starting from scratch but, rather, building on the foundations laid by social democrats while recognising their limitations and updating them for contemporary challenges.

Historically, states with a strong commitment to the values of social democracy recognised culture as a field whose particularities and social benefits required some market intervention. In the European context, the United Kingdom and France provide a good background to reflect on what social democracy can offer in this domain. While the British case highlights a minimalist understanding of state intervention and the privileging of ‘democratisation of excellence in the arts’ as well as ‘metropolitan aesthetic values’ (Belfiore, 2019: 70), France exemplifies an expanded understanding of culture

characterised by decentralisation, the ‘inclusion of the “minor” arts and novel connections with the economy’ (Girard, 1997: 108), recognising the economic correlates of the cultural sector.

### Keynes and the Arts Council of Great Britain

In the UK, the postwar Labour government built the foundations of the modern welfare state based on the recommendations of William Beveridge. Institutions such as the National Health Service were to provide minimum standards of living for everyone, independent of income. This was aligned with the goal of the Labour Party to build ‘a society free from the fear of poverty and ill health’ (UK National Archives, no date).

The Committee for Encouragement of Music and the Arts was set up in 1940, ‘as an emergency war-time organisation’ (Evans and Glasgow, 1949: 46) to keep musicians and actors in employment and provide ‘solace to evacuees scattered across the country’ (Belfiore, 2019: 71). In 1946 it was replaced by the Arts Council of Great Britain. Although John Maynard Keynes died shortly before the ACGB’s charter was officially drafted, as chair of CEMA from 1941 he ‘took an organisation established during the Second World War to employ artists and organise morale-boosting tours of the performing and visual arts, and oversaw its development into the Arts Council of Great Britain’ (Upchurch, 2004: 203).

Keynes saw the responsibilities of the modern state as including opportunities for cultural engagement—among other things, preserving past monuments, building new ones and protecting artists (*ibid*: 209). He supported an artists’ co-operative from 1925 to 1933, which had assumed responsibility for the sale of artists’ work (*ibid*: 212)—an approach extended to CEMA when it provided guarantees to theatrical productions. Keynes was also foundational in the design of the ACGB as a decentralised organisation built upon an advisory, peer-review system. Crucially, the model of the Arts Council, which now structures cultural provision in many countries, tends towards

political independence—although the arm’s-length principle, and thus autonomy from government, is not always confirmed in practice (Quinn, 1997).

Keynes’ approach is not however immune from criticism. First, his ‘elitist inclinations’ (Belfiore, 2019: 82) were evident in his veiled criticism of the priorities that guided CEMA before he became its chair, particularly the organisation’s support of amateur work, factory concerts and theatre performances in village halls (ibid: 83). Rather, Keynes privileged artistic standards of excellence. This was reflected in his vision for the ACGB—providing funding to (professional) artists. The Arts Council would, he said, ‘maintain and raise standards of taste and execution, cooperating for this purpose with local authorities, educational authorities, and voluntary bodies of citizens’ (cited in Upchurch, 2004: 215). But in so doing it was to contribute to ‘preserving the prevailing relationships of power in society’ (Belfiore, 2019: 85-6).

Secondly, Keynes saw the role of the state in the cultural field as minimal. The ACGB ‘would not compete with the market; ... its public funds would have a limited and very specific role in the national cultural life’ (Upchurch, 2004: 215). Although the model of the Arts Council was built upon the idea of government intervention, the latter was far from Keynes’ broader vision of a regulated market economy. In other words, the Arts Council was to support the elite of professional artists already working as such, rather than expanding their number or what practice counted as that of an artist.

The most recent iteration of the ACGB, Arts Council England, has acknowledged this privileging of a (top-down) democratisation of (an elite understanding of) culture over (bottom-up) principles of cultural democracy. ACE’s 2020-30 strategy is guided by the vision of England as ‘a country in which the creativity of each of us is valued’ (ACE, 2020). But research has identified a consistent ‘story of class-based disadvantage faced by those working in different parts of the creative sector’ (Carey *et al*, 2021: 20). In England, cultural policy remains mostly designed by and for cultural elites.

### Jack Lang's French Ministry of Culture

In fact, it was a French cultural minister, Jack Lang, who later applied the teachings of Keynesian economics—boosting government spending and thus demand—and redesigned the state's cultural policy around the values of social democracy, expanding cultural practices through state support. A member of the *Parti Socialiste*, Lang was minister of culture from 1981 to 1986 and from 1988 to 1993 under the presidency of François Mitterrand, who supported a budget increase for the ministry to 1 per cent of the overall budget in 1993. Although the Ministry of Culture had been led by several radical ministers from its establishment in 1959 (Girard, 2009), many cultural policies common today in Europe were inaugurated by Lang.

Lang initiated annual celebrations such as the *Fête de la Musique*, a one-day festival in which professional and amateur musicians give free open-air performances across France. This was accompanied by the *Journées du Patrimoine* (heritage days, inspiring the establishment of European Heritage Day, co-organised by the European Union and the Council of Europe) and the *Fête du Cinéma*, which gives access to films at discounted prices.

These events were integrated into an ambitious redesign of cultural provision, extended across the French territory. While Lang was minister, theatre and dance education and creation were decentralised, more than 20 regional arts funds (FRAC) were created, several education and training institutions were inaugurated and the network of libraries was extended. Artistic education was modernised and, crucially, the Ministry of Culture expanded its purview beyond elite-based understandings of cultural value: under Lang the ministry supported rock, jazz, circus and graphic novels.

Reflecting his support for an active state in the cultural market, the ministry initiated a programme of public procurement by French creators, permitted publishers legally to enforce minimum prices for books and inspired crucial shifts in audiovisual policy—the Treasury became committed to covering the losses of big-budget films. This

encouraged risk-taking and specialisation, supporting economic goals; simultaneously, at the geopolitical level, it allowed French cinema to make blockbusters and compete with Hollywood productions (Messerlin and Cocq, 1999: 9).

Finally, Lang saw domestic and European policy as interdependent. His support for the French film industry reflected ‘a crusade against American entertainment, which he condemned as a financial and intellectual imperialism that ... grabs consciousness, ways of thinking, ways of living’ (Hillman-Chartrand and McCaughey, 1989: 68). That French cinema is one of the main film industries in the world results from Lang’s long-term vision—what Mariana Mazzucato (2013) would later describe as an ‘entrepreneurial state’. One can also establish a direct line between Lang’s speech defending ‘cultural resistance’ against the logic of the market at a conference of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization in 1982 and what later became known as the cultural exception (introduced by France during the Uruguay Round of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade) or, in current debates, the principle of cultural diversity (recognised by UNESCO’s 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions).

