

The Left, the People, Populism

The Left, the People, Populism

Past and Present



Edited by
Walter Baier, Eric Canepa
and Eva Himmelstoss

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Editors: Walter Baier, Eric Canepa, Eva Himmelstoss

Editorial Board: Walter Baier, Eric Canepa, Susana Constante Pereira,
Eva Himmelstoss, Kuutti Koski, Bernhard Müller, Sigfrido Ramírez,
Dagmar Švendová, Louis Weber

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PREFACE

This year's volume opens with an assessment of the European Union from the point of view of left strategy by Gregor Gysi, who was elected president of the Party of the European Left at its Congress in December. An idea of the few options left to a country led by a radical left party, which still suffers under the EU's financial regime, is given by Greece's Minister of Finance, Euclid Tsakalotos.

With the ongoing developments of neoliberalism – financialisation, externalisation of labour, workers as entrepreneurs of their own labour power, etc. – it becomes ever harder to apprehend human relations and how people produce their world. A de-mystifying, deciphering effort is needed, one that locates the changes within a natural history of human beings producing themselves and society, which at present still occurs within a capital-based mode of life. But at the same time the new must be analytically embraced, in fact understood as a development of the old. This is what Ursula Huws does in her essay on the problems of labour in the digital age. By contrast, an empiricist theorising of the conjuncture, that is, one that does not see the new within this larger context, has led to a supposition – in variants deriving from André Gorz – that there is an emergent, naturally occurring and emancipatory post-labour regime based on creative intellectual work via internet technologies, or that we are entering a period of misery due to a diminution of employment and vast precarisation of labour, a dystopic kind of post-labour society. Both views lead to a politics in which labour-movement-based organising, however reconceived, is seen as beside the point.

This – along with the related defeats, failures or shortcomings of the social democratic, communist, and new radical lefts – has created the basis for a new populism that has spread within part of the left and for the partial tendency to regard the left-right distinction as irrelevant. Chantal Mouffe has proposed replacing it with the conflict between the people and the elites or 'us' and 'them'. An example cited by Roger Martelli is Spain's Podemos, of which an important current poses the social antagonism as that between

the 'people' and the 'caste' instead of between specified constellations of social classes. Alberto Garzón fleshes out the complex and contradictory outlook(s) both of this new party and of Izquierda Unida.

In the most recognisable and unrespectable form of populism, the nationalist radical right proposes a conflict between an ethnic entity (or, in its more modernised form, the citizens who have been born in the country in question) versus parasitic financial, and cultural, elites. Its image of 'the people' is in certain cases a hazy mixture of common-man 'workerism' and a nativism that also embraces the indigenous business class. A European specificity is that, due to the distorting effects of the EU's technical economic governance structures, the goal is posed of wresting back national sovereignty from foreign bureaucratic domination.

By contrast, the diffuse populism current in some sectors of the left certainly does not pose the popular pole as an ethnic entity or as the natives but variously as the poor, the 99 per cent, the little people, the collection of the excluded, the immigrants, etc. who confront the rich, the privileged.

As Walter Baier urges in the context of the election of Donald Trump in the US, the left, in resisting nationalist right-wing radicalism, should acknowledge the validity of the social complaints of the radical right's working-class voters – in some important instances by now no longer a minority of these parties' electorate. They feel threatened by the neoliberal national and EU policies of most centre-left parties of government but also are not attracted by the politically-correct image they get from parts of the left which content themselves with a socially insensitive sort of political liberalism or substitute a class-wide approach with an NGO type of charity advocacy for particularly disadvantaged social layers. The radical right indeed poses a threat to liberal democracy. However, moral condemnation is not sufficient; an ardent political struggle is required to halt their rise. That right-wing radical voters primarily consist of lower middle class people afraid of losing their status – and that the non-voters largely come from those parts of the working class that already feel disenfranchised but are not a permanent 'party' of non-voters and can come back to the polls when offered something meaningful – is a point driven home by Baier and developed systematically by Horst Kahrs, Bernhard Müller, and Gavin Rae in terms of Germany and Poland. Kahrs points out the vicious circle (and then offers strategies to get around it): When social property in the form of welfare-state legal entitlements is whittled away working class people no longer feel like equal citizens and they vote less. If the left wants to strengthen redistribution the votes are likely not to be there for this, for upward redistribution has already decreased voter participation.

In response to the trend of regarding the left-right distinction as outdated, Roger Martelli suggests that one problem lies with seeing ‘left’ and ‘right’ as automatic identities of social groups. It is then possible to conclude that left and right are no longer relevant when a group of workers no longer identifies as left. Instead of this, Martelli suggests viewing capitalist society as repeatedly reproducing left and right poles of attraction rather than fixed positions. Viewed through this prism, the left-right polarity continues to be as real as ever. And, moreover, successful examples of left political culture have historically been built around specific projects for society, concrete visions, not simply on the representation of a group. There is no point, Martelli says, in pulling together the ‘people’, if not around a specific project for society, and if the project is to overcome the inequality generated by capitalism it is not the totality of the people that can be gathered around it, but only a majority constellation built around the working classes.

Serge Wolikow provides a historical genealogy of the left, and the conditions that generate the differentiations between ‘radical’ and ‘government’ left, with an emphasis on the centrally important French experience. And Jukka Pietiläinen shows how varied the issues are that ground left identification in different European countries; nevertheless, the basic group of issues and concerns constituting the poles of attraction delineated by Martelli are discernible.

The alternative to ‘left populism’ is certainly not a return to a narrow workerist conception based on the surface characteristics of factory-organised wage workers of the Fordist and pre-Fordist epochs. Lutz Brangsch argues that – despite the privatisation and fragmentation of public space and emphasis on the internet as a commercialised surrogate for it, allowing people to express themselves non-committally – the idea of a self-organised left political party is as relevant as ever, for never before have wage workers been so skilled and, due to the consolidation of the social division labour as a complex process, so objectively capable of gaining control over society. Similarly, Alexander Buzgalin, in taking us through the devastating fragmentations wrought by neoliberalism, in part from a post-Soviet angle, sees potential in the consciousness of the new kind of digital creative worker, allied to the workers in material production, for the building of a new kind of left consciousness and organisation. And Ludmilla Bulavka uses the perspective of the ‘active subjectivism’ of the Soviet ‘new man’ of the 1920s to critique post-modernism and posit a political subject who can de-mystify reality and change it. In so doing she materially grounds the appropriation and creation of culture as a necessity.

Although Baier, Gregor Gysi, and Pedro Chaves – who documents the

intensification of the EU's post-democratic technical, economic governance – all feel that there is need of rupture and a radical refounding of the European Union, they argue that the EU is too easy a target. If the EU falls apart it will not be replaced by an order that is less capitalist or more peaceful. Moreover, both the national constitutions and the EU treaties will only allow social change if there are massive social struggles, which must occur on all levels. In his interview, Tsakalotos deals with the problem of maintaining the identity and substance of a radical left party when it is in government and has to make painful compromises with austerity, indicating how it may nevertheless be possible to limit privatisation. Against Lexit he argues that since it is only the left that can offer a programme to reduce inequalities while also confronting the cross-border issues of climate change and tax evasion a retreat to the national sphere does not make sense.

Geoff Eley's historical essay on democracy tries to deal with the dynamics of its actual emergence. Democracy results far more from popular militancy than from importing the proper civil-society institutions, as post-communist ideology in Eastern Europe would have it. A historical approach is key here because in reality democratic capacities are expanded in ways that go far beyond juridical ones.

Susan Zimmermann deals with the complex dialectics and ironies of women's emancipation and anti-homophobia as precious assets of the West in legitimating its imperial intervention and control. She also points out how, historically, Western discourse and policies demonising misogynist practices of non-Western colonised societies have contributed to reifying and culturalising these practices and co-creating their religious dimension in reality.

Michael Löwy clarifies an important part of ecosocialism's prehistory, pointing to William Morris and Walter Benjamin as predecessors, and sheds light on the ecosocialism of Hugo Blanco and related indigenous movements in Latin America. The Roundtable on climate change and left strategy provides much information and analysis of attempts to link social and ecological justice, indicating experiences that have developed the populations' capacities to engage with emancipatory ecological change.

Joachim Bischoff provides a rich survey of the development of secular stagnation, the role of China in the question of world economic growth, and concrete 'New Deal' alternatives that could be advocated now.

In the Country Reports, Yann Le Lann deconstructs media clichés about the social composition of the Nuit Debout participants. Richard Seymour explains how the weakness of the left, of the Labour Party, and of the Labour left ironically made Corbyn's victory possible while pointing out its

fragility. Pablo Sánchez provides a balance sheet of Barcelona's Barcelona en comú government. And Anej Korsika points to the origins of the current situation in the Balkans in the left and right movements during World War II and the liberalising currents of the 1970s, which paralleled the advent of neoliberalism in the West.

The volume closes with a collective report on activities and events organised by the transform! europe network in 2016.

The transform! europe network was established in 2001 during the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre by a small group of intellectuals from six different European countries, representing left research institutions or journals, who wanted to coordinate their research and educational work. Today transform! consists of 29 member organisations and observers from 21 countries.

The network is coordinated by a board of eight members, and its office is located in Vienna. transform! maintains a multilingual website and publishes a continuously growing number of reports, analyses, and discussion papers on issues related to the process of European integration.

Just like the biannual journal which transform! published from 2007 to 2013, the yearbook is simultaneously published in several languages; it now appears in English, French, German, Greek, and Italian. Expanding our audience and broadening the horizon of the experiences reflected in *transform!* are not the only reasons why we publish our yearbook in several languages. We do not see translation as a mere linguistic challenge but consider it a way to bridge political cultures that find their expression in different languages and in the varied use of seemingly identical political concepts. This kind of political translation is of particular importance when set against the current historical backdrop of the left in Europe, and it focuses on finding unity in diversity by combining different experiences, traditions, and cultures. It is at the heart of transform! europe's work.

We would like to thank all those who have collaborated in producing this volume: our authors, our coordinators for the various language editions, and finally our publishers, Merlin Press.

Walter Baier, Eric Canepa, and Eva Himmelstoss

The European Union and the Left

Europe – Quo Vadis?

The Left and European Integration

Gregor Gysi

After the Brexit vote, there is a sense of cluelessness, or at least irritation, in Germany, that is, in the newspapers, in political journals, in the parties represented in the Bundestag, and certainly also in the federal government. Pre-referendum polls appeared to indicate that it was alarmingly possible that people would vote as they finally did, but nobody really wanted to believe it; it was simply unimaginable that a country that had so long been an EU Member State could suddenly leave it.

But the Brexit vote is not the first big convulsion. When refugees headed in great numbers towards Europe the EU thought it was not in a position to work out a solidaristic solution to the associated problems. Things never looked too good for solidarity in refugee matters; Greece and Italy were particularly hard hit by the EU's unjust asylum system; only this time Germany accepted people in great numbers and suddenly showed a completely different interest in a European solution. The alternative to a solidary solution was found in the EU by way of a rotten deal with Turkey. It forces the EU, especially Germany, to keep silent on Erdoğan's civil coup d'état.

But there is more. Over a year ago now Wolfgang Schäuble succeeded through sheer coercion, threatening to push Greece out of the euro, to force Alexis Tsipras's government to give up its policy. Now not all Germans are put together like Schäuble. The philosopher Jürgen Habermas found justifiably drastic words for this: 'I fear that the German government, including its social democratic faction, have gambled away in one night all the political capital that a better Germany had accumulated in half a century' (*The Guardian*, 16 July 2015).

Looking back to 2005 we find similarly grave events. The ratification of the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe was rejected in the referenda in France and the Netherlands. Following this, further ratification

procedures in other EU states were cancelled and the EU decreed a ‘pause for reflection’. Not much came out of this other than a new Treaty, the Treaty of Lisbon. It is already quite suspect in that it presents in different legal guise the core ideas of the failed constitutional treaty – a trick used to avoid any risk in trying to win over majorities to support it. But the cost was the lack of legitimacy of the new treaty and the constant manoeuvring to deal with the contradictions between the Member States. Nevertheless it almost failed when it was defeated in an Irish referendum; subsequently it could only be ratified after various renegotiations.

The ‘risk’ of a referendum already existed in previous situations involving the EU. This shows that mistrust in the face of European affairs had been building well before the financial and euro crisis. The reaction of governments in the EU to this risk now consisted of minimising the referendum risk. The first example is the Treaty of Lisbon itself. There were referenda neither in France nor in the Netherlands. In France they even changed the constitution. Of course, we should not fetishise what some consider to be the ‘will of the people’. Nonetheless the wrong reaction is to thwart forms of democratic co-determination in order to ‘neutralise’ a rampant scepticism within the populations of the EU Member States. The curbing of co-determination has encouraged and is encouraging this scepticism.

If we therefore want to speak of a crisis of the EU, which I have often done, we should not regard Brexit as its trigger. The crisis was there well before this, and we should ask what its structural causes are. We need more precise discussion of the terms and theories that have repeatedly been floated during the debate: that the EU and the Treaties are ‘undemocratic’ and ‘neoliberal’ (these are not the same things) and that within the EU powerful inequities have been piling up whose reduction is necessary.

Neoliberalism as the answer to the capitalist crisis

Nobody wants to say that they are ‘neoliberal’, while some like being seen as ‘ordoliberal’. But these are not the same. Neoliberals believe in the market and in entrepreneurial initiative. For them only the market can enable an optimal – that is, needs-based – allocation of goods. Put differently, any other mechanism of assigning goods to given needs is against the market in a negative sense (it takes too long, it cannot process all of the relevant data and information for the needed solutions to the problems, etc.); neoliberals are especially suspicious of the state. By contrast, ordoliberals consider a certain degree of state interventionism to be necessary. They are indeed neoliberals at heart, but they understand that, for example, monopolies distort precisely the spontaneity of the market they so worship. Thus they accept that the state

has to take care of ‘fair competition’ if the market is to bring its blessings to all. Along with their market optimism, both outlooks have something else in common – a pronounced hostility to Keynesianism, Marxism, and socialism (whatever its variety). Therefore I will forgo differentiating between neo- and ordoliberalism in what follows and simply speak of ‘neoliberals’.

Neoliberalism is not simply an ideology. Neoliberalism implies a politics, a policy that is not limited to economic policy. It is directed towards the relationship between economy, society, and the state. If, through the 1960s and 1970s, the developed capitalist countries could still be described as state-restrained markets then today’s phenomenon is that institutions such as the big financial institutions and rating agencies now dictate the line of approach adopted by democratically elected governments. States and their societies are embedded in global markets. Obviously, the neoliberals have succeeded in reshaping existing political institutions and creating new institutions. Still, this is not a peculiarity of neoliberalism but is what more or less all ambitious political ideologies do when they get a chance. What is specific to neoliberalism is that it reshapes and creates political institutions – it aims at ‘market conformity’. This means that democracy will only be permitted when it does not impede capital and its valorisation.

However, this needs to be qualified because the societies constituted as welfare states emerging after the Second World War were also compatible with capitalism. They were arrangements that benefited capitalism in two ways. First, it was precisely democratically and through the welfare state that capitalism could confront state socialism within that era’s system competition: it was more productive, it allowed at least an acceptable internal distribution of prosperity, and it was more democratic than state socialism. Second, democratically constituted capitalism with welfare states could deploy growing mass consumption for an optimal use and expansion of capital’s productive capacities. This enabled a compromise between the interest of the workers in rising wages and less unemployment, on the one hand, and the interest of entrepreneurs in growing profits and greater utilisation of productive capacities, on the other.

This qualification has to take account of the fact that this class compromise is breaking up very quickly. Capital’s interest in high profits played a role in policy; however, the interests of the employees were in no way ranked on the same level. Thus there was profit growth along with equal or declining labour costs. At least for a time this has been feasible through deregulation of the labour markets and especially of the financial markets.

This is how the neoliberals set the scene. Capitalism’s growth crisis, which began to be apparent in the 1970s, was to be broken through profit

maximisation at any price. But they did not get particularly far with this. Neoliberalism has broken its own spell. Since 2008, at the latest, we have been living in a permanent crisis capitalism.

It is, however, not so simple to say that we want the financial sphere to be more strongly regulated again. First, because the neoliberals will immediately clamour. Yes, their respectability has been damaged – and, ever since the bank bailouts, the watchword ‘market before state’ seems less convincing to people – but they still intellectually dominate a major part of the political elites. This then poses a question of (intellectual) power. Second, the European Union is founded on a system of treaties that contains within it the Magna Charta of neoliberalism: the four ‘fundamental freedoms’ of capital (the free movement of goods; freedom of movement for workers; right of establishment and freedom to provide services, free movement of capital). The single states of the EU are compelled to dismantle any legal impediments to these freedoms, and the new establishment of any kind of impediment is ‘forbidden’. This has led to a deregulation of the markets.

The EU – motor of neoliberal developments?

This at least is the impression that one can get. I believe that there is a lot of truth in this, the more so as alternative possibilities of development have been discussed and consciously not adopted. But a lot of truth does not mean the whole truth, and it is therefore false, even if only a little.

What is true is that the decision to leave social policy under the aegis of the individual welfare states has led to a massively undesirable development. Through Europe’s economic integration the national social systems have come under pressure without there being a European direction in shaping welfare statism, which could have dealt with this pressure. The latest euro crisis has shown, especially in southern Europe, what it can mean to leave the social systems in the hands of the nation-state, for these nation-states can then be compelled to dismantle these systems ‘on their own’, under European supervision. A European integration of welfare states could have spared the people of these countries a great deal of pain. But the European social model should always be more than the welfare state. It involves trade unions, the right to strike and to collective bargaining, and the like. Here the practices of the European Court of Justice, especially the Laval and Viking judgements, are interesting. The ECJ relativises, even against EU directives, freedom of association and the right to strike in relation to fundamental market freedoms. In the case of the Rueffert judgement we can even see a constitutional conflict between the jurisdiction of Germany’s Federal Constitutional Court and the ECJ. This shows clearly that the market

freedoms can damage the social models of the nation-states.

The lack of welfare-state integration only presages it. What is playing out now in Europe is a ‘negative integration’ in the domestic market. The mode of integration is characterised by the dismantling of the impediments to integration vis-à-vis freedoms for capital. There are in fact possibilities of a ‘positive integration’ that can, at the European level, institute a political framework for the European market, but they have not grown at the same pace as nation-state institutions have been weakened or eliminated.

This ‘political imbalance’ has costs for the nation-states, which range from tax-revenue losses to growing scepticism about European integration. The latter in particular provides ground for right-wing populist parties and movements. They imagine a picture of a supposedly perfect past that was destroyed by globalisation and European integration.

Some consider it completely unrealistic to change the treaty basis of the EU in such a way that a welfare-state Europe could be established ‘without barriers’ analogous to the creation of an EU domestic market without barriers. In reality, it is not so easy to gather 27 EU Member States (this not even counting Great Britain, which is still a member) around a table, certainly not around this question. This has to do with the supremacy of neoliberal ideology. At the same time, precisely the example of Great Britain shows that we can no longer take the political costs of a merely negative integration so lightly.