More could be said about Lang’s regulatory approach to the cultural market, which included quotas for French-language cultural content on television and radio—a policy which required active engagement with the European Commission. All in all, Lang ‘formalised the idea that change must come from a reconsideration of the foundations of cultural action’ (Polo, 2003: 128 [author’s translation]).

French public policy, though, continues to be characterised by ‘a strong tradition of bureaucratization, centralization or, more specifically, “parisanization”’ (Zimmer and Toepler, 1999: 36). Several cultural institutions are under the direct control of the ministry, which can support a logic of political clientelism, opposing the sector’s values. Yet Lang’s ambition remains noteworthy.

### The challenges of today and tomorrow

Nonetheless, even Lang would struggle to address the challenges faced by policy-makers today, without further redefining the scope of the ministry he led. As has been discussed elsewhere (Culture Action Europe and Dâmaso, 2021), the issues facing artists and cultural workers—most of whom are precarious and have atypical work patterns—are manifold and multidimensional. This requires action beyond cultural policy, in the arenas of labour law (for instance by restricting limitations on collective bargaining in the EU), social protection, taxation and fundamental rights and freedoms, implicating the European as well as the domestic level.

Yet culture can also provide answers to challenges for which policy-makers do not have easy solutions. For instance, the overlap of technological change and globalisation is beginning to question one of the assumptions which accompanied deindustrialisation in Europe: moving towards a service-based economy would create a stable number of good jobs, in customer support and so on. These jobs are increasingly delocalised or replaced by artificial intelligence. This contributes to limited employment possibilities for those without advanced degrees—increasing the risk of a future working class without access to good work. Yet education continues to be focused on today's (if not yesterday's) labour market.

A social-democratic response would steer concerted European action to protect cultural workers and use the power of the EU to strengthen the principle of cultural diversity—along with others, such as fair remuneration—in fora such as the World Trade Organization. Creativity will more broadly be an important skill in the economy of the future, particularly in jobs requiring the exercise of human discretion which can't be filled by robots. An ambitious 'predistributive' (Chwalisz and Diamond, 2015) approach to employment would guarantee widespread access to quality cultural education for all, making individuals more adaptable to future demands in the labour market.

Meanwhile, the climate emergency highlights the need for a paradigm shift in our economic model. Economists are increasingly dedicated to solving the trilemma of rejecting extractivism while also decreasing material consumption and redistributing wealth—the latter, in the Keynesian paradigm, made possible by demand-driven growth. A greening of the economy will result in degrowth in some sectors and thus the disappearance of ways of living central to many communities since the industrial revolution. Dealing with this should be at the heart of the social-democratic strategy to speed up climate action.

The shift towards a greener model of development is not only economic and technological but also cultural. Evidence shows that cultural activities can support active citizen engagement and the reinforcement of community ties. Therefore, culture can contribute to ‘social tipping dynamics’ against climate change (Otto *et al*, 2020), by reimagining modes of living and highlighting that social ties are based not only on past experiences but also on values and aspirations. Social democrats could support programmes of small-scale cultural activities with this aim.

After the second world war, access to cultural provision was recognised by Keynes and others as fundamental to social welfare. This idea remains relevant. Fostering cultural production and consumption *tout court* is however no longer enough to steer transformations, in and beyond the cultural sector, towards fairer societies. Moreover, just as economic and labour policy are increasingly designed transnationally, so should social democrats approach cultural policy. A silo approach is also insufficient—as highlighted by the important links to education. Rather, culture should be recognised as an important policy area and embedded in an integrated approach to a new model of sustainable development.

A social-democratic cultural policy can thus be summarised in three principles: transnational, future-oriented, holistic. Building it requires rejecting the idea that only professional artists are worthy of public investment (as Keynes thought) and that the most ambitious

goal the sector can support is geopolitical (as argued by Lang). Rather, culture is also what we share—our values and our ways of living. The gap between a sectoral understanding of cultural policy as focused exclusively on professional cultural workers and on domestic concerns—which is still held by most governments—and social-democratic priorities, such as sustainable development and global justice, has to be filled.

Although detailed proposals lie outside the scope of this chapter, a European levy on video-on-demand providers could support investments in cultural infrastructure in the EU and the global south. Similarly, the growing concentration of media firms across the supply chain threatens cultural diversity and requires transnational policy action. The specificities of the cultural sector—productivity increases are often lower than in the broader economy, resulting in rising relative unit costs or ‘Baumol’s cost disease’ (Baumol and Bowen, 1966)—demonstrate the continued relevance of public intervention to pursue balance, in what Karl Polanyi described as the ‘double movement’ between marketisation and social protection (2001 [1944]). Social democrats should not however forget another of Polanyi’s lessons—to ‘redefine the field of social struggle as occurring in a specifically global context’ (Block, 2008).

Democracies are under attack by actors who manipulate the fear of change into hatred of cultural difference. It is not by chance that culture is often the target of authoritarians: the diversity of the sector mirrors that of liberal democracies. Rather than echoing their rhetoric, resulting in the conflation of so-called cultural issues with immigration policy—which demonises immigration and repeats the mistaken assumption that cultural difference is organised along state lines—social democrats should proudly celebrate cultural change and overlapping affiliations (Wilson, 2018) as the building blocks of fairer societies.

Twenty years after Lang’s speech, the UNESCO-MONDIACULT 2022 conference will celebrate culture as a global public good and argue for its inclusion in the post-2030 agenda for sustain-

able development. Will social democrats put their weight behind this idea with ambitious policies and budgets?

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SIX  
SECURITY AND DEFENCE: PRINCIPLED  
PRAGMATISM

CHRISTOS KATSIOULIS

There is an anecdote about an Austrian agriculture minister on a visit to China. When asked by the then Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping about security in his region, he started to enthuse about the Viennese police and their ability to keep the peace in his rather rough neighbourhood. The spectrum from safe cities to geopolitics—the latter the real interest of the Chinese interlocutor—describes the broad challenge for a social-democratic security and defence policy.

As important as safe cities are for all citizens—as well as a democratic police for societies—the focus of this chapter is however on war and peace, international security and defence policy. Historically, social democracy has been a movement with an internationalist approach, focused on avoiding war and preserving peaceful relations between states. This conviction led to a specific and recognisable foreign policy, with an impressive impact on European but also world affairs.

### A rules-based order

Three names exemplify this tradition and still inspire generations of politicians: Olof Palme, Bruno Kreisky and Willy Brandt. Stamped by the experiences of World War II, they pursued policies to reduce tensions between the blocs in the cold war and reduce the risk of an escalation into nuclear war. They made foreign policy a priority of their governments, acted as mediators in various conflicts and strengthened international institutions as part of a rules-based order. In short, they made Europe and other parts of the world a safer place.

The guiding idea behind these policies was co-operative security—the belief that security can be better provided for all sides by co-operating with one another and pre-emptively finding common interest, instead of following the zero-sum logic of dealing with conflicts that have already started. But social-democratic parties were not the mere ‘peaceniks’ sometimes currently described.

For there is also a second tradition, more focused on security at home and protecting domestic citizens. When he signed the treaty establishing the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in Washington, the British Labour foreign secretary, Ernest Bevin, spoke of a day of ‘consecration for peace and resistance to aggression’, NATO’s website still recalls. In Germany, Brandt’s successor as chancellor, Helmut Schmidt, stood for a strong defence against the Soviet Union, maintaining the biggest army in western Europe and at the same time agreeing to the NATO ‘double-track decision’ of 1979—against public opinion—to threaten deployment of Cruise and Pershing nuclear missiles should the Soviets be unwilling to dismantle their SS-20 intermediate-range alternatives.

Throughout the decades of the cold war, social-democratic security and defence policy thus combined the long-term aim of preserving peace and solving conflicts without violence with a strong collective defence. After 1990, however, this twofold approach seemed outdated and unnecessary. The substantial investments in defence seemed disproportionate in light of the diminished threats

and were politically contested, since defence budgets were now in competition with equally or more important domestic concerns such as education or social affairs. At the same time, an active foreign policy in the footsteps of Kreisky and Palme seemed superfluous, since the 'end of history' would bring a liberal world order.

Hence, after the cold war, social-democratic security and defence policy focused on conflict- and crisis-management. The wars in the Balkans and the crises in the middle east and Afghanistan were the main theatres for applying a mixture of targeted military instruments and an evolving array of civil-military-co-operation and development tools.

For many Europeans, especially in the old west, a physical threat through kinetic war seemed unthinkable. For others, however, the dangers emanating from other countries had been tangible—because of historical tensions, as with Turkey and its neighbours, or due to a mixture of old memories and current policies, as in the case of Russia and the central- and eastern-European former members of the Warsaw Pact.

The political landscape in Europe therefore presented a fundamentally different picture from the cold-war era. Neither in NATO nor in the European Union was there a perceived common threat. There were huge gaps in assessments of the necessity of collective defence. At the same time, there was no consensus on the value of co-operative security. Commitment to strengthening institutions such as the United Nations or the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe correspondingly dwindled. Relationships with Russia became bilateral and mostly cultivated on the basis of national priorities and interests.

On February 24th 2022, the onset of the Russian war against Ukraine, this changed. The understanding that collective defence was a necessity, not a burden, came back with a vengeance. The recipes of the cold war became in vogue again, with 'containment' and 'deterrence' to the forefront. But this implied just addressing the immediate need to confront the Russian Federation while missing

the fact that, in a globalised world—where China, India, South Africa or Brazil play a far more important role than during the cold war—such an approach might be short-sighted and inadequate (Tooze, 2022).

### A new global environment

Social democrats in Europe need to formulate a security and defence policy which faces current and future challenges and takes into account the new global environment—not reheated recipes from a bygone era. In the cold war, they developed policies which aimed to overcome the *status quo* and achieve progress for many European citizens. Now humankind is in the Anthropocene, which ‘suggests a dangerous rupture in the earth’s trajectory that calls for new ways of thinking about safety, protection and collective survival’ (Löfbrand *et al.*, 2021: 10). Combined with the radical changes in European security after Russia’s war on Ukraine, the challenges to overcome are clear:

- a credible territorial defence for EU member states, addressing the rather diverse threat perceptions in the different countries;
- how to deal with Russia, which has launched an unprovoked war against a neighbour on Europe’s border;
- balancing the interest in smooth economic relations in a globalised world with the need to reduce one-sided dependencies on trade partners which might be willing to weaponise that dependence;
- shaping international relations towards a multilateral, rules-based order with strong norms and institutions;
- pursuing these aims within the context of a looming climate crisis, which shows the planetary limits of human action and needs to be tackled decisively, and

- preserving the cohesion of democratic societies and galvanising a common effort to face these challenges, even if that puts the idea of unlimited growth in question.

The problem is that these challenges are contradictory and yet need to be encountered at the same time. Social democracy has to formulate a security and defence policy which combines elements of containment and deterrence with a reduction of dependence and enhanced co-operation. And since the external and domestic arenas are more and more intertwined, a successful foreign and security policy is in dire need of a solid societal base—otherwise the concept of open and transparent democracies might itself prove vulnerable.

Since the main parties of European social democracy act within the framework of the EU, the way ahead sounds rather simple, though implementation is very difficult. There are three immediate steps which need to be taken, a trap to be avoided and a window of opportunity which needs to be utilised, while at the same time social democracy needs to do its general policy homework.

The last can be dealt with quickest, since it is addressed in more detail in other chapters. Suffice to say that the basis of a sustainable security policy is a society where polarisation is low, equality is high and a sense of common purpose is clear. This should not focus on material ends but rather the opportunities a fair and just democratic order can provide for citizens—one's own and others.

### Three steps to be taken

As for the steps to be taken, some have already begun but they need a clear perspective and a strategy enabling the EU and its member states to provide security from external threats for its citizens over the long run. The first is that Europe acquires a credible defence capability.

In the years following the cold war, European security and defence policy was focused on the ability to conduct stabilisation

missions outside or on the margins of Europe. Defence in its classic sense—the ability to ward off attacks on EU member states—was dealt with on the national level or in the framework of NATO. This has changed with the Russian attack on Ukraine. Member states are starting to shore up defence budgets, trying to make up for past investment shortfalls. NATO (rightly) remains the main focus but its European pillar needs to be strengthened collectively and the EU can be conducive to doing so.