Is the EU undemocratic?

There is no doubt that the EU, if we measure it by the standards commonly applied to states considered to be democracies, is no democracy. However, it also is not a democracy-free zone.

Democratic elements can definitely be recognised:

1. The European Parliament (EP) is elected.
2. Since the Treaty of Lisbon the EP has more rights than before (although it does not appoint the head of the European Commission it can reject a proposal made by him).
3. The same can be said of legislative procedure; the EP is actively integrated into it.
4. And Citizens’ Initiatives are possible. Admittedly, the scope allowed is not very great, as the EP is obliged only to address the issue in question; however, it doubtless extends the participation of EU citizens beyond the EP elections themselves.

Among the non-democratic aspects:

1. A change of the Treaties is only possible through unanimity procedures and rests with the national governments.

2. The EP, it is true, is included in legislative procedure but it can be thwarted in decisive instances. For example, Martin Schulz, pushing his authority to its outer limits, interrupted the debate over the TTIP in the EP and thus prevented its early collapse. The draft is now going through Trilogue negotiations; what the outcome will be we do not know.

3. The Eurogroup: This is an informal body and therefore very untransparent. Here, at least since the euro crisis, very crucial political decisions are taken.

4. The ECB works independently of politics but is – as we knew at the latest since the Tsipras government’s surrender in July 2015 – an actor that is so important politically that its effective integration into political procedures would seem imperative.

5. The Fiscal Compact called into being with the ESM, binds the national governments, as the Stability Pact had already done, to austerity policy even if this is known to be counterproductive on the macroeconomic level. The role of the Commission is noteworthy here. It is often hard to understand when it intervenes, and why it does not, in the case of infractions against the deficit rules.

The question naturally arises, if we are to categorise things as ‘democratic’ and non-democratic’, of what should meaningfully be understood as democracy. With this we enter on uncertain terrain, for we know that the misuse of these terms is, among other things, very closely bound up with power interests. Accordingly, Russia is seen as not particularly democratic even if there are elections there and a legal opposition. On the other hand, the Ukraine, which is allegedly democratising, combines elections with bans on parties. There certainly are difference between states, but what is decisive is how the differences are evaluated, and here power interests play an important role, without this even being specifically addressed.

The most diverse state forms come under the category of ‘democracy’. There are parliamentary republics like the Federal Republic of Germany, semi-parliamentary presidential republics like France, and constitutional monarchies like Great Britain. If we draw an additional comparison between the understanding of democracy handed down in continental Europe and that in the United States, it becomes clear that there is no institutionally effective concept of popular sovereignty in the USA; this has to do with American democracy being based on older concepts of democracy than is the case in France, for example. If we ask what common element makes Germany, France, Great Britain, and the USA democracies then, if anything, what comes to mind is a geopolitical concept: the ‘West’.

But we should not be confused by the power-political contortions of the

concept of democracy. ‘Democracy’ also has a normative meaning. In the sense of German idealism we could say that democracy is a state form that produces institutions of freedom. Naturally, states also form other institutions, and not all of these institutions are institutions of freedom. As necessary as bureaucratic administrations are, they are not very democratic. Parliaments are elected and already incorporate free decisions, while administrations are occupied by directors and employees.

It is central to a modern understanding of the state that state rule is dependent on recognition by the ruled. The recognition problem means at least that there have to be plausible reasons, comprehensible to most people, for the necessity of state rule, which includes limits to personal freedom. If one assumes the necessity of state rule, then one also assumes that there are general interests that can only be guaranteed by a state. Hobbes sees, for example, the peace-bringing effects of national law as the basis of legitimation for the state. Social peace could never, at least in Hobbes’s view, arise from the efforts of individuals. What Hobbes is assuming is an interest that all or at least most have in social peace.

If one asks what kind of interests or needs – beyond concrete examples – could provide a viable basis for a community, one might first think of individual interests or preferences. Perhaps through aggregating individual interests a collective preference could be formed. However, considerations of this sort have led to results such as the ‘liberal paradox’, which makes it improbable that individual preferences could provide the basis for the general interests being sought. It seems that philosophers like Hegel had already recognised this paradox. They left purely individual interests to the sphere of ‘bürgerliche Gesellschaft’ (civil society). The subject of civil society – disregarding his/her egoistic interests – has to see him/herself as the subject of a citizenry that reaches agreement on questions of general interest. This is the transformation from ‘bourgeois’ to ‘citoyen’. Clearly, the results of these agreement processes regarding general concerns can be faulty, and therefore they must in principle be revisable; ideally, determinations on general affairs are to be made through consensus, but a pragmatic approximation to this would be the majority principle; it may well be ideal that all have a chance to speak up on common concerns, but a pragmatic solution is an elected, representative assembly. This is acceptable particularly when we are dealing with territorial states and not with quiet towns. What is striking in the discussions about direct and representative democracy is the lack of binding substantive assertions on matters of general interest. Instead, we find formal requirements on procedures: majority principle, elections to representative legislative assemblies, and the principle of revisability of decisions.

Thus democracy can best be characterised as a procedure of opinion and will formation. Democratic rule gains recognition above all through the acceptance of procedures as being reasonable processes – and this is where democracy’s Achilles’ heel lies. The idea sometimes put forward by the left according to which ‘bourgeois’ democracy is only a formal democracy suggests its incompleteness. But democracy is first of all incomplete due to the unspoken way in which it is substantively predetermined. One such predetermination, for example, is that the capitalist economy in fact largely remains impervious to any democratic influence. This is illustrated on the legal level by the fact that it is by and large dominated by private law. The more public law can be established in the economy the less capitalist will the mode of economy be – this would then be at least one possible view of a path to democratic socialism. Another prior assumption is expressed in the slogan ‘private before state’. Its consequence is that private law (for instance, in public-private partnerships) increasingly prevails in the public sphere, which makes political control increasingly difficult.

I see a further prior assumption in an interpretation of the ‘common good’ that conceives this as an objectively recognisable concern. Questions of the common good can then be assigned to bodies of experts, while parliaments are put in the position of being *ex post facto* providers of legitimacy. We are acquainted with this semi-democratic practice, for example in the Hartz Commission, the Rürup Commission, etc. But it dominates what happens in the EU. Provisions of primary law exist that specify the primacy of market freedoms as well as deficit goals; and then expertocracies concern themselves with how these requirements can be compatibly adhered to. Due to their neoliberal spirit these predeterminations are particularly invidious; but in general they constitute a problem of democracy, which does not go away by substituting ‘better’ provisions for ‘neoliberal’ ones.

Another problem is that all debates around the failed constitutional treaty, the Treaty of Lisbon, and the EU’s new financial constitution (Fiscal Compact and ESM) systematically omit one question: in what direction is European integration heading? Will there be a European state at the end? Or is the goal the integration of a free market in which the integration process simply eliminates all public law that stands in the way of realising market freedoms? Or should the integration goal be a neither-nor? As long as this question is not even raised it is not clear where to meaningfully situate the concept of democracy. If the EU is to become a state then high standards have to be applied to its democracy. But if it is not to become a state?

Are national exit strategies desirable?

The idea that we would be rid of difficulties like neoliberalism and the deficit of democracy if we got out of the EU is naïve. Its persuasiveness is due to the notion that previously everything had always been better. It therefore involves the romantic utopia that sees the past as a model. I want to be clear that this is no specialty of the right. We also see it in the left.

Right-wing strategies of retreat operate ideologically with concepts of national identity and state sovereignty. It is very hard to say, for example, what a German identity is (and it probably belongs to the realm of fiction). Is it language? But the German language exists beyond the territory of the Federal Republic of Germany. Moreover, many Germans speak a dialect, not correct high German. Is it art? This becomes still more difficult. European art traditions lived through exchange between many centres. Certainly, there is a German-language literature, but what would it be without its English, French, or Russian influences? The same applies to science and philosophy, which always lived through exchange. ‘German culture’ is an invention of imperialism and the late nineteenth century. It is time to shed these ideologies. The concept of sovereignty is similarly controversial. Conservatives tend to regard the concept of sovereignty as the actual substance of the state. The idea is that where the state is relativised, for instance through European integration, this also damages the sovereignty of the nation. As an alternative, a concept of sovereignty was formed in the Enlightenment that understands sovereignty as the capacity to enact legislation. It can be the absolute monarch, or the people, which gives itself a constitution and which creates the point of departure for the production of laws through democratic procedure. Sovereignty in this sense always exists; but it changes its form. In other words, that which presents itself as the preserver of identity and sovereignty is to a great degree tied to fictions or one-sided conceptualisations.

But there is also a left that recommends exit. Especially prominent here is Wolfgang Streeck who in his Frankfurt Adorno lectures suggests that only the establishment of strong nation-state bulwarks could offer protection from the neoliberal imperatives of the EU elites. The motive here is of a fundamentally different kind from those of right-wing exit strategies. The worry is about what remains of the welfare state, and the belief is that this is the only way to save it. However, two questions remain unanswered. First, if the German left should succeed in protecting at least some vestiges of the welfare state by abandoning the integration process, why is it not interested in those who are weaker in other EU countries? Is it really ready to abandon these people to their fate? Second, why actually does the left

not feel more confident in organising Europe-wide resistance to neoliberal and undemocratic tendencies in the EU? Where has internationalism gone? Here the left runs the risk of letting pessimism change into petty nationalism without even noticing it.

It is by now clear that I am not enamoured of exit strategies. The collapse of the Tsipras government's ideas in July 2015 was a wake-up call for the left: We are (still) too weak to effectively oppose the carryings-on of Schäuble and his assistants. A Europe in which peace prevails is the EU's most important legacy. Peace is endangered if the EU collapses. Therefore the left can have no interest in single countries going it alone. It has to put itself in a position to fight for a better, a social, an ecologically sustainable, democratic, de-bureaucratised, and transparent Union.

Twofold Disenchantment

Walter Baier

A sigh is just a sigh.

The fundamental things

Apply

As time goes by.

Herman Hupfeld: 'As Time Goes By', 1931

Donald Trump's election as the 45th President of the United States alarmed policy makers as well as the media and intellectuals all over Europe. Not only because the umbrellas have always been opened up here when rain clouds darken the skies over Washington but because the scenario very much resembled what we have become familiar with in Europe. 71% of white, male voters without college degrees voted for Trump, also giving him a majority among the over-45 age bracket and among the middle-income strata, which had up to now made up the core of Democratic Party supporters. 78% of Trump's voters say that the financial situation of their family has worsened compared to one year ago, and 63% expect that life for the next generation will be worse than their own.

Must Trump's victory be regarded as the harbinger of an imminent political earthquake in Europe?

Francis Fukuyama, in praising 'good populism'¹ wrote that by voting Trump 'American democracy is finally responding to the rise of inequality and the economic stagnation experienced by most of the population'. This might seem paradoxical. But not if one considers that electoral decisions are over-determined by political and ideological preferences and therefore only in exceptional situations correspond congruously to the economic and social status of voters.

This explains why only a minority of 42% of Trump's electorate say that the economy was the most important reason for their decision, while for 64% it was immigration and for 57% terrorism which made the difference.

What Trump voters think of him is quite surprising. Only one third (35%) believes that 'he cares about people like me', 26% give him credit 'for good judgement', and only 8% feel he has the 'right experience'.

How could a person regarded in this way become president of the United States? The answer is striking. 83% of his voters felt he 'can change the system'.² Apparently, people have a quite realistic view of Trump. He might be a politically inexperienced egomaniac, lacking good judgement; he might not even care about me and mine; but still he holds out the possibility of 'system change', whatever this might specifically mean.

The thrust of this 'single-issue' movement colliding head on with the political system has surprised just about everyone. But in no way can it be considered apolitical. The popular disenchantment expressed concerns not only the political personnel; it also embraces the hegemonic system which by now guarantees political consensus, as Harvard political theorist Danielle Allen wrote in a comment for the *Washington Post*. 'Half the nation consistently fails to understand the other half because the US is a nation divided between those who watch the news and those who read it.' And she concludes that 'understanding our political dynamics means spotting how those streams do or don't mingle, and tracking the eddies, riptides and surf storms their convergences generate'.³

Europe, 'de te fabula narratur'. The Eurobarometer detects the same degree of popular disenchantment. In 2015, 43% of EU citizens said they were dissatisfied with their democracies; 48% expressed distrust of the government, and 62% believed wholesale that things are going in a wrong direction.⁴

These findings illustrate what in political theory is seen as the typical populist divide between 'the system' and 'the people', the latter constituting what Laclau calls an 'empty signifier',⁵ capable of absorbing, like a 'black hole', all kinds of popular consternation and frustration; it bequeaths a discursive void that can be filled with various significations, even antagonistic ones.

The struggle for filling up the 'empty signifier' is the typical struggle over hegemony and power that takes place in the already existing arena of power relations.

In contrast to conventional interpretations in which right-wing populism is interpreted as a 'pathological' deviation from the normality of Western liberal democracies, the Dutch political scientist Cas Mudde argues that it is the symptom of a pathological normality, in other words, that right-wing populism is essentially a radicalisation of established neoliberal attitudes and values rather than their negation.

By way of 1997 Eurobarometer data, Mudde demonstrates that already

by that year only a mere third of the citizens of the EU-15 represented themselves as ‘not at all racist’, another third acknowledged they were ‘a little racist’, while another third acknowledged openly racist feelings. And even going beyond what most radical right populist parties would propose, 20% supported ‘wholesale repatriation’, agreeing with the statement that ‘all immigrants, whether legal or illegal, from outside the European Union and their children, even those born here, should be sent back to their country of origin’.⁶

This means that the populist cleavage between the ‘common sense’ of people and what is regarded as ‘politically correct’ has existed for quite a long time. Michael Fleischacker, head of the Vienna editorial board of the conservative *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, observes that with Trump’s election right-wing populism encompassing a broad range of socioeconomic, world-political, and institutional issues won ‘the first major victory in a long-lasting cultural battle. Yes, it is true that an aggressive, growing majority, which has long been considered a minority [...] is about to cancel a consensus that has lasted half a century. The deal was something like this: We, the “progressive” left, say what is socially and culturally right, and what is to be thought and written and what is not. The others ought to keep their mouths shut; however, they are allowed to fulfil themselves economically. We let the smarter people get rich and buy subversive art; we provide social support to the less smart people, let them watch TV and have fun. At a certain point, the effective muffling of the majority gave the successful minority the impression that they were somehow a numerical majority and were thus democratically legitimated. Since the deal on the success-or-feed-side is coming unhinged, it does not really work on the cultural side either.’⁷

The diagnosis is of almost Gramscian lucidity. The hegemonic crisis here is explained as the crumbling of neoliberalism’s two constitutive elements, cultural liberalism and neoclassic supply-side economics. The interplay between them worked well as long as the economy delivered prosperity for a growing and optimistic middle class. Once it stalled, cultural liberalism encountered the active objection of those who hitherto have at best tolerated it without actually accepting it.

Of the inroads of right-wing radical parties into proletarian, formerly social democratic electorates there is in fact much evidence.

However, a great deal of empirical material has been amassed in order to suggest that the rise of the radical right parties in Europe is the expression of the demoralised and confused lower classes, which are contaminating societies from the bottom up. These observations, however, are ideologically biased as they do not even bother to examine the vote shares of the radical

right parties in other segments of the electorate, in particular among the upper class.

But the rise of the far right cannot be approached only empirically. The disarticulation of a hegemonic structure which has become dysfunctional is neither the direct reflection of the crisis nor is it a spontaneous reaction of the masses.

Political and ideological components come into play here. In contrast to the discussion in the US, in Europe the role which powerful media play in boosting the campaigns of radical right parties is barely addressed in the debate. Neither is the lavish financial support which these parties receive from large financial corporations a topic of serious research and debate.⁸

People's grievances expressed in their vote for the populist radical right must be taken seriously as the 'the sigh of the oppressed creature' as well as of 'the opium of the people'. However, in this instance too the fundamental insight applies that 'the ruling ideas of each age have ever been the ideas of its ruling class'.⁹

The European Union is an easy target

The common accusation that the European Union is supposedly inefficient ignores the EU's great efficiency in imposing the neoliberal agenda on Europe's societies, even taking advantage of the financial crisis to do so.

However, what is true is that since the 1990s the EU has systematically betrayed the promises it has made to the people of Europe. In Central and Eastern Europe it failed to provide the promised swift catch up (except in a very few metropolitan areas); in the South the incipient welfare states have been sacrificed on the altar of neoliberal austerity, while even in the countries of the centre the living standards of the middle class are stagnating and welfare systems are being curbed.

For all of this, the European Union became too easy a target of populist criticisms. All the more so that Brussels, unlike Washington, is not the commonly recognised capital of a sovereign state which could confer historical and political legitimacy on a system of sophisticated checks and balances.

Some comrades in the left have nevertheless proposed playing this card. In an article published on the eve the British referendum former Syriza MP Stathis Kouvelakis rejected the EU as unreformable and called for its dissolution. 'So we have to play the referendum game, while blocking the forces of the xenophobic and nationalist right from winning hegemony and diverting the popular revolt.'¹⁰

Similarly, Stefano Fassina, former Finance Minister of Italy, calls on the

left to create ‘national liberation fronts’ rallying the progressive forces with ‘the democratic right wing and sovereignist parties’.¹¹

Although the two authors apparently differ on whether the left should fight the nationalist right on its own ground or forge alliances with it, in essence they agree that the European Union needs to be demolished in the name of the nation.

This is pertinent insofar as the European Union beyond the Economic and Currency Union constitutes a sophisticated system of institutionalised interstate relations whose democratic deficit arouses criticism that can easily slide into nationalism.

In other words, in contrast to what the predominant, optimistic European-policy rhetoric of today’s Europe maintains, Europe is by no means done with the ‘national question’.

The rise of nationalism in Europe is an indicator of growing inequality between the centre and the periphery, accompanied by a reinvigorated rivalry between the major powers, both resulting from the growing inequalities caused by neoliberal austerity.

Eric Hobsbawm, as a British historian with old Austrian roots, began his famous monograph on nation and nationalism by making reference to ‘the first noteworthy attempts to subject the issue to a dispassionate analysis’, which were ‘the important and under-appreciated debates among the Marxists of the Second International on what they called the “national question”’ involving ‘the best minds of the international socialist movement, Kautsky and Luxemburg, Otto Bauer and Lenin, to name only a few’.¹²

Interestingly enough, although dedicating a study to the concept of nation, Hobsbawm recommends to those interested ‘in this subject’ to ‘adopt an agnostic attitude’ and ‘not [to work with] an a priori definition of what makes up a nation’.¹³

In Hobsbawm’s view, the nations are more than mere ideological constructions related to statehood, either already existing or the subject of a new liberation struggle, but constitute an element of material social reality.

Socialists before 1914 agreed on the principle of socialist internationalism, which meant always prioritising the interests of the working class over national differences. But from this principle opposing strategies were inferred. While Karl Kautsky and Rosa Luxemburg were looking forward to an imminent withering of national and even linguistic differences – a development they regarded as progressive – Lenin proclaimed, at least in theory, the unconditional democratic right of each and every people to national self-determination.

As far as the controversies among socialists were more than ideological

preoccupation, that is to say, the reflection of different conditions they encountered in the struggle, they demonstrate that nations are not essential facts, time-transcending and immutable, but phenomena that are historically contingent within time and space.

Therefore the principle of internationalism that implies above all else the prioritisation of ‘class interest’ over national difference does not oblige socialists to opt for a particular scheme for handling national questions but always to adopt a political position that prevents the working classes of different nations from being pitted against one another.

This was exactly the position of the Austrian socialist Otto Bauer who commented with irony on the bitter polemic among Polish socialists at the turn of the nineteenth to the twentieth century about whether they should fight for an independent Polish nation-state or not. ‘At a time in which working-class militants are still daily imprisoned, shot and hanged, the workers of Warsaw and Lodz fight about whether the relation between Russia and Poland should be regulated by the constitutive assembly in St. Petersburg or in Warsaw, whether they should demand the eight-hour day from the Russian Duma or from the Polish parliament.’¹⁴

Does this not resonate with today’s ideological discussion about the European Union which threatens to divide the left? The wisest way to proceed would seem to lie in acknowledging that a democratic, social, ecological, and feminist Europe will never become a reality if not achieved through the struggles of the people – instead of focusing now on divisive issues around specifically formulated plans A, B, C, etc.

There are good reasons for the growth of Euroscepticism, especially in the countries of the European South. Can an internationalist European left ask the left in these countries to ignore these feelings of their people, all the more as they are grounded in real experiences?

Nobody today can predict the future of the euro and even the EU. Instead of mainstreaming obvious differences vis-à-vis the European Union the left needs debates for agreeing on a clear set of essentials for a common strategic platform which also acknowledges political differences.

The European ascendancy of the radical right and the imminent threat it poses to liberal democracy once more demonstrates that the struggle is not only about socio-economic rights. And it becomes even more political since it cannot be addressed in the national framework only.

How can we react? Do we accept the dilemma of choosing between Europhilia and Euroscepticism?

In reality most left parties always put forward a nuanced position. While supporting European unity in general they never have been ‘Europhiles’

in the mainstream sense of the term. Consequently, they were against the Maastricht Treaty, against the Treaties of Amsterdam and Nice, against the Fiscal Pact and the so-called Five Presidents' Report, and of course against TTIP.

If the question then is not whether to unconditionally accept European integration or reject it wholesale does the left then have at least to decide whether it is in favour of 'more' or 'less' Europe?

Actually, the vast majority of the left already rejects more of the same European Union politics. Indeed, a discussion about more or less of something only makes sense when it refers to a specific content. Therefore the right questions would be: what policies does the left advocate? What European Union does it want? And in what proportion should powers and competences be shared between the Union and the countries?

This debate requires a twofold disenchantment; we need to be disabused of two illusions:

One concerns the actually existing EU. The European Union never has been the democratic, social, and peaceful project that the governing parties made it out to be.

However, there also is no reason to have illusions about a possible post-EU Europe. The law of *horror vacui* also applies in history. If the existing European order falls apart it would make way for another one that would be no less capitalist and would be characterised by Great Power rivalries well known from the inter-war years where they mingled with the petty conflicts among small nation-states, especially in Central Europe where borders drawn after the First World War are still at variance with the multinational composition of the territories in question. Conflicts over South Tyrol between Italy and Austria or over Transylvania between Hungary and Romania, which were contained through the EU, would most likely re-emerge spurred on by reinvigorated nationalisms. Could such a repetition of history ever be in the interest of the European people or benefit the left?

Another scenario is possible. The contradictions inside the European Union might not necessarily result in a sudden collapse. Perhaps we will see a process similar to the decline of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, which proceeded for over five decades until it resulted in the First World War. Combined with a bi-partisan system of the centre-right and radical right, this scenario too would not create favourable conditions for the social and democratic progress that the left is fighting for.

In other words, neither a slow decline nor the sudden collapse of the EU opens the gates to a progressive exit of the crisis. Dismantling the EU would only benefit left goals if the major problems societies have to face could be

better managed in a Europe of 28, 35, or 50 national currencies, nation-states, and border regimes.

But is not the idea of reforming the EU as unrealistic as the idea that demolishing it would lead to a better Europe?

Indeed, the system of European treaties and institutions, particularly after the Maastricht Treaty, constitute a powerful bulwark against any progressive social change. However, this does not mean that all democratic struggles are in vain since it is also true of national constitutions that they provide spaces for progress only to the extent that these have been won through popular struggle.

In today's politics the question of the European Union cannot be separated from the question of how to combat nationalism and the radical right. It is crucial here to counter the populist right's claim to be 'anti-systemic'. In substituting an authoritarian '*Führer*-state' for liberal democracy the populist right is in fact preventing resistance at a time when popular democracy is being distorted and depleted by the political establishment.

In fighting the radical right it is necessary to shift the emphasis from moral condemnation to political struggle, which in the first place requires us to acknowledge the validity of the social concerns, complaints, and criticisms of the people whom politics has abandoned. Bernie Sanders rightly pointed out in his first statement after Trump won the White House that the President-elect had tapped into a real and justified anger.

It has often been said that the decisive battleground with the far-right is the overcoming of mass unemployment and precarity in working and living conditions. The left must not only raise these demands but propose feasible strategies. This means a break with the system on both the national and European level – a socio-economic transformation.

But advocating the social and economic rights of the people is not sufficient.

We must at the same time defend liberal democracy, human rights, women's liberation, and the rule of law, all of which are threatened by the radical right. However, democracy in the broad sense of the term cannot be defended or extended in alliance with the ruling forces – whose aim is to cancel the political rights won through struggle by the working class – but in opposition to them. Without becoming liberals ourselves, we must ally with all forces available in defending what is democratic in liberal democracy.

By the same token, defending democracy on the national level must not be confused with nationalism against which the left always has fought.

It is evident that in its present shape the European Union is part of the problem and not the solution. However, choosing between democratising

the nation-state and strengthening transnational democracy is to accept a false dilemma.

The political left and particularly its parliamentarians should therefore fight for a fully-fledged European Parliament, a Parliament elected by universal and equal suffrage, whose rights must be expanded, not to the detriment of the national parliaments but on the basis of a reasonable and transparent division of authority grounded in a democratic constitution.

The most powerful response to the growing nationalism in Europe would be a programme of integration to establish democracy on the European level while respecting the self-determination of its national components.

Before the First World War overturned Europe's system of states Otto Bauer proposed a reform of the Austro-Hungarian state which he termed 'cultural national autonomy', also presenting this as the 'socialist nationalities principle' in which collective national rights would be assigned not primarily according to territory but be understood as rights of persons wherever they lived. This concept could be a very relevant one in relation to old as well as new national communities that are currently emerging through migration.

Bauer was conscious of the larger implications of this proposal. Thus in 1907 he already wrote that it could yield the blueprint of a 'new kind of social structure', a "state of states" in which the single national communities are incorporated'.¹⁵ Thus the 'United States of Europe' would be the 'final goal of a movement on which the nations have embarked and which through forces that have already become visible will be greatly hastened'.¹⁶

Bauer's far-reaching concept for the progressive and democratic unification of Europe remained theory, apparently negated by the First World War. But so was the order which emerged from the war, which in turn proved to have only been the prelude to an even more murderous clash of Europe's nations.

Seven decades of fragile peace followed, leading Europe again to a crossroad to which the left has to offer a response.

Although the radical left always has been internationalist there is still no justification for idealistic views. Defending and expanding social rights as well as real democracy on both the state and European levels require discontinuity with the existing system, and if the formula 're-founding Europe' is pertinent then its meaning consists precisely in the call for this political and institutional rupture.

NOTES

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- 12 Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalisms Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*, Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991; quoted from the German edition, Frankfurt a M., p. 12.
- 13 Hobsbawm, p. 19.
- 14 Otto Bauer, *The Question of Nationalities and Social Democracy*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000 p. 453. This criticism clearly is related to the exhaustive treatment of the question of a Polish delegation in the Russian Constituent Assembly in the final chapter of Rosa Luxemburg's *Nationalitätenfrage und Autonomie* [The Question of Nationalities and Autonomy].
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Euclid Tsakalotos – interviewed by Haris Golemis

Haris Golemis: *At the time of this interview (12 December 2016), the Greek government is close to completing its second review of the third painful Memorandum of Understanding, which it was forced to agree to on July 2015. I understand that the government's but also your view is that this evaluation must be completed as soon as possible, so that an agreement on the short-term debt restructuring plan can be reached. This will allow Greece to benefit from the ECB 'quantitative easing' (QE), which in turn will lead to restoring confidence in the financial markets. All of this, together with the extensive privatisation programme to which we are committed by the agreement, along with fiscal, social and political stability, is to attract Greek and foreign investment, which will result in growth and reduced unemployment.*

My question is whether you think that this policy plan can be integrated into the strategy of a radical left party, or, to be provocative: how is this different from a neoliberal narrative for exiting the crisis?

Euclid Tsakalotos: It's a good question, and perhaps the most difficult of all to answer. My own view is that what we have agreed to, and what we intend to negotiate, is more complex and less unidirectional than your question implies.

Thus, for instance, we have cut pensions but mostly at the top end of the income scale. We have legislated a basic pension for all and resisted the demands of the institutions that this be means-tested. Our income tax reform was progressive. The efforts we have made to help the poor and the socially excluded, through various measures to confront the humanitarian crisis that we inherited, have put a disproportionate burden on certain sections of the middle classes, including the SMEs and the self-employed. This will be corrected slowly as our various initiatives to deal with tax evasion begin to bear fruit.

Turning now to privatisation, it is true that we are privatising a number of state-owned enterprises (SOEs) as well as leasing out various ports, airports, and land for development, mostly in the area of tourism. On the

other hand, we have a new state holding company whose assets, whether real-estate or SOEs, are not necessarily for sale, and half of whose value-added proceeds do go to our creditors – but half goes for investment in the Greek economy. Through the law regulating the state holding company (HCAP) we have ensured space for Services of General Interest, whether economic – mostly public utilities – or non-economic, such as educational and social services. This allows for non-commercial values to play a role – universality, affordability, users' rights, equal rights, and so on. At the time of this interview we are negotiating with the institutions the way in which the SOEs will be restructured and integrated into the government's national, sectoral, and regional development strategy, and the way to operationalise our preference for serving, in any restructuring, the interests of stakeholders and not just shareholders. By comparison, the previous government established an organisation whose only task was to prepare state assets for sale.

Is all of this enough? Perhaps not. But on the other hand we should note two things. The first is that the international political economic environment is, at present, out of balance. I do not see that we are heading towards a return of the kind of neoliberalism that predominated in the years before the crisis. When Theresa May can say to her party conference that what the country needs, after Brexit, is more trade union rights and more state intervention, we see that something serious is afoot. Elites are being challenged more or less every time they face an election or a referendum. The question is whether our kind of left is going to have any role in the new equilibrium that will surely arise, one way or another, in the coming years. And, secondly, a defeat of Syriza would have consequences well beyond Greece's borders. It could signify that the only alternative to the current elites is right-wing populism, of various levels of nastiness. That suggests to me that we should continue to do our best, even within the very severe constraints that we face.

H.G.: *The 'first' Syriza, that is, the political organisation that existed since its establishment until its split on August 2015 due to the signing of the third Memorandum, was a European, if not a world, paradigm of co-existence under the same roof (initially as a coalition and since 2013 as a single party) of political organisations and currents of the left with different ideological references and strategic objectives. Based on your experience, after all that has happened in recent years, do you still believe that this co-existence is possible in Greece and in Europe, and if so, when and how can this be achieved?*

ET: Syriza continues to be a meeting place of many left-wing currents, even though it lost a number of these after the crisis of the summer of 2015. Some

of them never really accepted the party's internationalist understanding that in a globalised world, with so many interdependencies (in areas such as the economy, tax evasion, finance, the environment, and so on), it is very difficult to go it alone. Others left, and this was particularly unfortunate in my view, because they stopped believing in the kind of logic I described in answering your first question.

In the period before the first Syriza government I always argued that unity was more important than the correct 'line', in part because there were so many lines and cooperation within the left cannot rely on the once-and-for-all determination of the line. But in part because I believe that the lesson from the alterglobal movement was that showing people that we can work together in oppositional movements is a precondition for convincing them that our kind of society will be democratic, pluralistic, and tolerant of different views. All this becomes more difficult in government of course, and it was a contradiction that, as your question implies, was never solved.

In part the problem is one of organisation. We, on the left, have not yet come up with an organisational form that is both democratic and effective, and at the same time attractive, especially to young people. That is why so many of the latter prefer single-issue causes, which are vital but which in the end, by themselves, do not create either a movement that is greater than the sum of its parts nor one that is sustainable in lean times.

The other part is of course political in a different sense. For all of us who have grown up believing in the internationalism of the left, and the ability of the EU to transform itself in a progressive direction, the past years have been a shock. Is it still possible to believe in a Europe of the people, in an EU that gives space to progressive social experimentation, that is more open and democratic? It does not look that likely at the moment, but only time will tell.

HG: *Developments in Europe show that the widespread dissatisfaction with neoliberal policies implemented in the EU and especially in the Eurozone not only turn increasing segments of the populations to political apathy and absenteeism, but in many countries strengthen the forces of the extreme, populist, and Eurosceptic right. Do you think that we are facing an unavoidable '1989 of really existing European integration' or that the situation is reversible? In the second case, what in your view should be the aim of the radical left at the national and European levels? In this framework, do you consider Lexit to be an alternative?*

ET: There is no doubt that the burden of the crisis fell on the usual suspects. As Marx emphasised, in any crisis the workings of capitalism become more transparent: wages and benefits 'must' fall, the contract with the creditors

must be respected, while other social contracts – with pensioners, with young people, etc. – ‘must’ be redrawn. The question is whether there are any prospects that workers will participate to some extent in the recovery. If they do not, then the forces you mention in your question, both right-wing and centrifugal with respect to Europe, will surely grow.

That is why we have insisted in the current negotiation that collective bargaining must return in Greece, and that we will not legislate up front new anti-social measures to be implemented in the post-programme period, that is in 2019 and beyond. Should we be unsuccessful, then our government will surely fall. And this will be a signal throughout Europe to workers, but also to sections of the middle class, that the recovery phase has no place for them. My mention of the middle class is significant, because more or less in the last decade inequality has become a middle-class issue as well. Globalisation as it is now does not just affect steel and textile workers but all sorts of previously ‘respectable’ middle-class professions, as well as SMEs.

This is the basis for a new left hegemonic programme. Because only the left can offer such a programme to reduce inequalities while dealing with those issues, such as climate change and tax evasion, which clearly transcend national borders. Or to put it another way: a retreat to the national sphere is unlikely to be something that occurs under the hegemony of the left, and this retreat will in any case be unable to address the above agenda. Whether in the longer term the left’s weakness in this respect can be reversed, and whether, after a period of national retrenchment, we might see a new wave of left cooperation in new ways, I have no idea. As you will appreciate, as Finance Minister I have enough short-term problems to deal with!

Economic Governance of the European Union: Activate the Emergency Brakes?

Pedro Chaves Giraldo

Walter Benjamin polemicised against the naïve idea of revolutions as the locomotives of world history. In his thesis on the concept of history¹ Benjamin suggested that if this locomotive, constructed by previous society, were allowed to circulate, most likely it would be heading inexorably into the abyss. ‘Marx said that revolutions are the locomotive of world history. But perhaps things are very different. It may be that revolutions are the act by which the human race travelling in the train applies the emergency brake.’ Painting such a picture in an article about European economic governance would suggest a Eurosceptical position, which, with Brexit, has recently seen a unique moment of glory. But this is not our intention. In this instance, the activation of the emergency brakes can serve to question the direction of the trip, the speed of the train, and the way in which the tracks and stations are built. In particular, it is important to understand the relation between economic governance and the euro as well the relation between its institutions and democracy and legitimacy. Economic, social, and political reality calls into question the continuation, as if nothing has changed, of this course and the speed at which it is being travelled. Without substantive changes a derailment is more likely than ever. In fact, such a widespread wave of concern about the very future of the integration process has probably never before been sparked by a European crisis.

I intend to address one issue here: the impact of the EU’s new economic governance in terms of the democratic quality of the process and its legitimacy. To do so I will first look at the economic crisis as a crisis of expectations of economic integration. This is an important factor because the impact of the economic crisis has undone the idea of ‘a Union for all’, which points to a significant constitutional change in the integration process. I will try to show the effects in respect to public opinion and, finally, propose an interpretation of the new economic governance and its impact.

The economic crisis and its consequences

The effects of the economic crisis in Europe are well enough known not to require more than a brief résumé here. However, the numbers are so extraordinary in terms of unemployment, poverty, and growing inequality that they deserve to be pointed out.

According to Eurostat,² the unemployment rate for August 2016 is at 2009 levels. It was 10.1% in the euro area and 8.6% in the whole Union, with significant disparities between the unemployment rates of Germany (4.2%) and the Czech Republic (3.9%), on the one hand, and other countries such as Greece (23.4%) or Spain (19.5%), on the other. In terms of the initial expectations, what is relevant here is that since 2008 disparities in employment rates and unemployment as a whole have seen a more pronounced increase precisely within the euro area.³ Other social data show the growing social dualisation:⁴ 125 million poor people in Europe today and an increasing concentration of wealth.

But as Stiglitz⁵ and Fitoussi⁶ point out, alongside the economic differences other important cleavages have emerged around beliefs and attitudes, such as diverse views on cooperation and solidarity between countries. One element is the growing North–South gap, which is one of the chasms that threatens to sink the European project. The introduction of the euro is at the centre of the criticisms. It is seen as something that has broken the promises made in the process of European integration. The causes may be found in the inadequacies of the currency's origin, the launch of the single currency, and the resulting impact on the overall economic architecture of the Union. Stiglitz suggests that the main factor that could permit the optimal functioning of a single currency is a 'sufficient resemblance between the countries'. In his view, the centrality of budgetary concerns, christened 'convergence criteria', leads in fact to more divergent economies. The inequality between countries with budgetary constraints imposed by the convergence criteria contributed to this divergence. This is also Aglietta's view, for whom the nominal convergence of interest rates resulting from financial unification has led to a real divergence of economies.⁷ For Aglietta the German authorities are, for the most part, responsible for this budgetary obsession expressed through mandatory requirements to prevent excessive deficits, which resulted in the Stability Pact adopted in Amsterdam on 17 June 1997, the covenant that 'enshrined the incompleteness of the euro'.