This risks developing ‘bonsai’ European armies, with the result being just slightly bigger bonsais, ineffective in deterring a major conventional threat. With the focus of the United States turning towards the Indo-Pacific, members of the EU (and NATO) should assume greater responsibility in providing the conventional part of NATO defence. That will remain impossible without closer co-operation—what the EU calls pooling and sharing. Since ‘sharing’ presupposes a certain trust and like-mindedness, the EU should initiate or develop regional frameworks for these efforts, thereby avoiding the need to find a common purpose among all members. European inclusion in this predominantly national effort can help reduce the funds needed to scale up defence capabilities and thus ease the pressure on government budgets, already under pressure.

Secondly, EU enlargement and neighbourhood policies should follow the geopolitical logic of stabilising the surrounding regions and offering a clear and credible European perspective to the affected countries. Although the EU has offered the path to full membership to Ukraine and Moldova, that leaves Georgia sidelined and western-Balkan countries displeased. The latter vividly illustrates the danger of an enlargement policy caught between an ever-more-intense conflict for the scarce resources inside the EU and a rather bureaucratic logic guiding the accession process. This needs to be both more flexible and more political.

The EU needs a more nuanced toolbox, which can offer neighbours interested in a closer relationship a more diverse set of options. Since the ‘Brexit’ negotiations the spectrum of possible arrangements

has become broader and more diverse. This should be used to offer solutions tailor-made for these countries, allowing them and the union to find the most fitting equilibrium to accommodate the interests of both sides.

With the interests comes the politicisation. The EU has geopolitical interests, which are affected by its neighbourhood as well as its internal procedures. Therefore, enlargement needs to become a political tool to strengthen the union and serve its interests. As the offer of membership to Ukraine has shown, such political thinking is possible during an urgent crisis—it needs however to be engrained in the whole process.

The third step (again, addressed in more detail elsewhere) is based on a recognition that economic dependence and security are closely interlinked. Therefore, to become a sustainable and credible source not only of physical security but also a guarantee of the European economic model, the EU needs to realise ‘European sovereignty’.

That means having a clear picture of European dependencies and vulnerabilities and a strategy for reducing them, making the EU less reliant on trade partners willing to exploit these dependencies. With the European Green Deal the basis for such a strategy is already there—directing the EU towards a carbon-neutral economy.

### Policy towards Russia

The trap stems from the fact that the Russian war against Ukraine has united the EU only ‘in adversity’ (Zuleeg and Emanouilidis, 2022). After the initial shock, the member states could agree quickly on a common approach to the crisis, adopting successive sanctions packages and supporting refugees from Ukraine as non-bureaucratically as possible. The EU even managed to adopt a common strategy on how to deal with gas shortages in the winter, establishing a kind of solidarity mechanism—even if a very thin one.

The Strategic Compass for the security and defence of the EU,

agreed by the European Council as early as March, outlines the main threats and challenges facing the union. While it includes clear language and an unvarnished description of the revisionist policies the Russian Federation pursues, it stays clear of envisioning any scenario of future EU-Russia relations. That would be the trap, to be avoided at all costs.

In light of the widely diverging views on Russia in different member states and the low level of trust—especially between eastern and western member states—such an endeavour could only end in an unsatisfying lowest common denominator. Such an outcome would hamper the ability of the EU to react flexibly to future developments and adapt its strategy accordingly. As with the discussion of enlargement, policy towards Russia should be handled more flexibly and allow for the pursuit of European interests. Since these interests in relationship to Russia have been and will in the future be hard to agree on, a case-by-case approach could be followed.

Such a procedure would mark the core of a common European strategic discourse and could serve as a starting point for the further development of the Strategic Compass to outline the EU's course of action towards its eastern neighbourhood, including Russia. Such a strategy, although rather a middle-term task, would represent a common European *Ostpolitik*, an endeavour worth of European social democracy.

The Overton window that is opening up at the moment—and letting in rather ghastly weather—is the climate crisis. The Anthropocene forces major transformation on all humankind and needs to be considered across a broad range of policies, including security and defence. European social democracy has the potential to use its convening and exemplary power to foster a more co-operative approach in the current climate of confrontation, containment and deterrence.

A precondition is that the EU can act proactively on a domestic level and show that climate neutrality, economic wellbeing and social cohesion can go hand in hand. Another precondition is a global

approach by the EU, with the aim of fostering partnerships to cope with the climate crisis and its effects, bringing other major powers as well as smaller partners on board. The main aim should be that all sides clearly benefit from these partnerships.

That needs a fine balance between agreeing on common aims, shouldering the necessary burden and finding a way through without patronising stances or any similar imbalances, which have marked so many past relationships between Europe and the global south. Such an approach, which would be inspired by the *Entspannungspolitik* (easing tension) of the 1970s, could generate political momentum, opening up opportunities to allow for co-operative strands in relationships—even with states such as Russia and China which are currently adversaries rather than partners.

#### A complex conundrum

Security and defence policy after 2022 presents a huge mountain for social democrats to climb. The challenges are manifold and intertwined. The interconnectedness between the local and the global, domestic politics and international relations, makes for a complicated terrain, where it remains unclear what impact national or European policies can have. The return of major inter-state war to Europe, the rising impact of the Anthropocene on humanity and the increasingly polarising effects of globalisation on the public spheres of democratic states pose a complex conundrum.

As its past achievements prove, however, social democracy is the political force best equipped to master these currents, by following a principled pragmatism. It should be clear on the principles of preserving peace, democracy and social cohesion, while flexible enough to adapt to future developments and visionary enough to include planetary limits in current policies.

If this endeavour proves successful, future social democrats visiting China can easily discuss the safety of their backyard—since

the main tenets of European security will be common knowledge with their counterpart.

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SEVEN  
LEADERSHIP FOR TRANSFORMATION

FELIX BUTZLAFF

Since the 19th century, progressive political movements have always been torn between conflicting understandings of how to achieve the social, economic and political transformations they sought. Should change, liberation and emancipation be delivered top-down by the party and movement leaders, with a Marxist analysis and socialist programme—or must any social change be the result of an incremental, bottom-up democratisation, involving ever-more liberated and emancipated individuals?

Both perspectives were present from the outset in socialist, social-democratic and communist movements and led to harsh conflicts within the organisations, as they entailed very different strategies and movement-society relationships. It was the classical Faustian dilemma, deeply engrained until this day: ‘Two souls, alas, are housed within my breast.’

On the one hand, providing leadership, forming social collectives as bases for political struggles and formulating a positive vision for a better, more just and free society was always, in the eyes of social-democratic and socialist parties, a top-down endeavour (Sassoon, 2010). As progressive movements had originated in a joint struggle of

the underprivileged, party structures and leadership were based on collective organisation and bureaucratic discipline. In this perspective, social transformation could only be achieved if all the weak and vulnerable united—it could never be the aggregated result of individual efforts (Lösche and Walter, 1989). As a result, discipline, delegated decision-making and a somewhat patronising, hierarchical leadership were cornerstones of progressive notions of political organisation.

On the other hand, the truly liberated and emancipated individual was also key to the vision of progressive movements from the early days (Coole, 2015). Already in such imaginings of post-bourgeois, Western societies as August Bebel's *Woman and Socialism*, alongside collective class identity the individual choices, preferences and democratised daily lives of all citizens were critical (Bebel, 1910). And before World War I, Robert Michels criticised social-democratic party organisations as fossilised bureaucracies which had abandoned any aspiration for social transformation—and indeed which might, contrary to their initial purpose, easily develop into new orthodoxies and paternalism (Michels, 2016 [1915]).

A balance which is never stable

Thus, political leadership in social-democratic or socialist organisations has always had to find a balance between the need, collectively and top-down, to organise liberation for the vulnerable and exposed while enabling bottom-up democratisation for those craving more self-determination and emancipation (Rebughini, 2015). This fragile balance is context-dependent and time-specific. It is never stable and, if ever once truly achieved, is rapidly altered by the changing expectations, hopes and demands of citizens, as well as by the complexities of the real world.

In the more than 150 years since the early days of progressive struggles, individualised and bottom-up understandings of how progressive change can be achieved have gained traction and accep-

tance, while top-down notions of political leadership and vision have more and more come under attack. Movements and parties alike seek to allow for more individual, flexible, non-binding and identity-centred forms of participation, to cater to shifting emancipatory demands. Yet while these shifts are the consequence of processes of liberation themselves—rightly criticising top-down leadership as (sometimes) condescending—they also have serious consequences for how that very emancipation might be achieved and for whom (Butzlaff, 2021).

As sociological observers have identified, in recent decades there have been growing discrepancies in citizens' demands of (especially) progressive parties and movements and more generally of political elites and representative democracies (Bauman, 2012). Yes, expectations for democratisation have led to calls for more individualised participation opportunities and bottom-up involvement of citizens. But in light of ever increasing complexities and crises—such as the ubiquitous climate crisis, economic inequalities, an international pandemic and a raging war in Europe—the pressures for state-led, top-down steering and political leadership are also rising (Blühdorn and Butzlaff, 2020).

Crises of such magnitude, so the argument goes, can hardly be addressed bottom-up—given their transnational scale and the associated collective-action dilemmas. Any alternative necessitates political leadership and the resources of national and international government co-ordination. These ambivalences make the struggle for a progressive balance between bottom-up and top-down transformation strategies ever-more difficult, though ever-more vital.

Rising levels of education, but also of self-confidence and self-efficacy, have made citizens demand direct participation in democratic decision-making: vehicles of intermediation, such as political parties, are correspondingly viewed with suspicion and distrust. Yet, amid growing social complexities, parties—as well as governments and big social-movement organisations—are expected to operate effectively and to offer a plausible, trust-inducing political

narrative in a world increasingly perceived as confusing and chaotic.

Meanwhile, there has also been a growing contradiction between the desire for a comforting belonging—to historical *milieux*, classes, families, social groups—and that for emancipation from associated restrictions, even if liberation brings some social isolation. In western countries today, many seek closer social ties and inclusion, yet fear the curbs these place on the ideal autonomous individual (Bauman, 2017; Butzlaff, 2021).

### Growing political tensions

The potential tensions arising from this diagnosis have been growing for some time and have been exacerbated by the climate crisis, the pandemic and the war in Ukraine. In sum, citizens demand policy efficiency and decision speed in light of global crises, yet they increasingly demand to be heard and involved. Facing multiple crises which have isolated millions in their homes and threatened the wellbeing of millions more, citizens are longing for social connections and crave state-led, top-down policies securing a familiar way of life, yet hardly want to see their individual freedom and flexibility restricted.

The political tensions stemming from these contradictions are not equal for all party families. Against the background of their own organisational and political heritage, they are especially relevant to the progressive side of the political spectrum—because close ties and social belonging are (still) held dear, in light of the history of class mobilisation, while democracy, participation and individual emancipation have always been of great importance to these movements.

Throughout history, the resulting tensions have always led to organisational adaptations and a search for renewed balance on the part of parties and movements alike. Struggles for party statutes, intra-party-democracy or enlargement of the role of members have mirrored what would have been considered democratic, desirable and necessary at the time. Whenever debates over reforms break out, they

indicate that political organisation and democratic demands have fallen out of synchrony.

When we look at how western progressive parties have sought to establish a democratic balance during the last three decades, we can see that organisational changes may have over-emphasised bottom-up participation and neglected the demands for belonging and leadership—and may therefore have created an imbalance. Since the early 1990s, social-democratic party reforms have increased intra-party democracy and introduced new forms of member and supporter participation, in selecting candidates and leaders and preparing the political programme. But this has devalued formal membership and weakened the parties' middle ranks and arrangements for intermediation (Faucher, 2015).

This democratisation of party culture has also unwittingly atomised the single member and favoured centralised decision-making: if all can have a say as individuals, each is barely heard and more power remains with those formulating the question and pre-selecting the answers (Gauja, 2014). Nor have more opportunities for individual member and supporter participation often been integrated into a coherent narrative of why and how this would result in a modern and contemporary social democracy. More channels of intra-party democracy may even have dislocated affiliates and constituencies and left out those not able or willing to make themselves heard (Ignazi, 2018; Wolkenstein, 2019).

A coherent social-democratic narrative and programme, political orientation and policy efficiency are thus ever more difficult to realise in the most open and deliberative manner. Paradoxically, social-democratic organisational change has led to an even greater social bias towards representative democracy within—as most formats for intra-party participation require resources and knowledge.