To these factors we have to add a clearly insufficient European budget and the lack of political institutions capable of ensuring the legitimacy of the single currency and the decisions linked to post-crisis responses. All of this in the absence of a constitutional order that is implicit in the social acceptance

of a currency and that guarantees its economic and political viability. This is all the more striking, as the euro has not ceased to be, from the beginning and above all else, a political project.

In more doctrinaire economic terms, the euro did not meet some of the basic conditions for an optimal currency area and was not equipped with appropriate devices to respond to crisis situations: setting prices and wages, internal budget adjustments, mobility of labour, and a mechanism for budgetary transfers between Member States.⁸

The reality shows that the initial expectations of the virtuous articulation between single market and single currency are far from being met. The introduction of the single currency was to increase competition, allowing price convergence and a better distribution of resources over the territory, and thus strengthen the economic union, but this is not how the reality developed, and forecasts point to a consolidation of the divergent trend. By 2017, GDP per capita is expected to be 50% lower than the European average in Greece and Portugal, 23% in Spain, 17% in Italy, while in Germany it will be 21% higher.

New economic governance and democracy

The crisis revealed the failures of an economic governance that rested on the principles of monetary and fiscal neutrality and the implementation of structural reforms that would supposedly allow an increase in potential growth and a decrease in the unemployment rate. This ‘government by rules’,⁹ very dear to the German ordoliberal model, proposed joint supranational institutions, primarily related to monetary control and inflation, whose paradigm is the European Central Bank (ECB), and the intergovernmental coordination of economic policies.¹⁰ Monetary union was built on an optimistic premise that would both conjure up crisis and then be used to manage it, that is, sufficient voluntary cooperation between states and a commitment to avoid budgetary crisis.

In practice, it articulated two formulas of ‘cooperation’, which we will call soft governance through the open method of coordination and which has taken the form of different institutions such as the Broad Economic Policy Guidelines (BEPG), the guidelines on employment policy, or the Cologne process, a macroeconomic dialogue involving the Ecofin Ministers of Labour and Social Affairs, the European Commission, the ECB, as well as employers and unions aimed at increasing economic growth and employment without altering price stability. This model sought to achieve results through dialogue and voluntary cooperation between different institutions and actors.

The second process, hard governance, was based on a clear mechanism of

material sanctions in order to ‘tie the hands of states’; the clearest example is the Stability and Growth Pact. In real terms, the Maastricht system of economic governance is based on three main features: the coordination of economic policies of Member States; the prohibition (except in exceptional circumstances) of any form of financial solidarity between states and of the monetary financing of states through the ECB or national central banks; and limits on fiscal deficits and public debt. Interestingly, the first reform of this model – in 2005 – took place after the failure of Germany’s and France’s fiscal deficit indicators.

As a whole, this model of economic governance failed to manage the crisis for several overlapping reasons: insufficient monitoring of macroeconomic imbalances, especially when states did not have at their disposal the use of currency devaluations to respond to differences in competitiveness and pricing; the total absence of coordination of budget policies, despite Article 121 of the Treaty, which considers the coordination of economic policies a ‘matter of common interest’, and the BEPG where in practice coordination has not existed; an underestimation of the interdependencies between Member States, meaning that the impact that structural asymmetries could have on economic performance for the whole area was ignored; and the marginalisation of the EU budget as a tool of economic policy – the Union’s budget being not only far smaller than its federal counterparts throughout the world, even when these are limited as in the US, but also incapable of making the budget an instrument of proactive economic policy.

Last but not least, in political terms, the crisis has blown away the constitutional artifice constructed out of Maastricht.¹¹ This constitutional commitment based on the euro area consisted of the combination of centralised monetary policy with decentralised political, economic, budgetary, and fiscal incentives connected to the common currency. In the search for an entente that would allow everyone to feel relatively comfortable, the use of the opt-outs created the reality of different economic constitutions. However, the favourable economic situation until 2008 allowed a relatively friendly coexistence of these different realities. The victory of the Brexit vote and other centrifugal dynamics make it clear that diversity has facilitated the dislocation between states and societies and put at risk the integration process itself.

‘New economic governance’ is the set of responses adopted by the European institutions in answer to the crisis. We thus now have the third reform of economic governance. Given both the accumulation of new powers and the impact and consequences of them, there is some agreement among scholars that we are dealing with a new phase, and I agree. Obviously,

there is no question here of a radical change away from the basic orientations of previous economic policy; what is meant is the kind of impact the new institutions and mechanisms have had on the political structure of the Union, creating a new political and institutional situation, with important implications for the process of integration. Roland Erne,¹² giving a new meaning to the words of Barroso in 2010, speaks of ‘a silent revolution’ with emphasis on the punitive and automatic character of the new economic governance mechanisms.

The new features are:

- support plans for the balance of payments of Hungary, Latvia, and Romania; plans to ‘rescue’ Greece, Ireland, and Portugal, and plans to help recapitalise the financial system for Spain and Cyprus;
- the launch of a European financial stabilisation mechanism and a European Stability Mechanism (ESM) with a lending capacity of 500 billion euros and the aim to ensure financial stability in the euro area;
- the reform of the Stability and Growth Pact, via the ‘Sixpack’ and the implementation process of the ‘European semester’ for reinforced budgetary and macroeconomic surveillance of Member States. Through the newly created mechanism of the Excessive Deficit Procedure, the Commission may initiate a process that requires a country to undergo a programme of structural reforms. The macroeconomic surveillance is carried out under the new procedure for economic imbalances; this procedure can generate specific recommendations for certain countries, including sanctions;
- the European Semester – an annual cycle of surveillance and coordination of budgetary and economic policies;
- the adoption of Euro + to strengthen fiscal discipline, and a strengthening of the coordination of economic policies in the euro area covenant;
- the adoption of a ‘Twopack’ for ex ante budgetary and economic policy surveillance;
- the adoption of the Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance (TSCG) and the inclusion of the ‘golden rule’ of balanced budgets in national law.

In short, the four pillars on which these mechanisms are articulated would be: *fiscal surveillance*, *macroeconomic surveillance*, *socio-economic coordination*, and *financial assistance*. It is a complete package that is intended to be expanded and completed with the proposals contained in the report of the five presidents of the EU institutions. The Five President’s Report advocates more unity in

economic, financial, budgetary, and political decision-making.¹³ It speaks of ‘... a political union that provides the basis of these three unions through a real strengthening of democratic control, legitimacy, and institutions’.

To achieve this, the Report proposes the creation of a system of authorities for competitiveness, ‘that manage to keep track of the policies and results in competitiveness’ and are able to guide social actors and have ‘taken into account the guidelines of the authorities during wage negotiations.’ A strengthened Macroeconomic Imbalance Procedure (MIP) is also proposed. The Report notes that the MIP ‘should not be used alone to detect imbalances but also to promote structural reforms through the European Semester.’ The need to pay greater attention to the results in employment and in the social arena aims at strengthening coordination of economic policies within the European Semester, simplifying its contents to make it more effective and clear.

In the banking field, a series of measures to strengthen the role of the Single Supervisory Mechanism are considered, the most important novelty being the creation of a European Deposit Insurance Scheme (EDIS); in this context the union of the capital markets is considered a priority. The idea of reinforcing what the Report calls ‘responsible budgetary policies’ leads to the creation of an advisory European Fiscal Board as a public and independent body to assess the way in which budgets and their implementation comply with European directives.

The Report’s proposal for democratising this scheme basically concerns three issues. The first is strengthening the ‘economic dialogue’ between the European Parliament and the Council. Second, strengthening the dialogue between the Commission and the Eurogroup in the context of the discussions on the European Semester and also improving cooperation around the European Parliamentary Week organised by the European Parliament in cooperation with national parliaments (here the report suggests a presence of representatives of the Commission and the Council). Third, improving the initiatives that already exist in the legal framework, such as providing for a European Commissioner in the national parliaments to request explanations concerning the recommendations made under the Excessive Deficit Procedure.

Multiple problems of economic governance to be depoliticised

Since 2011, the year from which we can date the new governance with the launch of the Sixpack, economic developments in the Union in general and more specifically in the euro area have been disappointing. This article is not the place to consider alternative economic proposals, but at least we

want to point out the contradictions implicit in the current situation: on the one hand the modest impact of the economic measures in relation to their objectives, on the other hand the high social cost and finally the democratic inconsistency of the proposals, that is to say, the lack of relationship between the identified problems and the democratic dimension of the proposals.

Without going into too much depth, I would like to highlight this last feature, which I think is the most important element of this economic governance: the lack of democratic meaning.

A crazy constitutional construction

As Sergio Fabbrini has said, the economic crisis has swept away the ‘constitutional consensus’ that came out of Maastricht. Arrangements between the supranational and intergovernmental levels were established on the basis of an underlying agreement that was part of the shared values of the integration process: ‘a Europe for all’, that is, a process of inclusive and incremental integration that would not leave anyone out and whose dynamics would be strengthened by the realisation of real economic convergence among EU countries. The euro area would function as the vanguard of this explicit promise of ‘progress for all’. But the crisis has swept away this consensus. At bottom it blocks any growing convergence of economic systems and living conditions. As convergence grinds to a halt, the system is beginning to collapse. So far, economic performance, which has enabled economic governance, is not exhibiting any reversal of the increasing divergence between northern and southern Europe.

Along with this ‘constitutional mutation,’ there are other factors that make up the bizarre constitutional construction installed by the new economic governance.¹⁴ First, the heterogeneous legal nature of the texts. There are 8 Community texts (7 regulations and a directive) with intergovernmental treaties, which impose heavy constraints for states and others (as the Euro Plus Pact does), but they are statements without obligations.

There is a complex geography of overlapping group perimeters of states whose place in economic governance depends on their relationship with specific measures: there are 28 Member States of the Union that also take part in the Twopack and the ESM;¹⁵ there are 25 states covered by the TSCG, and 24 states by the Euro Plus Pact. Moreover, voting arrangements vary according to the legal frame: qualified majority voting (or simple majority) for EU states or those of the euro area affected by the Two- or Sixpack, and reversed qualified majority voting for euro area members under the TSCG. According to types of issue, in the European Council decisions are taken either by agreement or by a qualified majority of 80% (in some cases 85%).

Similarly, the Union institutions involved in the procedures vary

according to the affected domain. The complexity of the procedures can be shown, for example, in the course of the 2016 European Semester where three procedures are developed accompanied by numerous documents for examining the aggregate euro area budgets, based on the macro-economic framework provided by the Annual Review of growth, leading to Commission recommendations discussed by the Eurogroup and adopted by the Council.

The system is so rigid and so confusing, procedurally and technically, that without sufficient technical expertise it is almost impossible to monitor the process as a whole. As far as national policy makers and parliamentarians are concerned, they have at best a rough idea of what the system involved does.

A new institutional balance

The management of the economic crisis – with its asymmetric distribution of possibilities of intervention between the institutions and the constitutional and institutional disorder fuelled by the tangle of treaties, agreements, rules and institutions – has distracted attention from the institutional shift that has occurred in the European institutions: the increasing centrality of the European Council and the reinvention of the European Commission as a political secretariat of the Council.

Analysis of three specific domains related to economic governance, financial stability, flexible coordination of national policies, and financial-sector supervision and surveillance of economic policy, brings us to conclude that two things are being done, which may seem contradictory: the strengthening of the Commission's role and its shift from executive to technical tasks.

Since the beginning of the crisis the political initiative to find 'European' responses to the economic and financial tsunami that was taking place moved the European Council to the tip of the EU institutional triangle. The visibility of what Europe did was embodied in the summits of heads of state and government, in their statements and final statements.

In the first forms of financial assistance, for example, the Commission was in charge of loan capital and distribution, although it was the Council that decided on the conditions. In the second form of financial assistance, initially embodied by the European Financial Stability Facility (EFSM), the task of distributing the 440 billion euros of total appropriations was delegated to a new organisation that took the form of a limited company registered in Luxembourg. The same has occurred with the ESM, which has replaced the previous EFSF and EFSM.¹⁶

The participation of the Commission in the troika, together with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the ECB, is very relevant at the

technical level and politically. The Commission is responsible for assessing needs and negotiating the protocol agreement with the country concerned, but the management is shared with the other two institutions. The conflict between the IMF and the Commission is well known, especially in its political dimension, with the former reproaching the latter for its insistence on austerity policies the Fund considered counterproductive. As in the 2012 conflict with Hungary around the negotiation of the country's second aid programme, the Commission tried to virtuously articulate two requirements: exerting its authority as guardian of the treaties and its willingness to give satisfaction to the request of creditor countries.

The management of the Greek crisis highlighted the supporting role of the Commission. Its goal was to try to mediate between the Greek government and the other really significant institutions, particularly the Council and ECOFIN. The results were a disappointing management of the Commission itself, as the President of the Commission said repeatedly.

In sum, the most striking change in the balance of power between institutions relates to the consolidation of a model of governance based on rules and procedures that deal in a new way with responsibilities: the decision-making capacity assigned to the European Fiscal Board, ECB and ECOFIN, and the specialised and technical management to the Commission.

The measures referred to in the Sixpack, Twopack, or in the European Semester comprise an extensive panoply of procedures: for infringements of excessive deficits, a rapid alert system for the assessment of the macroeconomic situation of a country, a scheduled timetable for the European Semester, and procedures for macroeconomic and fiscal imbalances.

Most of these mechanisms operate on the basis of statistical indicators pointing towards comfort zones and risks and/or with trigger alerts, followed by the accompanying procedures. Naturally, in this context the Commission's competences remain politically significant – advisory committees, country visits, recommendations etc. – but it is clear that the 'political role' of the Commission has lost relevance in relation to other actors, namely the Council.

Moreover, this model of crisis management rests on a technocratic idea of 'management': statistical indicators, automatic alerts, independent expert advice, etc. It is an approach that has been criticised for ignoring the political dimension of the debate over the very meaning of the crisis, its management, and the results of this management, particularly, but not only, in southern Europe. Interestingly, we see the emergence and consolidation of an extreme right which makes the critique of technocracy and bureaucracy in Brussels its hobbyhorse.

The European Parliament as a part of the institutional triangle has been relegated to a true institutional limbo, although it still maintains its role as co-legislator in directives relating to the banking union and accessing information, and in some cases it organises public hearings. It can take the initiative to invite other institutions, including individual states (under certain conditions), and it receives reports from the Commission related to the implementation of macroeconomic adjustment programmes. Under the European Semester, the Parliament's role becomes more significant and includes that of co-legislator in some processes, and it has the leading role in organising the 'parliamentary weeks' with national parliaments; it can express its views in the draft Annual Growth Survey and the recommendations for each country.

But it is obvious that real power is far removed from these ordinary legislative processes and that conditions for exercising parliamentary scrutiny are not worthy of the name. At best, the Parliament is involved in information, participation in the legislative phase only, and only on some specific issues, along with some 'institutional influence' in general.

It seems clear that the traditional confrontation between the Commission and the Parliament has been replaced by that between the ECB and the ECOFIN Council. In any case, it can no longer be argued that the European Parliament is the institution whose powers have grown most since the Treaty of Maastricht. That view no longer reflects the new circumstances.

The Five Presidents' Report offers no improvement in this regard: the scope of change continues to make the European Parliament a house with diminished responsibility and one unable to perform the function of even basic political oversight.

Given the European dimension of the measures and institutions proposed, this 'control capacity' was, since the beginning of the crisis, removed from the authority of national parliaments. In a system that, from the outset, heaps up democratic shortcomings, this new model of governance has increased the illegibility of the model, its opacity, and lack of control.

Following the models of governance proposed by Crum,¹⁷ we would highlight increased competences at the supranational level but in which political control remains in the executive of Member States and monitoring is performed through depoliticised technocratic processes and institutions.

This model implies that the entire political process operates beyond effective parliamentary control, both at European and national level. Moreover, the logic of the capacity to introduce changes is explained and understood according to the logic of classical international institutions, where the discretion of the Member-State governments increases and is

superimposed on established procedures at the EU level, when available, on deliberative and decisional transparency or on the very right to self-government. In the dynamics of the integration process, consolidation of this model helps to entrench this growing decisional opacity, the illegibility of the system to which we have referred, and the increasing centrality of states. They have created new dynamics comparable to the confrontation between creditors and sovereign debtors with different levels of democratic quality: the German Parliament is clearly not on the same level as the Greek Parliament.

These factors militate against the integration process and the possibility of creating a European public arena and socio-political subjects articulated by specifically European dynamics of conflict. A democratic solution would involve substantial changes in policy and institutional dynamics, conceivable changes around a model of democratic federalism mean, right now, activating the emergency brakes. The biggest risk at the moment is that the salvation of the euro is traded against the eternal damnation of everything else, starting with democracy. The European Union must not become like France's *ancien régime*, a kingdom whose greatest glory coincided with the most miserable condition of its inhabitants lives.

NOTES

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Social Evolutions

The Future of Work: Neither Utopias nor Dystopias but New Fields of Accumulation and Struggle

Ursula Huws

It is fanciful to presume that there are many Marxists who believe in an afterlife, so it is perhaps perverse to imagine Karl Marx sitting somewhere on a heavenly cloud, looking down at the world and contemplating the current state of the left. Nevertheless, if we suspend disbelief and give way to this fantasy, it is difficult not to imagine him giving out an exasperated sigh of frustration and disbelief at the collective amnesia that seems to make it impossible to learn from history.

What he would see, from his fluffy white throne, much as he predicted, is the juggernaut of capitalism recovering from yet another of its recurrent crises, mightier than ever, leaving in its wake a trail of environmental and human devastation exponentially larger than the previous time. As after the crises of 1973 and the early 1990s, the crisis of 2007-8 unleashed a massive wave of destruction. Untold millions were wiped off the value of assets, both material and immaterial; production facilities were closed down; and hundreds of thousands of workers paid the cost: through the loss or downgrading of their jobs, the depreciation of their savings, and the penal effects of the government austerity policies legitimised by the crisis.

Now that the dust is starting to settle, it is clear that capitalism is still alive and kicking. It has restructured itself, found new sites of accumulation and new markets, regained the upper hand over labour in sectors where organised workers were relatively strong and found new ways to subjugate both the working population and the reserve army. As is always the case, of course, it has not achieved this unconditionally. Each capitalist innovation requires workers to bring it into being and each process of restructuring launches new dialectics, from which spring new contradictions. But even the most ardent optimist must recognise that at this moment in history the workers of

the world are far from united, and no revolution seems imminent.

How can this be? What is it that gives capitalism this amazing ability to defy the apparent logic of the falling rate of return on profit and the saturation of global markets and reinvent itself in this phoenix-like way?

I will argue in this article, as I have done on several occasions in the past since the 1970s, that capitalism survives at least in part by bringing new areas of life within its scope. But before examining this in detail, it is useful to examine some of the arguments that blinker thinking about the future of work, on the left as in the academic mainstream and in popular culture, rendering such developments so hard to discern as aspects of economic development.

The future of work: terminological obfuscation, Utopias and Dystopias

One obvious source of confusion is the obfuscating discourse about technology that tends to arise with each twist of the boom-and-bust cycle. New developments, by definition, do not come with a ready-made vocabulary to describe them. Neither will they be captured in official statistics, which are based on established categories. So the field is open for anyone – academic, journalist, consultant, politician, or corporate representative, from motives of curiosity, puzzlement, self-promotion or genuine worry – to invent new coinages and, in the absence of solid empirical evidence, make grandiose claims about the way that life will be transformed in the future as a result of the changes these catchphrases purport to describe.

In the 1970s and early 1980s, the discourse was about ‘informatics’, ‘telematics’, ‘information superhighways’, an ‘information society’, or simply ‘new technology’. By the 1990s, these had been superseded by terms like the ‘knowledge-based economy’, ‘weightless economy’, ‘digital economy’, or just ‘new economy’. After the bursting of the dot-com bubble at the turn of the Millennium, these terms went out of fashion, only to be replaced, in the current era, by ‘platform economy’, ‘gig economy’, ‘sharing economy’, ‘network economy’, and the like.

Each time, it has been claimed by some commentators that a new industrial revolution is underway (whether this is the second, third or fourth depends on the commentator’s world view) and that the traditional laws of economics no longer apply and must be reinvented for a new era. Each time, an unspoken assumption is made that this particular kind of progress is both inevitable and desirable and will bring with it a range of putative social and cultural benefits that, following a kind of cost-benefit analysis, are seen as outweighing any unpleasant side-effects of change.

For some, especially those Marxists who were brought up to believe that science and progress were synonymous, each development brings us closer to a new post-capitalist world of leisure and bounty for all, in which labour can become creative and autonomous. Technology will release boundless increases in productivity, enabling us to meet our needs without back-breaking toil and releasing free time which can be shared equally throughout the population.

Counterbalancing such Utopian scenarios are more negative ones, rooted in the realities of the impacts of automation on specific industries and jobs. Technologies are not simply adopted because they are there, but because they fulfil some particular function that is useful for their adopters. Under a capitalist system, especially one that is emerging from crisis, companies are seeking to restore profitability, and one of the most obvious ways to do this is to apply automation in areas where labour costs have historically been high, in order to increase productivity not to generate leisure but to restore profitability. Large companies that can afford to do so will thus typically use the latest technologies to target capital-intensive areas where workers are well paid, which is where the greatest savings are anticipated. Because good wages do not fall from the sky but are the results of past struggles, these are also likely to be the areas where workers are well organised and seen by capitalists as troublesome. Just as weavers were among those in the front line in the eighteenth century, so were printers and auto workers in the 1970s.

These organised groups of skilled, reasonably well-paid workers, highly visible in the labour movement, are likely to be found in large concentrations, reflecting past spatial patterns of capitalist development: the weavers in those parts of Northern Britain where the first industrial revolution started; the auto workers clustered in cities like Detroit, Coventry and São Paulo, areas where the impact of their vanishing jobs is all too visible. Workers are also consumers, and analysts look at the decline of these cities and try to measure the economic loss. Then they look at the map of labour across the rest of the developed world (defined as it is by existing occupations in existing sectors) and (making assumptions based on the capabilities of the technologies they know about) extrapolate some more. Looms don't buy clothes, they point out, and robots don't buy cars. Automation will lead to a downward spiral of overproduction. Mass unemployment is upon us and with it will come a crisis for capitalist enterprises that have no consumers to purchase their products. Capitalism will implode, starved for lack of the market expansion it relies on to feed its insatiable appetite for growth.

We are currently in the midst of just such debates. On one side are Utopian discourses about how the 'sharing economy' or 'peer-to-peer networking'¹

can bring a 'world without work'² in which services and goods (some self-manufactured on 3D printers) can be exchanged between individuals in cybernetically regulated decentralised markets on the basis of need. On the other are dire warnings from think-tank-based economists³ that large-scale unemployment is round the corner.

These apparently polarised views in fact rest on similar misunderstandings. Both forecasts tend to be based on a somewhat blinkered vision, in which the known landscape of labour is assumed to be constant, with changes taking place only within its currently visible borders. As in the Utopian visions of André Gorz⁴ and Ivan Illich⁵ in the 1970s and 1980s, the labour that is envisaged by the techno-optimists as being available for sharing in the post-capitalist world is the labour that is currently paid, and visible in the statistics. Typically, the total number of hours worked across a national economy is taken as a basis for calculation, added up and then divided by the working-age population to give a reduced working week that is assumed to be all that is needed for everybody's needs to be met. There is little or no mention of the unpaid reproductive labour that underpins this paid work. As I have written elsewhere⁶ 'While Adam blogs, we must ask, who is cleaning the toilet?' Both human needs and the existing division of labour are assumed to be frozen in time.

A similar zero-sum-game logic underlies several features of the calculations of job losses that will result from automation. 'Jobs' are often assumed to be fixed and finite in number. Little account is taken of the restructuring that takes place up and down the value chain with each elaboration of the technical division of labour which, while causing job losses in some sites may create others elsewhere: for example, the mining of the raw materials, the manufacture of components and assembly of all those robots, drones and 3D printers that are going to make workers redundant; their design and testing and maintenance; the supply chain management and customer service; the logistics labour that will shunt them from factory to container ship to train to warehouse to customer. Not to mention the labour involved in maintaining and servicing the broader information infrastructure that supports and enables global value chains to function: the satellites, fibre optic cables, electrical power lines; the innumerable sockets, adaptors, chargers, screens, keyboards, smartphones, headsets, routers, batteries, and other paraphernalia, becoming detritus almost as quickly as they are purchased, requiring constant replacement. Then there is that labour, so often forgotten, of keeping it all clean.

I speak now only of the physical labour related to existing manufacturing industries and the tools currently being introduced to transform them, but

even here it quickly becomes apparent that dynamic processes are in play. New jobs are created as old ones are deskilled or destroyed but the new ones are not necessarily in the same places as the old ones, nor do they necessarily require similar skills. Restructuring may involve outsourcing work from one company or sector to another, or relocating it from one region or country to another, or both. These upheavals also change the spatial organisation of work, with new patterns of agglomeration and dispersal; new centripetal and centrifugal dynamics. While there is a tendency for capital-intensive functions requiring highly skilled people to be concentrated in specific locations, perhaps near centres of research and development, and for routine service functions to be dispersed, there is nothing inevitable about these patterns. The more that work is standardised and routinised, the easier it is for workers to be substituted for each other. Modularised tasks can be combined and recombined in multiple ways, rearranged like lego bricks into whatever configuration suits the employer best, in a wide spatial and contractual variety.

New sites of capital accumulation

Brutal though they may be in their impacts, such restructuring of existing industries may do little more than sustain past profit levels, by reducing the cost of labour and increasing the rate of exploitation. For capitalism to surge forward, it also needs new fields of accumulation. It needs to create new kinds of commodities from which it can make a profit. It could be said that it needs to engage in an ongoing process of what was originally translated into English by Marxists as ‘primitive accumulation’, a process of expropriation that David Harvey has rechristened ‘accumulation by dispossession’⁷ in what might be seen as a paraphrase of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon’s famous anarchist slogan ‘property is theft’⁸, with the noun made verb.

The commodification of ‘nature’

This concept is certainly appropriate for describing some of the many forms of accumulation of natural resources currently taking place across the globe and becoming the basis for new industries (and new employment). These include, at a scale visible from space, the seizure of land and the colonisation of ocean beds for resource extraction, plantation agriculture, or fish or cattle farming. Less visibly, but just as invidiously, they include the appropriation and manipulation and privatisation of the genetic ingredients of life to form new pharmaceuticals, patented seeds, and other bio products.

The commodification of public services

The concept of accumulation by dispossession is also useful for understanding another huge new site of accumulation for capital in the world today: the privatisation and commodification of public property or commons. In this process, publicly owned goods are seized and sold outright, and public services (having been rendered suitable for the purpose through standardisation) are put out for tender so they can be milked for profit by private companies. The first part of this process can be seen as the founding project of neoliberalism which, beginning in the 1980s started the sale of public assets, ranging from energy to transport infrastructure, from telecommunications networks to housing. This was given an enormous boost after 1989, when the vast national assets of formerly state capitalist or socialist economies were handed over to kleptocratic oligarchies. The second, which is growing exponentially, involves the outsourcing to private companies of services whose formal ownership remains public, or vested in the murky hands of public-private partnerships or other bodies whose complex constitutions shield them from direct scrutiny or accountability.⁹

Some of the largest and fastest-growing corporations in the world today can attribute much of their growth to this source. They include former national incumbents, such as EDF, Telefonica, and DHL and companies that have grown fat on supplying outsourced services to governments, such as G4H, Serco, and Siemens Business Services, as well as accounting and consultancy firms that oil the wheels, such as Capgemini or Accenture.

The extent to which this process creates new jobs is moot, but it is abundantly clear that it transforms the character of existing jobs, putting the workers directly under the control of capitalist organisations, subjecting them to capitalist discipline and precarising employment relations. Although they may at first – at least in Europe – be constrained by the terms of TUPE, the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations, 1981, or the resistance of the existing workforce, as time goes by transnational outsourcing companies are increasingly able to take advantage of the existence of a global reserve army of labour. For services that have to be carried out locally (such as cleaning, care work, security services, or driving) they can recruit migrant workers. For those that can be carried out remotely (such as IT services, call centres or processing tax returns) they can use global sourcing practices to get the work carried out in developing economies where labour is cheaper.

The commodification of private services

Public services are by no means the only new field of accumulation being seized on by capitalists right now. Private services represent another huge opportunity. Perhaps because they have so often in the past been carried out mainly by people working as domestic servants or petty traders, services such as domestic cleaning, gardening, childcare, and household maintenance have been somewhat neglected in the past by economists, and socialists have often assumed that they are dying out, along with other pre-capitalist forms of employment, although feminists have drawn attention to the ways in which women have been able to enter the workforce on more or less equal terms with men in developed economies only because low-paid migrant women have been available to carry out their reproductive work.¹⁰

Now, thanks to online platforms such as *Handy*, *Uber*, and *Helping*, such labour can be captured by capitalists to bring it within the direct orbit of capitalism, with companies typically taking a 20–25% cut from each transaction. Meanwhile, tasks are standardised and workers disciplined by means of tools that individual customers would be hesitant to use directly. The experience for the service workers drawn into this new labour market is analogous to that of other workers sucked for the first time into direct capitalist relationships in the past. In some respects the autonomous window-cleaner going from door to door with a ladder is not unlike a pre-capitalist craft worker hawking his products directly to the final customer. The online platform that engages that window-cleaner's services in the twenty-first century has many features in common with the factory-owner who decided in the eighteenth century to centralise production in one place in order to control it better. The work is formalised and disciplined but – until the workers manage to organise to mitigate this – remains highly precarious. For those who previously provided such services independently, there is a clear loss of autonomy, but for newcomers to the labour market new opportunities are opened up to obtain work without the slow effort of building a personal reputation (perhaps rooted in networks of friends and family). The desperate migrant can come to the online platform now, just as earlier generations came from the reserve army to the plantation or the factory gate, to seek an entry point into the capitalist labour market¹¹ to trade time and labour for subsistence.

There are other similarities too between new forms of capitalist organisation, like online platforms, and their earlier predecessors. Just as in the early days of the first industrial revolution it was common for workers to be expected to provide their own tools and, sometimes, pay for the space in which they worked, capitalists in the new 'platform economy' also avoid

tying their money up in depreciating assets, often expecting workers to invest in their own means of production: Uber drivers, for example, are expected to provide their own cars, sometimes even being obliged to take out a loan from the company to purchase one of a suitable standard; workers carrying out digitised tasks online for platforms like Upwork or Amazon Mechanical Turk are expected to provide their own laptops.

The commodification of art and culture

The formalisation of the informal economy carried out with the help of online platforms, must, then, be added to the commodification of public services and the commodification of natural resources as a means whereby capital finds new sites of accumulation. But these are not the only means by which capitalism extends its scope into areas of life that were previously beyond its reach. Its tentacles also stretch into personal life, including the body itself (in the form, for example, of cosmetic surgery or performance-enhancing drugs) and into sociality, art and culture.

Sometimes this is done by the time-honoured method of simple theft – of people’s ideas, music, art, or cultural heritage – which are copied, patented, or copyrighted, much like the DNA of plants, and used to form the basis of new, replicable commodities. Sometimes, rather like public services or informal service work, artistic activities that in the past existed outside, or on the fringes of, capitalist social relations are brought more firmly within them, in the process changing the nature of artistic labour. In the twenty-first century it is increasingly difficult to participate in any form of creative activity without engaging directly or indirectly with multinational corporations.

In its most apparently arms-length form this can be seen in the corporate patronage which is seemingly necessary to put on any opera, ballet, concert, or major art exhibition in most of the world’s cities. But often it is more direct. There has been a massive concentration of capital in what were in the twentieth century a series of separate industries producing films, recorded music, games, television, newspapers, and books which have merged into giant global conglomerates. Walt Disney, Time Warner, Reed Elsevier, Thomson Reuters, Sony, and Comcast are among the world’s largest companies, with interests that cross these and other fields. The value chains that produce their products are as elaborate as those in other production industries with, for example, animation carried out in Vietnam, copy-editing in India, digital special effects in Argentina, or post-production in Canada. Many paid workers are likely to be employed by subcontractors, for the duration of a single project, working long hours under precarious conditions. Others will be working without payment as interns, supposedly

gaining work experience. Other creative workers are self-employed. If they still craft physical objects then they are likely to be driven increasingly to online marketplaces, such as Etsy, to sell them, in competition with millions of others from around the globe. Alternatively they may seek corporate patrons or turn to crowdfunding platforms to try to raise the money for particular projects, requiring them to specify in advance what it is they want to make, and ‘pitch’ the idea, a process they will also have to go through if they want to apply for one of the increasingly rare public grants available to artists.

Many writers, musicians, and other creative workers have traditionally earned, not a wage, but an income from royalties, based on the number of sales of their books, records or DVDs, or ‘residuals’ based on the number of times films or videos to which they have contributed are shown. Traditionally, this has meant a commonality of interest between the artist and the publisher or producer. Once the percentage distribution has been agreed, then both parties have an interest in selling as many copies as possible, at the highest possible price. In the digital era this common interest has broken down. Power has shifted from the companies that produce individual artistic products (such as vertically integrated book publishers or record companies) to those that distribute them. Corporations like Amazon and Apple that distribute electronic books and digitised music also sell the hardware to access them (the Kindle, the iPad etc.) and therefore have an interest in making as much content as possible available at the lowest price. This meshes with the expectation that content will be freely available to download from the Internet to put strong downward pressure on prices. The result is that, apart from a small minority of big stars, creative workers struggle to make a subsistence income from their work. Many, indeed, produce without pay, hoping that the videos they upload to the Internet, the ebooks they self-publish, or the blogs they write will generate a small income from advertising, or occasional requests to perform in person or ghost-write for others. Apart from the large distributors, a host of smaller companies make a rent from their activities (for example internet service providers, software producers, blog hosting companies) but the creative workers themselves are increasingly driven, like the self-employed cleaners, drivers, and gardeners and other service workers, into the arms of the online platforms, where they have to bid, against global competition, to carry out standardised ‘taskified’ creative tasks, be it designing a logo, translating a manuscript, retouching a photograph, or producing copy for a website.

What about the academy? Does this not still provide a space for independent intellectual and cultural activity? Can creative workers not survive by

teaching? Alas, the modern university is not immune to the tendencies affecting the rest of the economy. Indeed it can be seen as playing a critically important role in nurturing the expansion of capitalism. Its research is often the cutting edge of this expansion, scouting out new aspects of the natural and social world that are capable of becoming the basis of new commodities, with many departments little more than public-subsidised R&D departments for global corporations. Its teaching is on the one hand expropriated, used for content for commodified courses and, on the other, like so many other activities, intensified, routinised, and standardised, managed by performance indicators (sometimes set by student ratings).

In short, the spaces in which independent artists and intellectuals can survive economically are shrinking dramatically. Creative workers must increasingly choose between becoming links in the value chains of global corporations (with all the ethical, creative, and intellectual compromises this implies) and penury.

The commodification of human sociality

As we move into less tangible areas of human sociality, perhaps, the metaphor of ‘accumulation by dispossession’ is less apt. It is clear that the development of social media has generated yet another huge new area of accumulation out of forms of – often apparently trivial – human activity that were previously outside the market, ranging from remembering the birthdays of relatives to finding a date. Surely, some will argue, this is not so much an example of capitalism snatching and grabbing elements of personal lives as of people voluntarily offering them up for exploitation in return for the use values they produce. Although some online companies are directly producing commodities, or contributing to their development, others make most of their income from various forms of rentier activities,¹² with their business models depending variously on selling advertising, reselling their users’ data, or taking a percentage cut from each transaction carried out on their platforms.

Whether or not we regard this as ‘dispossession’, it is clear that a great deal of accumulation is taking place and, with it, a large amount of employment is created. The highly visible direct employment of staff at the headquarters of companies like Google and Facebook is just the tip of the iceberg here. Tens of thousands of other jobs are created under the radar of public visibility, carrying out the hidden housework of the Internet, much of this labour devoted to tasks generally believed to be carried out by algorithms, the ‘artificial artificial intelligence’ offered to their corporate customers by platforms like Amazon Mechanical Turk (named after an eighteenth century

chess-playing machine that purported to be intelligent but was in fact operated by a hidden human player). Human labour of this type is employed for a wide range of tasks including moderating content (deciding which images of child abuse, beheadings, bestiality, or other horrors should be taken down from the Internet), manually adjusting Google ratings, tagging photographs, clicking 'like' on political or corporate websites, or matching workers with potential clients. There is also human labour involved in designing and updating websites, editing video clips, moderating online chatrooms and games and a myriad other online tasks. Those who forecast, in the 1990s, that the Internet would be a net displacer of labour from other sectors could hardly have been more wrong.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that concerns that the overall quantity of employment around the globe will fall, or that capitalism will collapse, as a result of the latest convulsions of restructuring, are misplaced. However, this does not mean that there will not be dramatic reductions in employment in particular areas. As in the past, it seems likely that the main impacts of these will fall on skilled, organised workers who have formerly managed to negotiate decent wages and working conditions. The new jobs created are much more likely to be precarious, low-paid, and located in parts of the world without strong traditions of labour organising. The impacts, in other words, are much more strongly qualitative than quantitative.

This raises a sharp lesson for the labour movements of the developed world: a resurfacing in a particularly accentuated form of what might be termed the problem of the reserve army of labour. This problem, posed simply, is that the existence of a reserve army pits worker against worker: the organised insiders can only defend their relatively privileged working conditions, for which they have fought long and hard, by insisting that no new workers are admitted to the group on conditions that undercut these negotiated conditions. In practice, this often means excluding outsiders altogether. The outsiders, meanwhile, are forced by desperation to seek whatever employment they can find on whatever terms are on offer.