### Crumbling trust amid dissolving social *milieux*

What is more, the struggle for a balance between top-down and bottom-up transformative strategies does not only affect the internal organisation of parties but also extends to their networks of progressive movements. Historically, social-democratic parties considered themselves as facilitating co-ordination among a great variety of everyday movements and actors: trade unions, workers' insurance schemes, food co-operatives, recreational organisations, sports clubs and so on. Movements and parties considered themselves part of the same lifeworld and contributed to the same struggle on the basis of mutual trust (Butzlaff and Deflorian, 2021).

This certainty and trust across a landscape of social movements and progressive parties has crumbled with dissolving social *milieux*—which greatly affects how joint struggles involving movements and parties might be pursued. Parties today are by no means (any more) automatically considered legitimate network 'leaders' and movement-party networks are not a projection of their bureaucratic, hierarchical and disciplined structure. As with the demands and expectations of members and voters, any progressive network of movements and parties has to be balanced and re-established time and again, between the bottom-up contribution by citizens and movements and the top-down leadership of party and 'official' movement leaders. As with the balance within the parties, establishing such an equilibrium has grown ever more complex.

Especially in light of the current crises and the consequent need for a progressive rebuilding of a post-crisis world and a more just and equal society, social-democratic parties may have inadvertently exacerbated an imbalance between demands for participation, on the one hand, and for orientation, political leadership and belonging on the other. Thinking about new forms of democratised progressive leadership is thus key.

Yet a solution cannot lie in dismantling membership participation or channels of intra-party democracy. The democratic expectations of

members and supporters cannot be neglected, especially for social democracy as a progressive movement. But a readjustment is called for, between the demands for more direct involvement of citizens—recognising how unequal representation can be introduced through participatory processes—and the facilitation of policy efficiency and concrete political change in a threatening, runaway world.

Social-democratic parties will have to invest seriously in new forms of collective participation by members and supporters and rethink organisational intermediation to create a new sense of belonging, without compromising the individuality of their members. They should also have in mind that top-down leadership in the history of progressive movements was considered legitimate if and when members and voters were convinced that party elites truly knew about the daily struggles, hopes, dreams and expectations of their affiliates—when the linkages and relationships between the party and movement base and their leaders were close and intimate, and mutual trust strong.

In a way, today's growing demands for more direct and individual participation show that citizens do not trust party and movement leaders (any more) to have detailed knowledge of their everyday lives. It is the impression that party and movement leaders have become detached from citizens' lives that hurts political-leadership capabilities the most. The legitimacy of political leadership depends on how its decisions match and connect with the daily experiences of citizens—although, of course, not in a way that restricts political decisions to an established *status quo*. Indeed, especially for progressive organisations, legitimate top-down leadership necessarily addresses the hopes and expectations for social transformation their supporters crave.

Formulating a coherent and plausible political narrative

Throughout their history, social-democratic parties have always been successful when they were able to formulate a coherent and plausible collective political narrative among their members and supporters.

What do we strive for? How does our desired future society look? Who will participate in this undertaking and why? Combating the climate crisis, constructing a better post-pandemic world and rebuilding a peaceful and thriving free Europe will demand answers, as ever, to these questions.

Yet, in contrast to the last three decades, progressive parties and movements should not seek the answers in bottom-up member participation alone but should also dare to invest more time and resources in providing solutions top-down—to reconcile the modern contradictions between demands for participation and orientation, efficiency and belonging. And for that, rethinking how party elites re-establish connections with the everyday lives of citizens may be key.

The Faustian dilemma progressives always face cannot be avoided—it simply must be constantly addressed and tackled. The more pressing and daunting a crisis in the contemporary world, the more important that is.

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EIGHT  
POLITICAL PARTIES AND DIGITAL  
CAMPAIGNING

ERIC SUNDSTRÖM

Why have social-democratic parties been rather close to the voters, and reasonably good at communication and campaigns, throughout their history? In a word, exclusion.

The history of the labour movement was one of creating its own presence in the public sphere: buildings to meet in, newspapers to read, songs to sing, banners for the big rallies. Nothing was there already—everything had to be created anew. A movement of the working class had to be built from the bottom up.

It is easy to be nostalgic about a time when every flag was a red flag, every hall a union hall and every right—from the ballot box to organising at the workplace—a fight yet to be won. The differences between now and then, when it comes to communication and campaigns, are enormous. Our societies have changed profoundly. The communication made possible by the Gutenberg printing press is being replaced by a rapidly changing digital landscape. Strict comparisons are difficult and to a degree unnecessary.

Yet the need to organise to face stiff challenges amid difficult circumstances eventually provided some assets in the early days of

the labour movement. Times were tough but so were the organisers of the working class.

The challenge spelt out seven hours per day

If we fast-forward to communication and campaigns in the modern era, the need to be digital and professional is indisputable. We progressives read books by George Lakoff and are aware of the need to ‘frame’ our messages and communicate them in a suitable, digital way to the right group of undecided voters at the right time.

The side-effects are many and easy to laugh about when the campaign is over. Most of us—with a queasy feeling—have advocated a policy we did not like, just because ‘it’s polling so very well’. We have been in meetings with consultants who do not understand politics at all, excusing the exercise as a somewhat expensive meeting with an urban, upper-middle-class voter (Thor, 2022).

We have all been trying to bridge the gap to the ever-expanding world of the internet, doing our best to create innovative digital campaigns. This normally includes a podcast no one listens to (even Joe Biden failed), a YouTube channel with fewer subscribers than your number of campaign staff and the hiring of young, tech-savvy people who should have had a seat at the table where decisions were made—according to the evaluation you did *after* the election was lost.

An easy but valid excuse when discussing digital campaigning is the constant motion. Good advice faces the challenge of durability and will soon become yesterday’s practice. Yet according to a report (DataReportal, 2022) in February 2022, the average global citizen who uses the internet—all devices, age group 16-64—spends six hours and 58 minutes online *every day*. That statistic should be enough to validate the need for one major idea and some bullet points about what digitalisation might mean for social democracy.

How to organise—and ten pieces of quick advice

If voters spend nearly seven hours every day online, political activity cannot only be organised in the old way with physical meetings. At the same time, it is difficult to beat the impact of a face-to-face conversation with a neighbour.

The logical solution is to blend the two basic principles of political activity: *community organising* and *distributed organising*. For the former, think of Barack Obama or a section of a social-democratic party in a European town. Geography is your base, knocking on doors is your method. For the latter, think of Bernie Sanders and how thousands of young volunteers in Brooklyn could be directed as an ‘online fire hose’ to any part of the country according to the campaign manager’s preference. The methods used by the Sanders supporters in this case were all virtual: you sat in Brooklyn but talked to voters in a state far away through phone calls, text messages, ‘social media’ and Zoom meetings.

The Biden presidential campaign (Dâmaso and Sundström, forthcoming) blended these two principles by creating virtual election offices using the application Slack. Thanks to these virtual offices, volunteers could choose the campaign model they preferred and were used to. The Slack channel ‘Victory 2020’ simply became a digital field office.

The virtual office was created out of necessity: Covid-19 ruled out almost all physical election activities. But to organise the voters of the future, a political party must operate where voters are and adapt to their digital lives. The challenge to the internal processes of social-democratic parties will therefore be to keep the basic democratic structure—think of a pyramid with top-down command and bottom-up participation—while incorporating digital methods and procedures which are transparent and easy to use.

That nut will be hard to crack, unless you ask how young people in your party would like to change things (that’s a serious piece of advice). But let us leave this difficult organisational challenge to the

side for now, because many recent digital developments can serve as possible inspiration and initial steps. Ten pointers follow.

1. *Gaining contacts, matching lists*: If you wanted to help elect Biden, one of your first steps was to download ‘Vote Joe’—the official app of the Biden campaign. You were then kindly asked to share your contacts in social media with the campaign. This gave it an opportunity to create some magic: match personal connections with voters who, according to other data points the campaign had, were important to talk to. As a new volunteer you could see if you had a personal contact—say a cousin—who lived in a swing state. You could also see if your cousin had requested a ballot.

Social-democratic parties in Europe will follow this path of mixing personal contacts in social media with other data points—as far as the GDPR regulation allows. The reason is the new buzzword, *relational* organising. The impact of you calling your cousin, to whom you have a relationship through family, is stronger than if a random campaign worker gets in touch.

European campaigns will likely not primarily count doors knocked on but meaningful conversations had. These will include the chat with your cousin on the Messenger app as well as conversations you have had while canvassing in your neighbourhood.

2. *Organise—and dare to lose control*: Starting with a campaign in Virginia in 2017, progressive grassroots in America have increasingly been using the digital platform Mobilize to arrange all kind of physical activities: canvassing, rallies, voter registration, recruitment of volunteers, educational activities and phone-banking. In the Biden campaign, Mobilize was the base for online activities and Zoom meetings: 551,000 volunteers completed around one million shifts through Mobilize during the final four days of the campaign (Bloomberg, November 30th 2020).

All social-democratic parties will probably have improved versions of this tool in future campaigns. The key, however, will be to accept that you cannot control every meeting. Instead, increase your technological capabilities and educate party members and volunteers

so that they organise loads of events—digital and physical—beyond party headquarters.

3. *Tunnels and pathways*: The world watches one billion hours of videos on YouTube every day. But the aim of a political party must not be to produce the most popular content on its own or find a representative who can double as an ‘influencer’. The task is to create ‘a tunnel’ from popular videos to your own material.

So maybe create your own online educational channel and name it after one of the heroes/heroines of your movement. Produce loads of content with a political message—and name it after the most popular search words on YouTube. The clips should be many and should be short, fun and educational. Check out the Gravel Institute in the United States, which is already doing this successfully.

4. *Try, mix, fail and succeed*: We have ways we do politics and campaigns, and a growing array of digital possibilities. Your new rule must be to think innovatively and include digital in every project you embark on. The Swedish trade union federation (LO) recently conducted an enormous research project on the burning topic of inequality. A major report was written and several sub-reports by independent researchers—thousands of pages—were produced. But in addition a professional podcast series summarised the findings in eight episodes and there was a smooth study guide, with topics for discussion based on each episode.

You could have book-club meetings or a study group about the report—with podcasts uploaded to Spotify as your literature. In this way, the report was made accessible to union members who are used to listening to podcasts and audiobooks—but who do not always dive into the sub-reports of a research project. How did this idea come about? You start with the end user, then think of a digital tool, then about the reports you have produced—not the other way around.

5. *The masters of the platform*: What do Antonio Gramsci, Georges Clemenceau, Benito Mussolini, Winston Churchill, Michael Foot, Olof Palme, Al Gore, Sarah Palin and Boris Johnson have in common? They were all journalists, of course. That leading

politicians master the written word was logical in a world where the letters of the alphabet were the smallest building blocks of politics. But as voters live their lives in a digital world, beyond the wonderful smell of recently printed newspapers, politicians ought to master the new digital platforms.

A natural is Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. Take her appearance with her fellow US Congress member Ilhan Omar on Twitch (a platform where you play video games to a live audience). Ocasio-Cortez and Omar played *Among Us*—a ‘multiplayer social deduction game’ (my oldest daughter tells me no one plays *Among Us* any more but it was popular in 2020). The *Guardian* (October 22nd 2020) reported: ‘[I]t was, by every metric we have for this kind of event, an incredible success. Ocasio-Cortez’s Twitch channel garnered a staggering audience of 439,000 viewers, all watching her in real time ... with approximately 5.2 million viewers watching the stream in aggregate. Meme-makers extended the conversation well into the week.’

When the deputy-mayor of the Swedish town Luleå—gamer Fredrik Hansson—asked me if he should invite voters to try to beat him playing his favourite console games, my answer was: yes, of course. An 18-year-old who has beaten the deputy-mayor at *Super Smash Bros* or *Mario Kart*, while chatting about life in Luleå, is quite likely to vote.

6. *Digital partnerships and ‘polfluencers’*: If you went to the Swedish Social Democrats’ Twitter account during their recent election campaign, you found this message: ‘This account is no longer active. Instead, we are out on the streets and in the public squares, having conversations at workplaces and in stairwells where we knock on doors. You can also find us on Facebook, Instagram and YouTube.’

From this message we can learn two things. First, Twitter is only the tenth biggest social platform (monthly active users) and is often deemed to be elitist, negative and polarising. Instead, priority is given to meetings with voters in real life, and through the first (Facebook), second (YouTube) and fourth (Instagram) most popular platforms.

Secondly, TikTok—in fifth place and with mostly young users—is not mentioned.

This makes a lot of sense. If you do not see any benefit, stay away from the platform. If the platform is huge, engage but stay updated (Instagram having introduced reels, learn how to use them). And if the platform is too big to ignore but your party feels like daddy on the dancefloor (TikTok), try to form digital partnerships with interesting accounts active on the platform.