When Marx and Engels were writing, the reserve army was largely a local one. Capitalists seeking cheaper labour for their factories looked to incomers from the surrounding countryside, or the unemployed living in the slums of their cities, although they did also make use of the labour of women and children to undercut men's wages and of immigrant labour when it was available. In the colonies it was, of course, a different story, with slave, coolie, and plantation labour supplying the imperial heartlands with cheap goods and raw materials.

Nevertheless, in the mid-twentieth century, in most developed countries it was possible to resolve this contradiction (albeit imperfectly) at a national level, by creating welfare states that generalised decent basic standards across the entire population, making possible a degree of solidarity between insiders and outsiders. Recognising that trade unions and social democratic parties represented the interests of the whole working class, and with a level of social protection that protected them from absolute destitution, workers who were unemployed or in precarious jobs were, on the whole, able to resist directly undercutting their more fortunate counterparts in well-organised workplaces, or could be prevented from doing so. Although, of course, things were far from perfect, and many, especially women and immigrant workers, found themselves positioned in inferior positions in the labour market, some social cohesion could be sustained.

Since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, which can be regarded as the symbolic inauguration of whole-world globalisation, such cosy national compromises have started to unravel. There is now a global reserve army of labour that can be accessed in two ways: by sending work abroad, or by importing migrant workers to carry it out. Each wave of restructuring shakes out more of the 'insiders' and enables capitalists to draw more freely on the labour of this growing reservoir.

To regard the members of this reserve army as part of a permanent 'precariat' is in my view a mistake. All the evidence suggests that, once locked into capitalist labour relations, workers begin to resist, to combine, to organise and to make and win demands that lead to greater security, higher earnings and other improvements in their situation. Unorganised workers are part of an organised workforce in the making (even though this may make them, a couple of generations down the line, the targets for new waves of deskilling and undercutting).

Nevertheless, the current wave of restructuring, in combination with austerity problems, is creating a serious crisis of solidarity in the working class in the short term, one whose effects are already all-too visible in the rise in xenophobia evidenced in recent election results in Austria and France and in the Brexit referendum in the UK, which can be read in part as a cry of despair from redundant formerly organised industrial workers who feel abandoned and betrayed by the social democratic parties in which they placed their trust in the past, their anger redirected by right-wing populist parties and the toxic mass media not at the global corporations that are their real enemies but at the desperate members of the reserve army who are their fellow victims but whose immediate interests have been opposed to theirs, objectively speaking, by the ways in which capitalist labour markets operate.

The challenge confronting the left in Europe right now is to reconstruct that solidarity and build a manifesto of hope that can unite the past and present insiders with the outsiders in the labour market. This can only be done if trade unions look beyond representing the interests of their current members to the broader interests of the entire population. What should these demands be? They will of course have to be worked out in detail in dialogue with political parties of the left and representatives of the affected communities but should almost certainly include increased investment in health, social care, education, and housing; raised minimum wages (expressed in a formula that allows it to be applied to workers paid by the task as well as weekly or hourly paid workers); a universal basic income (or at least reform of the social protection system to ensure that nobody is ever so destitute as to be forced into whatever work is available); reductions in working hours; paid leave; and support for worker cooperatives. Such demands may be difficult to sell to the membership (who, understandably, see the purpose of trade unions as representing their paid-up members), but unless they can be achieved there is a real risk of seeing all past gains destroyed in a mass outbreak of xenophobic rage. In an era of globalisation we need international solidarity along the length of global value chains; but we also need local solidarity, on each spot on the planet that constitutes a unit of government.

NOTES

- 1 See for instance Michel Bauwens (2006) 'The Political Economy of Peer Production', *Ctheory.Net*, <<http://www.ctheory.net/articles.aspx?id=499>>.
- 2 See for example Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams, *Inventing the Future: Postcapitalism and a World Without Work*, London: Verso, 2015, and Paul Mason, *PostCapitalism: A Guide to Our Future*, London: Penguin, 2015.
- 3 See for example the reports from the Oxford Martin Programme on the Impacts of Future Technology by Carl Benedikt Frey and Michael A. Osborne, *The Future of Employment: How Susceptible are Jobs to Computerisation?*, 2013, <<http://www.oxfordmartin.ox.ac.uk/downloads/academic/future-of-employment.pdf>> and from the European Bruegel Thinktank, *The computerisation of European jobs*, 2014, <<http://bruegel.org/2014/07/the-computerisation-of-european-jobs/>>.
- 4 André Gorz *Paths to Paradise: On the Liberation from Work*, London: Pluto Press, 1985 and *Farewell to the Working Class*, London: Pluto Press, 1982.
- 5 Ivan Illich, *Tools for Conviviality*, London: Marion Boyars, 1973 and *Gender*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1982.
- 6 Ursula Huws 'When Adam blogs: cultural work and the gender division of labour in Utopia', *The Sociological Review*, Volume 63 (2015), Issue Supplement, pp. 157-173.
- 7 David Harvey, 'The "New" Imperialism: Accumulation by Dispossession', *Socialist Register* 40 (2004), pp. 63-87.

- 8 Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *What is Property? Or, an Inquiry into the Principle of Right and of Government*, 1840, Donald R. Kelley and Robin G. Smith (eds), Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994.
- 9 I have written at greater length about these processes in Ursula Huws ‘The new gold rush: the new multinationals and the commodification of public sector work’, *Work Organisation, Labour and Globalisation* Volume 2 No 2(2008), pp. 1-8, and ‘Crisis as Capitalist Opportunity: New Accumulation Through Public Service Commodification’, *Socialist Register*, 2012, pp. 80-107.
- 10 See for example Barbara Ehrenreich and Arlie Russel Hochschild, *Global Woman: Nannies, Maids and Sex Workers in the New Economy*, New York: Henry Holt, 2004, and Brigitte Young, ‘The “Mistress” and the “Maid” in the Globalized Economy’, *Socialist Register*, Vol 37 (2001), pp. 315-327.
- 11 I have discussed platform labour more fully in several research reports and articles. See for instance Ursula Huws, *The Future of Work: Crowdsourcing*, Report to the EU-OSHA, 2015, <<https://osha.europa.eu/en/tools-and-publications/publications/future-work-crowdsourcing/view>>, and Ursula Huws, ‘Logged labour: a new paradigm of work organisation?’, *Work Organisation, Labour and Globalisation*, Vol 10, No 1 (2016).
- 12 I have discussed this at greater length in Ursula Huws, ‘The Underpinnings of Class in the Digital Age: Living, Labour and Value’, *Socialist Register* Vol 50 (2014), pp. 80-107.

Time of Alternatives: The Left 100 Years After the October Revolution

Alexander Buzgalin

The undermining of commodity production began one hundred years ago with a qualitative leap in the manipulation of market and consumption by corporations. No anti-cartel legislation can touch the market power of the largest capitals. Today the market does not primarily stimulate effectiveness but serves as a shield for the involution model that is leading the world into a dead end. We have been caught in a spider's web in which the corporate spiders manipulate us and not only subject production and consumption to their interests but commercialise the entire life of people. Everything is for sale: art and education, healthcare and love, nature and the state. The market is becoming total. It is a power that subjugates people more thoroughly than the Stalinist NKVD and dictates behavioural norms more sharply than any communist propaganda. Coming up against the limits of consumption with demand in material production lacking purchasing power, the market is forced to shift to the virtual world. Increasingly, it is not only commodities and services that we are sold but also symbols and signs. We are falling into a simulated market and submitting to the rhythm of the brand economy. And this involves everything – from the poor Asian worker, who dreams of being able to buy brand goods, to the millionaire, who has to keep up with the state of the art.

However, what is most important is that capital is extending commodity relations into spheres in which market forms are irrational – the spheres of public goods. The fruits of science, education, art, and any of the results of creative activity are transmittable and therefore do not have to be lost. These goods must not be sold; their consumption must not be subjected to norms – there are plenty of them for everyone, they are not limited. Everyone can have access to them, just as we have access to the goods in public libraries or Wikipedia. This is an area in which the ownership of all things is possible and necessary for all people.

Today's social production increasingly rests not only on the highly socialised goods of productive labour but also on the public goods of this same labour. Antagonistic and foreign to this kind of production are both the spontaneity of the market's self-regulation and the total power of the market and the fetishism of money. The result is the crisis of consumer society and the thwarting and dying off of the stimuli of progress arising in the market. These problems can be mitigated by state regulation of the capitalist market economy. But this cannot resolve the contradictions of the totally simulated market.

In the last 100 years capital has also changed. It became global and transformed the contradiction between labour and capital into a worldwide contradiction. Capital, which is primarily concentrated in the north, is represented by the strongest players of the contemporary world – the transnational companies, the World Trade Organisation, the IMF, etc. It is based in the USA and the EU and is defended by NATO as the world policeman. Wage labour, which is increasingly concentrated in the South, is divided, unorganised, and is defended neither by the nation-states nor by the influential international organisations.

Capital has created a system of subjugation and exploitation that unites all of its historical forms within it: the semi-feudal compulsion to work vis-à-vis the poorest strata, the classical exploitation of the enormous industrial proletariat in the semi-periphery, the extraction of monopoly profits and imperial rents as well as the subordination of the real-economy sector to the financial sector, the exploitation of general natural resources, and the appropriation of cultural capital, the creative capacities of people.

New forms of domination have emerged. Financialisation did not simply lead to hyper-profitability in the spheres of financial services and speculation. It led to finance capital, once partly tamed and limited by the welfare state, becoming omnipotent once again. Today, virtual fictitious financial capital is not simply interwoven with industrial capital, as it was 100 years ago; now it governs production and the others economic spheres. It assumed not only a fictitious but also a virtual form, which lives in worldwide information networks and represents a 'spider of spiders', a black box of financial bubbles. This capital spawned the world economic crisis, whose flame was dampened only at the cost of deploying budget funds and with the help of so-called financial socialism.

It gave rise to a new kind of worldwide contradiction: asymmetrical and hybrid wars, in which terrorism has become an answer to the democracy of cruise missiles.

It led to the undermining of democracy's formal rules of the game through

political manipulation. A new law reigns in today's world. To the degree that political technologies become more effective and use arbitrary methods—from PR campaigns to armed intervention in the affairs of sovereign states—democracy is transformed into a fiction and politics becomes the production of passive products, that is, votes, out of a passive raw material, the electorate.

And most importantly, the stage of late capitalism is not only the twilight of the bourgeois mode of production but also of the long stage of humanity's pre-history, which Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels called, not coincidentally, the 'realm of necessity'. This period of thousands of years produced the most diverse forms of social alienation. It is not only a question of market and capital. It is also about slavery, serfdom, and Asiatic despotism, war and terror, and state and religion. Global capital reproduces almost all of these.

In addition, the contemporary era also produces global threats—the threat of the destruction of ecological equilibrium. Here it is precisely the hegemony of global capital today that reproduces and intensifies the whole spectrum of social alienation whose basis in the twenty-first century is the contradiction between capital and labour. Capital has led the world to a dead end. The way out of it is known: the liberation of labour and human beings from all forms of alienation produced by global capital and its phenomena.

The first worldwide attack on this power began in October 1917. And although the world revolution did not occur, the first experience of the creation of a non-capitalist society became a reality in the USSR and the other states of the world socialist system. Another reality was worldwide social reforms. These first practices ended infelicitously. It is thus all the more necessary today to achieve a breakthrough and find new sources of the emancipation of labour and human beings.

The left: social base, identity, goals of struggle

The defeat suffered at the end of the twentieth century in the first worldwide battle for socialism delivered a painful blow to the left movement. Counter-revolution and counter-reform demoralised the forces of social emancipation. Wage workers as a class for itself increasingly changed from being a politically and ideologically organised force to a class in itself, a social stratum that in itself did not represent a political force in a position to recognise and realise its strategic interests. This was also fostered by the process of deindustrialisation in the countries of the capitalist centre and the post-Soviet area, in which the industrial proletariat also shrank numerically in this part of the world.

In Russia, the catastrophic destruction of material production, the 'shock

without therapy' of the 1990s, the struggle for survival, as well as the illusion of patriotic unity with power also led to a declassing of a large section of wage workers. Still, there is another side of the coin. Throughout the world the class of wage workers has undergone great change. The epoch of the global hegemony of capital led to essential changes in the structure of the forces of production and, in what followed, the structure of employment. The centre became the world that concentrated the most developed forces of production and simultaneously the most irrational in terms of how they are deployed – the world of virtual technologies which are above all used in the production of various simulacra (from financial derivatives to computer games). But this irrational production causes the appearance of a massive stratum of creatively active workers who are occupied with both useless things (advertising, finance, etc.) and socially useful activity (education, the healthcare system). The world of industrial labour increasingly became a periphery.

A new social structure of global capitalism has thus formed. Even under current conditions the predominant class is still the class of wage workers. However, the most skilled and cultured strata of this class are occupied in creative professions – worker-innovators and engineers, pre-school teachers in kindergartens, teachers and university professors, etc. The main content of these professions can and must be creative activity, as, for example, the not alienated dialogue of the teacher with the student or of the physician with the patient. This is what in the USSR was called the 100-rouble intelligentsia, since they earned 100 roubles on average. This stratum possesses a powerful social-creative potential but is burdened with deep contradictions.

According to his or her objective conditions a person in these professions creates unlimited social goods, technical innovations, a good feeling amongst children, pictures, and computer programmes. The results of their work are sharable, are not lost, and they can and must be the property of all. By its content their labour is general and free, that is, communist labour. But if this creative worker falls under the power of capital he/she is transformed into the creator of private property, which in some cases is also privileged. Even if this property in the end belongs to the head of the company (which it normally does), the creative person still receives a part of the intellectual rent from the employer. That is why he/she has sold to capital not only his/her labour power but also his/her talent, his/her personal qualities and becomes a participant in the exploitation of humanity's cultural wealth. A section of creative people, especially in the countries of the centre, not only produces cultural values but simulacra that reinforce the power of the market and of capital. This involves not just brokers and PR specialists

but also teachers, scientists, and others. And this contradiction objectively impedes the inclusion of the class of the intelligentsia in the struggle for social emancipation.

This makes the task of fostering the broadest development of the sphere of production of public goods amongst the most important in the left's struggle for social emancipation. Due to its economic condition, this growing stratum is close to the industrial proletariat and is becoming a new potential subject of the struggle for social emancipation. The material basis for this, the content of its activity, is general free labour. However, this stratum will only become a real subject of social emancipation to the degree that it, first, acquires features of a specific class, the class of creative workers employed in the social sector, and, second, that it consequently becomes a class for itself and finds its political and ideological expression.

This is possible to the extent that the teacher and physician, the artist and the scholar, the social worker and the ecologist free themselves from the power of capital and its state, and transform themselves from conformists, who can tend to their private intellectual garden thanks to the appropriation of new machines (computers, 3-D printers, etc.), into freely associated producers of the world of culture. The path to this is the inclusion of this stratum in the struggle for the broadest development of the public sector and the de-commercialising and de-bureaucratisation of their activity, for the self-management and appreciation of their labour. But the social basis of the left should not at all be reduced to this proto-class.

The decisive producer of the material wealth of society in the twenty-first century remains the class of wage workers employed in the sphere of socialised material production. At the beginning of the twenty-first century this class became not only the most numerous in the world; it also still remains the social stratum the social character of whose work makes it into the bearer of the principles of collectivity, organisability, and discipline. By dint of its social position, it is precisely this class that has an objective interest in the emancipation both of its labour and of its free time (the latter being a specific trait of recent decades) from subjugation to capital.

In terms of the social (self-)emancipation of the industrial proletariat and the tasks of the left in the realisation of this imperative, little has changed in the last 100 years. There are also material reasons for this. As we stressed at the outset, capitalism, in its essentials, remains capitalism. What is more, the spiral of the negation of the negation, which destroys the welfare state and has created the massive class of industrial wage workers brings us back to tasks that were regarded as old-fashioned fifty years ago. This is why it is necessary for the left to remember and once again, without being embarrassed, to

bring back to centre stage the fundamental programmatic assertions of left social democrats and communists. But it is not only about remembering; the situation has so changed that new content and forms have to be found for the orientation to old slogans.

What this first of all requires is an organisation of the working class that incorporates economic and political tasks and is based on the self-organisation of the wage workers and not on delegating the defence of their interests to a trade-union bureaucracy and paid specialists. Second, the old task of bringing class-consciousness and self-awareness to the world of workers. This involves decoupling the industrial working class from the norms of consumer society, including the products of show business, and the appropriation of authentic culture and the basis of a theory of social emancipation. Impulses for this are already present in the practical participation in one or another form of voluntary socially creative work. Third, it involves the inclusion of the industrial working class and its organisation in the realisation of the general tasks of social self-emancipation, tasks which go beyond the framework of the narrow class interests of wage workers.

The realisation of these tasks presupposes the development of a unity or an alliance of the industrial proletariat and the above-described new mass intelligentsia formed through practice. This is no longer an alliance of the class with a small stratum of intellectuals forming the working class's ideology. This is the unity of two classes, which are equally interested in social emancipation and which are close to each other due to their socio-economic position in society and are becoming increasingly closer.

A key for the unification of the old and the new in such organisations can be the creation of open free associations, of models of self-organisation that combine the principles of the communist party (the practical participation in the work of the organisation, unity of action, conscious discipline) and modern network organisation (openness, voluntariness, non-hierarchical relations). I would point out that such associations are based on the following principles: first, the participation of each member in the common practical activity and not only in the formal approval of the programme and the payment of membership dues; second, the openness of the associations in terms of admission, that is, integration in the joint activity, and of exit, that is, the termination of this collaboration; third, the voluntariness and, of course, non-remuneration of the work; fourth, the freedom, the self-evident unity of self-organisation and responsibility, self-management, and subordination to the discipline of the joint work of realising the commonly worked out goals. As a hypothesis I would add a fifth principle to this enumeration: the principle of authorship: social creativity, like all other

creativity, is oriented to authorship; the author can lead a collective like a conductor of a symphony orchestra but she/he can also simply put forward a theme that can be developed in free improvisation as in a jazz band. The forms can be very varied.

The above-mentioned imperative of the left struggle for the abolition of the 'realm of necessity' is as a whole and at the same time the basis of quite practical tasks for left movements. The path towards social liberation is blocked by a complicated system of alienated relations. This is consumer society, which transforms active people into possessing people, in which the imperative of Being is squeezed out by the imperative of Having. This is market fundamentalism, which transforms everything into sellable and buyable commodities. This is the subordination of free time to capital, which results in people's lives outside work becoming, in the best of cases, a bit of recuperation after personality-destroying labour and, in the worst of cases, a kind of mental atrophy. It is also political-ideological manipulation, which makes of a formally free citizen a marionette of political technologies and the mass media.