Working with ‘micro-influencers’ (1,000–40,000 followers) who have a big impact in a certain part of the country, among people with a specific interest or within a particular demographic group became important in the 2020 US presidential campaigns. The Swedish election campaign this autumn even saw the introduction of the concept ‘polfluencer’. This is an influencer who has a large following in social media who is not specifically linked to a political party yet produces content about political issues. The polfluencer might work as a teacher, nurse or police officer—which gives credibility and authenticity.

If you want to build relationships with micro-influencers and polfluencers, you should start way before election day. It will take a lot of work but the benefits could be substantial. Needless to say, there are digital tools that will help you find accounts which suit your campaign and your digital operations.

7. *Fetch a crazy item and bring it to your strategy*: As the digital part of your party activities grows, do not forget that you (hopefully) only have one strategy aimed at winning the next election. The trick will be to quickly understand a sudden development in a campaign, master the impacts online where reactions are fast and use the development as a tactic to reach the strategic objectives in that main document adopted by the party executive six months before the election.

The main objective for the Biden campaign was to inform voters about how, when and where to vote (amid Covid-19). For that purpose, a very sophisticated webpage, [iwillvote.com](http://iwillvote.com), was created (a chase system with layers programs—think of Amazon and how you

are reminded to finalise your order). The challenge now was to direct voters to the webpage and avail of all opportunities to do so. One came flying (pun intended) during the vice-presidential debate between Mike Pence and Kamala Harris. A fly landed on Pence's head—and stayed. As digital activity about 'Flygate' exploded, the Biden campaign kept calm and remembered its main task. It sent out a tweet from Biden's official account, formulated as an active link, [flywillvote.com](https://www.flywillvote.com). The link was of course to [iwillvote.com](https://www.iwillvote.com) and traffic was better than during the presidential debates and the final night of the Democratic convention.

Digital is not a separate part of your campaign. It is a growing part of your operations to execute your strategy and make it, er, fly.

8. *Go deep and look ahead:* At LO we realised we had an auditorium in our basement with brand-new technology, a tech guy who dreamed about being a television producer, a co-worker who kept in touch with all the districts and rank-and-file members and two people who loved to be in front of the camera (I was one). All of a sudden, we had our own weekly TV show which you could watch on the LO website or through Facebook or YouTube. The show premiered during the pandemic, during which around 95 per cent of LO members had to be at their workplaces (the middle class worked from home, of course). The production had many flaws, but those who watched the show seem to remember one thing: every episode started with an interview (over Teams) with a rank-and-file member somewhere—never with elected officials or politicians. Whatever you do in your digital projects, never forget that your members and supporters are the real goldmine and that technology gives you endless possibilities.

But you cannot only dig deep—you must always look ahead. Artificial intelligence will change our lives, and our parties and the campaigns we run. Already today, you can prepare for a debate in the following way. Collect all digital material to be found in which your opponent speaks. Let a program built with AI analyse the material and you will receive information about segments where the program

has found that your opponent sounds wobbly—nervous, not grounded in the topic, uncomfortable. This will help you to form your debate strategy and your attacks. So dare to use the technology and digital tools you have, let the rank-and-file speak and be afraid of relying on the old technology—not the new technology your opponent might already be using.

9. *The dark side of the internet*: There are endless problems with the digitalisation of our lives—including what seven hours a day in front of screens do to us as human beings. The labour movement has always kept the torch of education high and successful parties will spend time and resources educating members and staff how to handle the dark sides of the internet: cyberattacks, misinformation, phishing, hate, defamation, fraud, violations of digital rights and so forth.

There are, however, many ways to link your operations so that you can run positive campaigns with tough counter-attacks when needed. One practical example is to use social-listening tools which automatically scan the internet for you, so that you can detect if a narrative involving your party is receiving many interactions online. If so, you include the narrative in your own polls—or even in a focus group. In this way, you can assess which groups of voters were affected and in what way. Is the narrative just circulating in a right-wing bubble or are important constituencies affected? The answer to such questions will inform your response.

10. *Integrate all your operations*: There are many ways to organise the digital side of political parties and campaigns, and the names can vary. But already today many headquarters of progressive parties, unions and other civil-society organisations are more and more organised around a database-centred digital architecture. This means that you will integrate your contacts database, programs for e-mailing and texting, profiling of voters, message formulation and testing, cross-section searching, geo-targeting including a digital canvassing solution, social-media operations including a response decision tree, programmatic advertising, social listening and interaction guided by a response tree, fundraising, performance measure-

ment and a tactical calendar for when you are doing what in which social-media channel.

If you ask the Biden campaign what they could have done better on the digital side, blessed with time, the main answer is: more planning and earlier investments. Whenever your next election is, start organising and updating your database-centred digital architecture right away.

### From exclusion to inclusion

In the early day of the labour movement, exclusion from society led to the formation of the movement's own infrastructure in the public sphere. Today, voters spend close to seven hours every day in front of screens giving them access to an interlinked, digital world.

The challenge for political parties is therefore to achieve an *inclusion* of digital development in the best possible way. This give parties the opportunity to interact directly once again with voters through a digital infrastructure which is under their own control. For the foreseeable future, this will be done by combining traditional political operations based on geography (community organising) with online campaign work which operates beyond geographical confines (distributed organising).

One question social-democratic parties will have to ask themselves in the near future is what democratic influence digital campaigners, active through distributed organising during the campaign, should be given when politics resumes after the election. Should the physical annual meeting of the social-democratic branch in the union hall be opened up in some digital way, shape or form? Do people who prefer to be active online have to become party members, and show up in person, to have a say?

This will challenge the traditional functions of social-democratic parties (back to the pyramid) but the basic democratic structure should remain. Internal democracy makes parties stronger but digitalisation will force the old structures to become more transparent and

horizontal—and slow internal proceedings will have to be accelerated.

Parties will build advanced digital architecture but it will be used to facilitate something basic—physical meetings with the right voters. Sixty-two per cent of voters like a knock on the door from a political party, 33 per cent are lukewarm and only 5 per cent are negative. And 15 conversations on the doorstep lead to one new vote; on the phones, 35 calls are needed (Sundström, 2022).

Research however also shows that relational organising—that Messenger conversation with your cousin—is very powerful. So every successful party or organisation will have to do both, and combine them well.

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