Freeing up this path and helping the class to self-awareness, to gather its forces and develop habits of struggle is only possible through a twofold activity. First, through integrating de-alienation into everyday work. The appropriation of authentic culture is the second element. The person integrated into social creativity gains a practical need for culture. In appropriating culture she/he becomes capable of producing a new world through the knowledge of things. Only in this way does the class gain social muscles and a social brain, without which its struggle is doomed to failure. Collaboration in the initiating and development of activities for realising these tasks is a mission of the left. This purpose of the left is on the one side extraordinarily abstract. However, every abstraction requires a concretisation; it is a matter of 'small' things, of the transformation of these imperatives into a system of concrete forms of organisation, principles of activity, and fundamental elements of the strategy of left forces.

The time of alternatives: revolution, reforms, and the strategy of the left

Must left social forces, which have set for themselves the goal of overcoming the power of capital, support reforms? Doubtless yes, because notwithstanding the temporary attenuation of the contradictions these provide essential preconditions for the victory of socialist revolution, create social muscles for working people, and improve the quality of their lives. Another aspect is to carry out those reforms which, even if minimally, promote de-alienation,

and which curb the economic and political power of capital even if only partially. The left's minimal programme is established to realise those reforms oriented to these tasks:

- orienting the economy to goals of an eco-social and humanly oriented development, with the creation of a system of related social, humanitarian, and ecological norms; the selective regulation of the economy; strategic planning and other forms of reining in the market power of companies and the manipulation of consumers;
- the nationalisation of all natural treasures and the full deployment of all natural rents for development goals; social and state support of all forms of solidary economy; transparency and the social responsibility of the business world; the participation of employees in the management of the enterprise including the right of veto in social questions;
- establishing transparency and limits to all transactions of finance capital and developing forms of social control over them; the prohibition of offshore businesses and the introduction of the Tobin Tax; debt cancellation for the poorest countries of the South;
- the immediate creation of a tax system that ensures the taxation of no less than 50 per cent of the personal income of society's wealthiest strata; the use of this revenue for the goal of social development; the creation of a social consumption fund system through which social tasks can be realised, among them the ensuring of full-employment;
- the expansion of the sphere of production of public goods and free and general access to them along with limits in the realm of intellectual private property; the expansion of universally available education throughout an entire lifespan, high-quality and free healthcare, access to sports activities, and universally accessible real culture, etc.;
- ensuring constitutional reforms oriented to the establishment of norms for direct participation and the introduction of a broad spectrum of forms of direct citizen participation in administration (direct and grassroots democracy); strengthening the role of social movements and other grassroots institutions of civil society as well as decreasing the role of political organisations based on professional work;
- curbing the activity of private and state mass media; expanding support for independent social information networks;
- the democratic reform of the UN and other international institutions through strengthening the role of international civil society; the abolition of NATO and analogous organisations, the radical reduction of strategic offensive weapons and other weapons of mass destruction;
- the establishment of large international centres that offer free access

to public goods, above all to products of the most diverse kinds based on state-of-the-art technology, to healthcare and medicines, to agricultural education, science, art, in the IT sector, etc. on the basis of revenue from the Tobin Tax and voluntary donations.

All of these and many other concrete reform orientations, which in part limit and undermine capital's global hegemony, are not only well known; they have also been accepted by a broad stratum of international civil society and international continental, national, and regional social forums. They can be found in the programmes of thousands of international and national social movements and left parties, etc. The struggle around them has already begun.

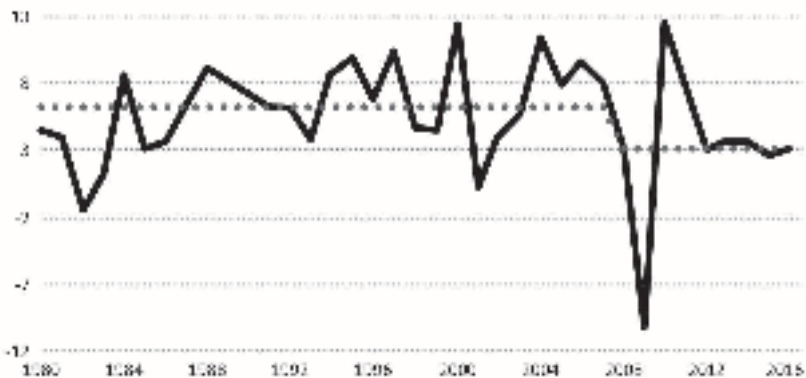
Ways Out of Secular Stagnation?

Joachim Bischoff

In its Fall 2016 prognosis for the capitalist economy, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has notably scaled back its growth prediction for the USA. Sluggish investments – possibly also due to insecurity over the country’s future political leadership – have slowed growth by 1.6% for the coming year. In the summer the IMF was still expecting 2.2%. ‘Growth has been too weak for a long time now’, IMF Economic Counsellor Maurice Obstfeld noted in his presentation of the Report.¹ ‘And in many countries too few people have been able to benefit from it. This has political consequences, which will probably depress growth still further.’ The IMF sees numerous dangers for the world economy as a whole, which call into question any recovery in the coming year. Among them, according to Obstfeld, are ‘a halting development in China, a further collapse of raw material prices, increasingly strained financial markets, disturbances due to climate change, increased trade barriers, and geopolitical tensions’. Obstfeld and IMF Managing Director Christine Lagarde are therefore demanding more stimulus from the political sector to promote growth.

Graph 1: Down With World Trade

Percent change in the volume of annual exports of goods and services

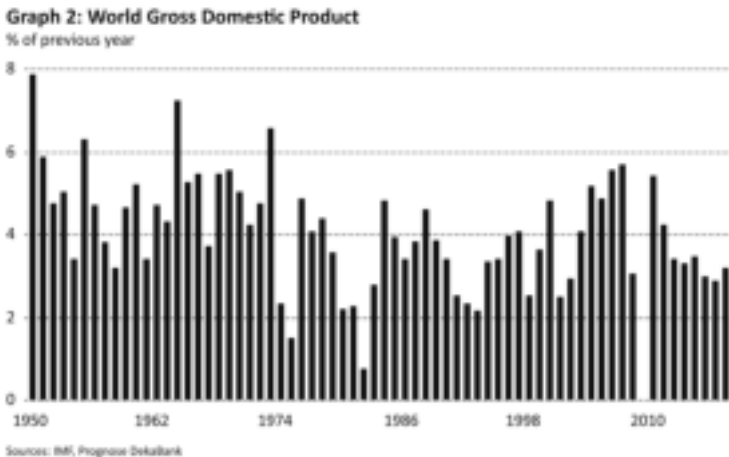


Source: IMF, *World Economic Outlook*, and *International Trade Statistics*, October 2016.

In view of weakening worldwide growth, Lagarde appealed to the member countries to do everything to reinforce it.² Depending on the specific situation, each country needs, she insisted, to create an appropriate mix of monetary and fiscal policy and structural reforms in order to remedy weak growth in the world. ‘Every country can do something.’ The goal proclaimed in Brisbane in 2014 of raising the worldwide growth rate by two percentage points within five years will not be reached, she said, in the context of what has been planned. At present, according to Lagarde, we are entering a 1.5% growth path.

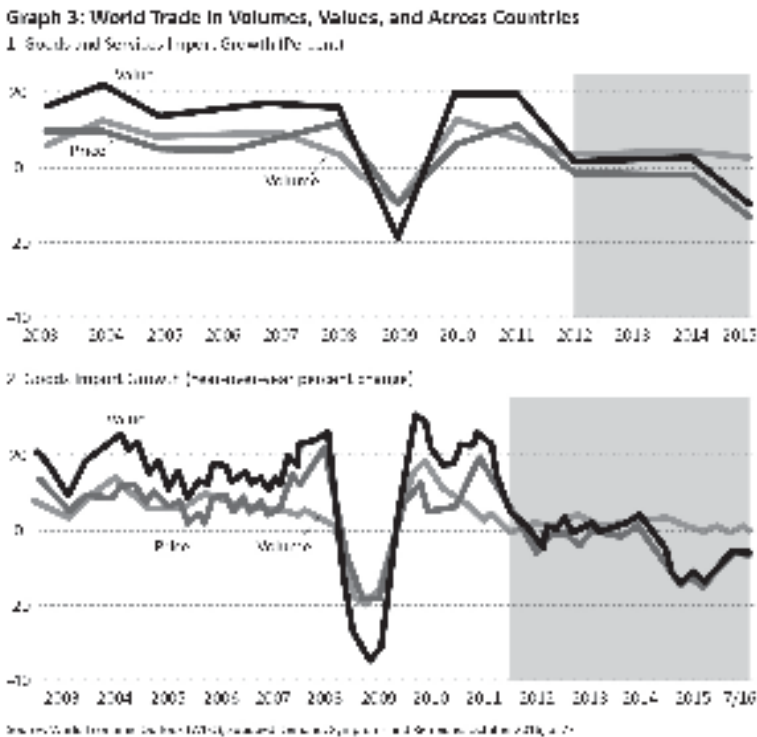
In the reports published around the Fall meetings on the international economic situation (*World Economic Outlook*), on financial stability (*Global Financial Stability Report*), and on the financial situations of countries (*Fiscal Monitor*), the IMF economists on the whole painted a dark picture. They agreed, above all, that the low-interest policy pursued by central banks had missed the target of stabilising economic growth; the still ailing global financial system and the incapacity of the banks to implement reforms led to the insufficient promotion of growth due to their lending; insurance companies and pension funds had increasing solvency problems; debt – especially private debt – was at an all-time high worldwide; and the weak economic development and growing threats were boosting populism.

Not only is the economic dynamic of the USA, as the world hegemonic power, weakening; since the great economic crisis of 2007 the capitalist centres (the USA, Japan, the EU, and Great Britain) are showing no coherent upswing, which has its effect on world production and world trade. The crippling of the world economy can be clearly seen if we look at world trade. From 1970 to 2007 its share in global GDP rose from 27% to circa 60%; but after this world trade has stagnated and in the most recent period it has tended to weaken still more.



The political establishment and the economic elites of capitalist societies have not managed to shift gears for a prosperous future. Present-day attempts to move the ossified world trade order through free trade agreements (TTP, TTIP, CETA) are being met with considerable resistance from civil society. An increasing number of citizens see their prosperity being eroded or endangered and few of them have benefited from the policy of recent years. Moreover, there is great doubt about the theory that secular stagnation can be overcome through qualitatively new free trade agreements.

The effect of declining world trade is already disastrous for the emerging economies whose export volume makes up a greater portion of global GDP than that of the EU and USA together. The emerging markets piled up too much debt in the boom phase and created too much industrial capacity. Major adjustments will come – as we see in Latin and Central America and Africa. Stagnating or even declining prosperity will find global expression in seismic policy shifts.

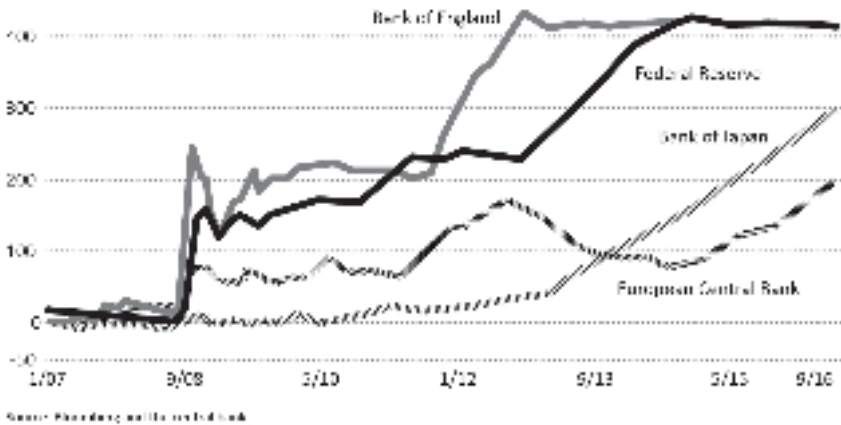


The global economy is not recovering, although in reaction to the crisis the central banks have implemented one of the biggest interventions ever carried out in the history of capitalism. The central banks jumped in when the capitalist global economy was on the edge of a sharp drop. They used the

option of acting as a ‘lender of last resort’ in crisis situations.

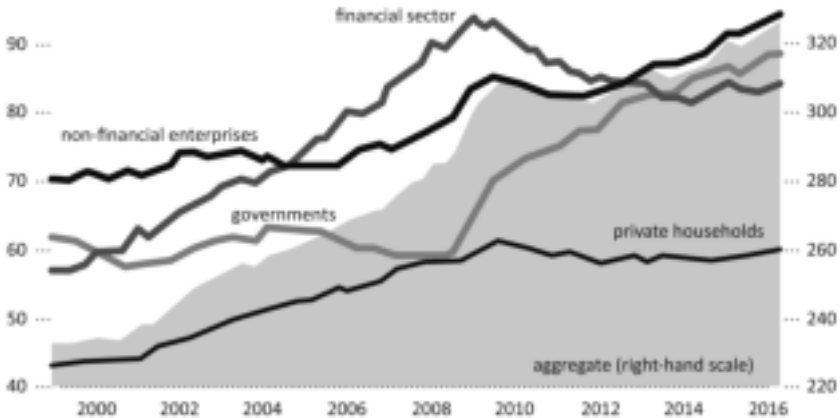
Already in recent decades the central banks have repeatedly lowered interest rates when growth in individual states left something to be desired, and they have regularly used other monetary measures as soon as there were threats of bigger financial crises. The idea behind this is still that low interest rates stimulate consumption and investment activity and indirectly spur economic growth. In the highly developed economies, the buying up of government bonds by central banks do not represent a dangerous development in the sense that they would endanger monetary value or lead to inflation. The stabilisation of low interest-rate levels is indeed the result of expansive monetary policy, but it was also deliberate. For if they were higher the world economy would find itself in a still weaker condition than it already is in.

Graph 4: Central Bank Assets
 (change since January 2007 (percent))



At the beginning of the twenty-first century, due to chronic over-accumulation, the capitalist economies were faced with a secular capital surplus and thus with a global ‘savings’ glut. With their expansive monetary policy the central banks reproduced the scissors phenomenon of a stagnating real economy and the superabundant accumulation of money capital. In their reaction to the 2007/2008 global crash they went over to crisis-management mode: following the lead of the US central bank (the Fed) they used an expansive monetary policy to try everything to prevent a collapse of the markets. But nine years have passed since then, and now it is clear that the central banks are, so to speak, prisoners of their own ‘salvage policy’.

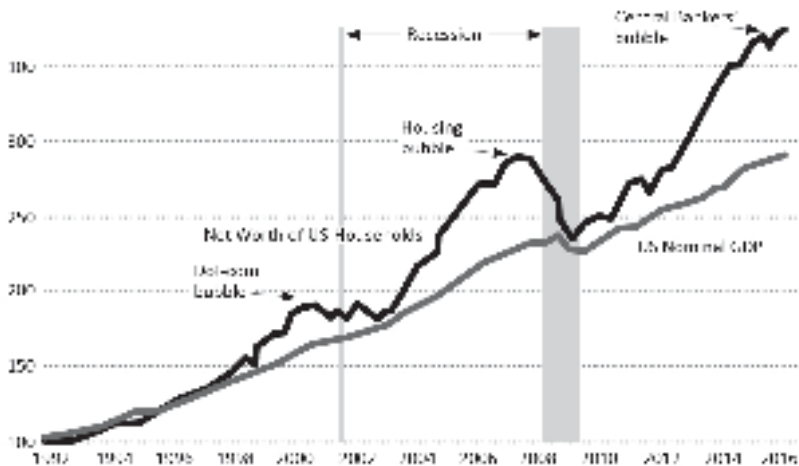
Graph 5: Worldwide Debt – in Industrialised and Emerging Countries
in % of GDP



Source: IF Debt Monitor

The continued intervention of the central banks is leading less to economic expansion and increasingly to market distortions. It is obvious that excessive money creation has no positive influence on real economic growth and produces the opposite effect. The ‘penalisation’ of savers by an illogical monetary policy leads to fewer investments in the real economy and weakens productivity, efficiency, and thus prosperity. Increasing state interventionism via expansive credit policy favours the real-estate sectors and the development of financial instruments. The more the central banks intervene, the greater will the imbalances be and the greater the consequent dislocations in the real and financial economy.

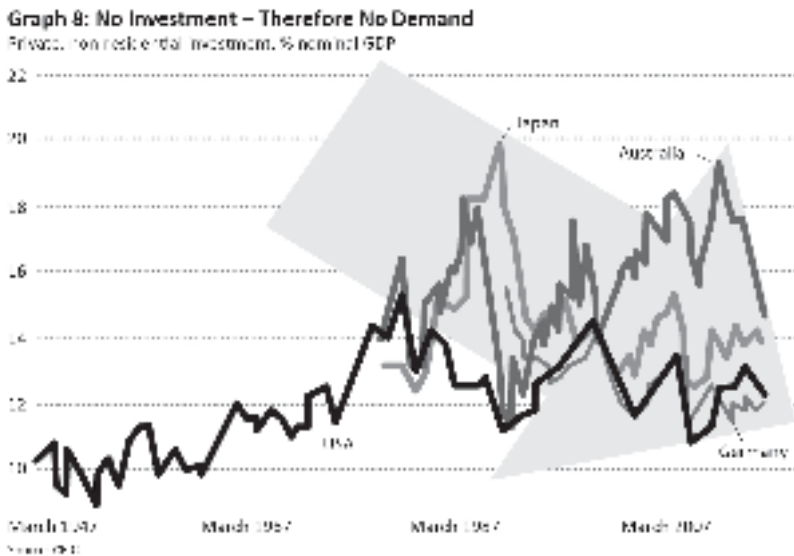
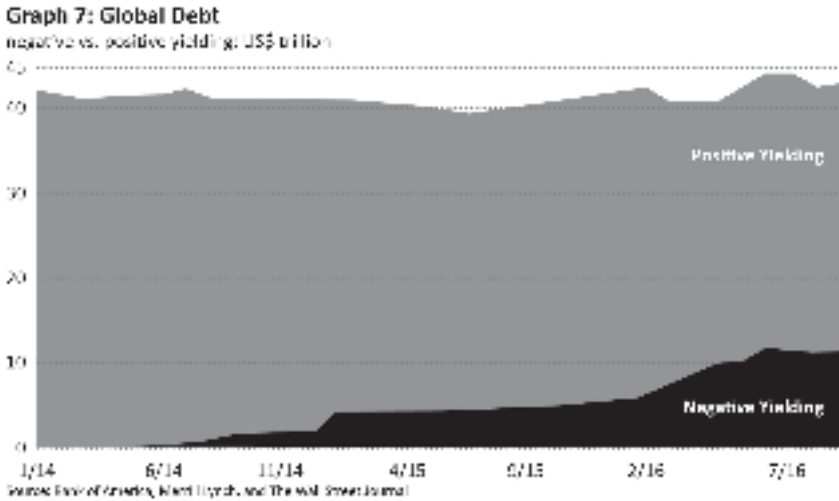
Graph 6: Asset Prices vs. GDP
Growth index (Dec. 31, 1991 = 100)



Source: Standard & Poor

The most important point is that with an abundant supply of capital the worldwide weakness in real investments produces a so-called savings glut or an over-supply of money capital. This leads to low and, in the end, negative capital-market interest rates. The interest rate loses its control function for the allocation of investment-seeking capital. The blame for this does not lie with the central or currency-issuing banks.

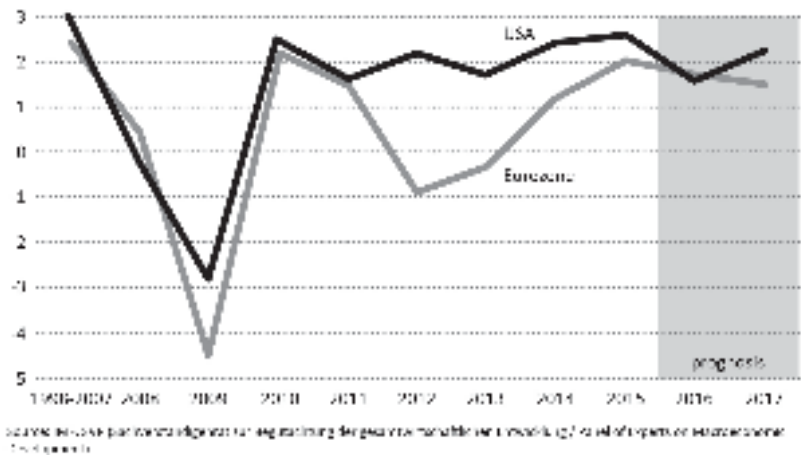
The paradox is that many companies are swimming in liquidity. In view of the further aggravation of unequal distribution and the inflated volumes



of credit there are no impulses to expand investments. The accumulation of debt has by now reached such a level that a return to a normal interest-rate cycle has been made impossible because this would have dire consequences for the economies and the political relations of forces.

Since the great recession of 2009 economic growth in the industrialised nations – and then later also in the emerging countries – has remained weak. Europe especially has had difficulty in transcending the pre-crisis level of added social value. The USA is growing somewhat more robustly, and with an unemployment rate of 4.9% it has recovered to a condition of nearly full employment.

Graph 9: USA and Euro Zone Compared
growth as percentage



Nine years have passed since the great crisis of 2007/2008. In times of a pronounced economic boom cycle a rapid recovery would have long ago turned into a new recessionary development phase, for as a rule after such a long time economic recovery already slackens again. In the present case a recovery has not even really set in. In the USA too, recovery has levelled off onto a flat path.

Europe is still waiting for the recovery, as is Asia. The same goes for Latin America, where structural problems of the region repeatedly come to bear. There is no trace of a return to an accumulation cycle borne by investments. It is true that on the global level there is no downturn, but there are at the most disparate developments and on the whole a depressive stagnation. Although the 2008 financial crisis is over we are still caught in a circuit of expansive credit policy, fragile accumulation, and accelerated growth of financial assets.

Structural transformation of the global economy – the China factor

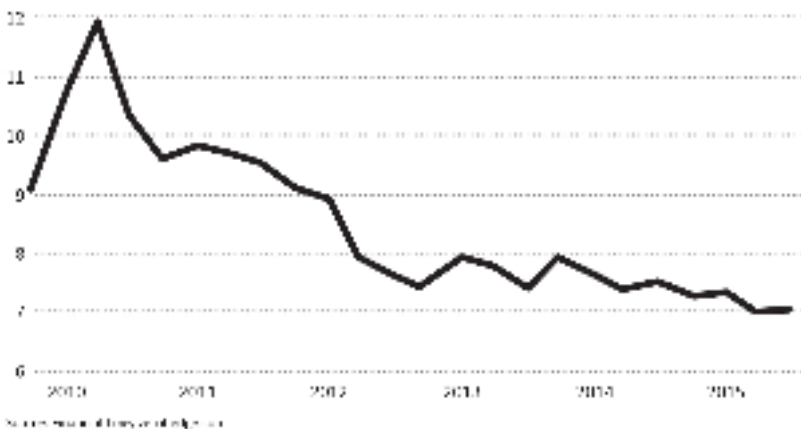
Global economic growth is not decided in Europe. It is secondary whether the euro area will come out of its condition of stagnation and whether Germany's European hegemonic power will grow by 1.5% or 1.9%. Much more crucial is always whether the economy in China will continue to grow by 6.5% or 7%, and whether China's party and state leadership can continue politically and socially to control the more or less serious decline of growth.

Emerging doubts about the strength of the Chinese economy, the surprising devaluation of the yuan, and worries that the US Fed will soon raise the prime rate have for some time now been frightening investors out of their routine. This has freed many to look at the deeper problems of the global economy.

First thesis: A shift in trend has become apparent. The economic importance of the emerging countries for the global economy has almost tripled in the last two decades. Their GDP today accounts for about 40% of the world economy. With its dramatically increased economic output, China has risen to be a locomotive of the world economy. The most recent data on China's economy has increased concern that the economic dynamic is waning. The party and state leadership is proceeding to weaken its own currency to strengthen its export industry.

In fact, economic growth in China is weakening. Despite this, China's economy clearly continues to be the greatest contributor to global GDP growth. For a world economy that has manifestly not overcome the contradictions of the 2007 accumulation crisis and that could not withstand a new drop into recession without major dislocations, China's role is central to further development.

Graph 10: China's Economic Growth
% GDP



Second Thesis: The patent difficulties the People's Republic of China has in maintaining the high growth rate of around 7% is creating problems for a broad segment of raw-material exporting countries and is leading to market contractions in the main capitalist countries.

China was and is an important growth engine for the global economy:

- It intensified its growth model, which primarily rested on exports and domestic infrastructure investments. It extended its capital stock. It invested in new road networks, railway lines, harbours, airports, and cities.
- Its need for raw materials like petroleum, iron ore, copper, and coal exploded.
- The worldwide prices of these raw materials established a super-cycle lasting several years.
- The exporters of these raw materials – from Australia and Indonesia to Brazil, Canada, Chile, Saudi Arabia, and Russia – could develop their own economies thanks to the profitable business this provided them.
- China generated a massive surplus in its trade balance and its current account. Furthermore, capital investments were pouring into the country. In a system of flexible exchange rates China's currency, the Renminbi, could therefore have steadily gained value.

The growth rate in China is still high at almost 7% but clearly lower than the annual average of 10% of past decades. If China's GDP were to reach the 6.7% mark in accordance with the government's official 2016 goal – which is only a little over the most recent IMF prognosis (6.6%) – China would account for 1.2% of global GDP. For this year the IMF is now expecting worldwide growth of only 3.1%; but in this case China's contribution to world GDP growth would be responsible for almost 39% of the total.

The contribution of the other important economies, on the other hand, comes out to significantly less. The USA, as the hegemonic power, will increase its economic product in 2016 by a mere 2.2%. With this result the leading power will altogether account for only ca. 0.3% of worldwide GDP growth, which amounts to about a fourth of China's contribution. It is true that the tempo of the Chinese economy's growth has clearly decreased relative to its average 10% annual growth in the period from 1980 to 2011. However, even after the transition from the 'old' to the 'new normality' (in the official vocabulary of the Chinese government) the world economy remains highly dependent upon China.

A continuing global growth dynamic supported by China's domestic economy has three important consequences:

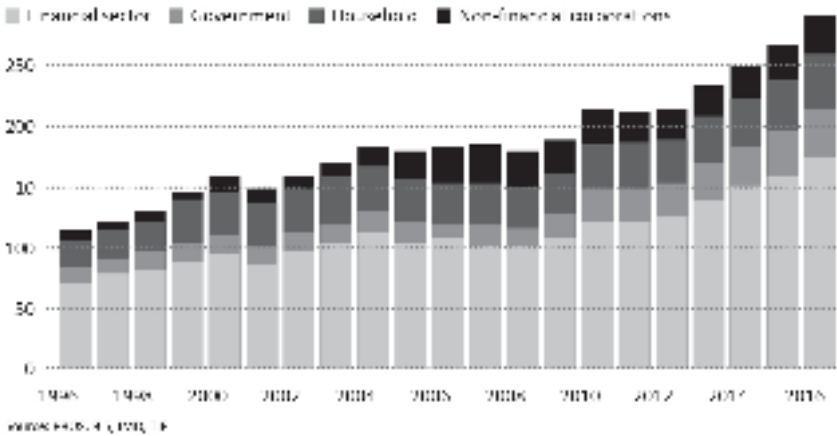
- First, without China's contribution to the global growth dynamic, worldwide GDP in 2016 would reach about 1.9% and thus be clearly below the 2.5% threshold classified by the IMF and the World Bank as stagnation.
- Second, a possible but not likely hard landing of China's economy would have a disastrous effect on large parts of the global economy. Every 1% drop in China's GDP directly reduces global GDP by about 0.2%. Including the spillover effects of foreign trade, the negative impact on worldwide growth would be about 0.3%. A massive weakening of China's growth would trigger a sharp recession in the world.
- Third, the global effects of a successful structural change of the Chinese economy remain positive. The tendency would be towards a stronger rise of imports than of exports. The reason is that rising wages countrywide make it increasingly difficult to be the 'world's workbench'. With many incentive and promotional measures, the Chinese authorities are therefore trying to stimulate the development and establishment of upmarket (and clean) production. At the same time, the consumption of the Chinese is itself to become a stronger growth motor. The unavoidable structural change in China continues to make possible a strong counterweight to an otherwise stagnating worldwide economy.

China must carry out a structural transformation, for the time is over in which the world's second biggest national economy expanded for years, sometimes by much more than 10%. This boom phase has left a legacy of macroeconomic imbalances, a wide social gap, and increased political risks. But in stark contrast to the important national economies of the highly-developed world, in which there is very limited scope for this, the Chinese authorities have control capabilities for loosening monetary policy to spur economic activity. To the extent that the Chinese leadership is in a position to maintain this multi-dimensional policy and its reform focus, the weak and still vulnerable world economy can only benefit from this.

The reconstruction of the Chinese economy is proceeding. In the last year the share of service workers in economic output totaled to 50.5%, which corresponds to a 2.4% growth relative to the previous year. In so doing the tertiary sector is slowly outstripping industry – whose share of GDP last year was 40.5%. Thus in 2015 the tertiary sector, with 8.3%, rose more sharply than industry, with a growth of 6.0%. These emerging changes in economic structure show that structural transformation is indeed advancing. In view of the growth slowdown the government has laid great stress on regulating loans and controlling debt.

Graph 11: China – Total Debt-to-GDP

Percent of GDP



The debt burden makes up more than 250% of GDP, which is now too high. Structural change must therefore be tied to a weakening of credit expansion. Reassuring comparisons with the similarly high liabilities of the US or Japan are misleading because in the long run rich countries have less problems with financing their loans than do emerging countries, which are at a lower level of development. The decision-makers in China are thus engaged in a risky re-orientation process: they want to decrease the debt burden, stabilise growth, not depress the market with debt default, and at the same time avoid price bubbles. To stabilise growth the state is keeping up investments. On the other hand, the enterprises are hardly still investing.

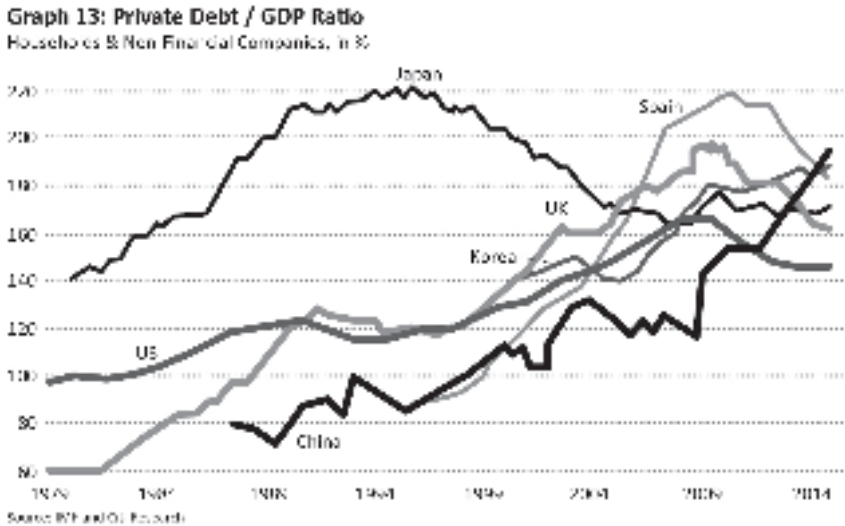
Graph 12: Change in Investments in China

Change in capital investments (against the previous year, in 3-month averages), in %



Source: Société Générale

The rapidly growing debt burden was the price paid for the high growth dynamic with its positive effects on the global economy, since economic output grows thanks to higher debts. In the recent period lending has clearly grown more than the economy. As a result the debt burden rises in comparison to economic output, and the debt ratio has accelerated even more. In order to reduce the ratio of debt to GDP the debt level must be lowered. The present high rate of growth in loans is based on government-directed investments in infrastructure and on an expansion of the real-estate market.



Global economy – between secular stagnation and credit expansion

Years after the Great Crisis, the capitalist global economy is still in a dangerously unstable mode. It is unstable because the expansion of the credit system included constraints. No corrective is emerging in either extreme of disequilibrium – neither in a speculative boom nor in deflationary debt liquidation. The boom is feeding on itself just as the economy spirals ever deeper into depression. This process can only be stopped through state intervention. In depression this means fiscal and monetary policy support to stop the self-destructive, deflationary debt liquidation.

Since the outbreak of the Great Crisis almost ten years ago now (2007/2008) we are passing through a cascade of various phenomenal forms. Between phases of the intensification of contradictions the financial markets cool down and the social process of reproduction recovers, although not evenly in all countries. The point of departure for the structural crisis in contrast to a normal business-cycle crisis was a drastic price correction in

the real-estate sectors and after ailing mortgage loans in many capitalist countries, out of which a bank crisis and later a public debt and banking crisis developed.

The following years will probably be characterised by attempts to deal with the accumulated mountain of debt, that is, to clear them. Private households would have to reduce their debts and states consolidate their budgets. If private consumption and investment expenditures still decline aggregate demand will be suppressed. Debt reduction is a protracted process; in all historic cases it requires years. It began with the outbreak of the financial crisis in 2007, and there are no signs of a return to accelerated capital accumulation. We are once again seeing symptoms of a possible financial crisis.

Contrary to conventional wisdom, financial crises are inevitable phenomena of the basic instability of the capitalist economy. In longer phases of accelerated capital accumulation (with economic growth), banks, enterprises, and consumers lose their aversion to risk and, driven by the desire to valorise their assets, begin to expose themselves to ever more adventurous financing – stimulated by the merciless competition between the banks, which contributes to the invention of new financial products and to attempts by banks to circumvent the prevailing regulations. The financial markets begin to overheat, and the number of alternative options are constantly diminished. In the end, enterprises, financial institutions, or private individuals pin their hopes on expected price rises of assets that they have bought on credit. The end of the party is normally triggered by an actually minor event, which throws the whole financial branch into crisis.

The capitalist economies are now in a liquidity trap. That is, the tendency to ‘secular stagnation’ means strongly flattened growth rates for the economy, meagre rates of price increase (which is called deflation), and at the same time the central banks have recourse to the lowest extremes of their prime rates, which cannot be much lower than zero. At the same time a decided uncertainty prevails in the international financial markets vis-à-vis the incontrovertible instability. In view of frictions in the global credit cycle, the present situation is assessed as extraordinarily fragile. It is acknowledged that since the beginning of the financial crisis there has been no global debt reduction, and that, instead, debt has sharply risen, that derivative products have lost nothing of their complexity, and that their enormous number has grown still further. It is seen that politicians and central bankers have shirked their responsibility to citizens through their policy of high debt and the risky, untested measures not directed towards reinforced growth and greater financial stability but to more inflation.

Once again the policy of life on credit is facing the danger of tipping over and coming to an abrupt end. The world financial system and world economy are in turn caught in the logic of an uncontrollable expansion of credit. There is the threat of a new great depression with bank collapses, state bankruptcies, mass unemployment, and social and political conflicts within and between countries. Policy has stuck to the supposedly tried and true means, that is, still cheaper money and still more debt. This only means continuing to fight the symptoms and not the actual causes.

The leading central banks have now once again transformed the traditional business-cycle and financial cycle of the last decades into a dangerous 'asset-price cycle'. Today, in view of the incredibly long low-interest-rate phase, and in terms of the booming bond, stock, and real-estate markets, the world economy ought to find itself in an analogously strong upswing – but this is not the case. Even below-zero interest rates are not enough to get a world with a shrinking or stagnating labour force and without advances in productivity back onto a growth course.

In the last 30 years this economic policy not only covered up the increasing crippling of the economic driving force; it also further aggravated the problems. Continually rising debt has only served to finance consumption and speculation. The value of assets resulting from this debt has risen sharply everywhere. The interest on it, however, must as always be financed from income, which in the end leads to decreased demand. At the same time investments have been made that on closer analysis have not paid off. Overcapacity, bad investments, and nonperforming loans are depressing the market and reinforcing deflationary forces. It is becoming continually clearer that debts enable advance consumption. The growing gap between productive capacities and stagnating mass income is threatening development.

A (state-accompanied) drastic remedy or a 'New Deal'

What could the solution be? Aside from a crash triggered by a secondary event there is an alternative. The central banks, supported by government policy, can bring the economy back on a path of growth after an induced 'creative destruction', a cleansing shakeup, for instance through a decisive prime rate increase. Tottering enterprises and banks are swept out of the market so that something new can emerge from the ruins. Or a bridging subsidy can be established through which private households and companies can be rehabilitated, banks recovered, and the economy made self-sustaining again. A severe financial crisis is defused and its distortions cleaned up by state intervention, be it in the form of the central bank, the oversight authorities,

or the ministry of finance.

A drastic remedy to clean up worthless asset titles would not be a popular one. The property and conditions of reproduction of all population groups, however diverse, would be touched. The owners of assets would have to make their contribution to the removal of the non-performing loans and to the financing of the urgently needed investments. Companies, if they want to avoid higher taxation, would have to invest more. The state would have to invest more in public infrastructure. The future ensuring of prosperity would be purchased by a longer lean period with higher unemployment. A collapse into a longer crisis phase cannot be excluded.

The alternative to a state-accompanied cleansing and accommodation process is an extraordinarily concerted reform effort, a kind of New Deal consisting of monetary, fiscal, and structural policy, with which the important national economies and consequently the world economy could be manoeuvred back onto a development path. Monetary policy alone could never accomplish this. It is still not too late to involve the central banks in a reform option. State investments in infrastructure financed through the bond market could be efficiently and successfully implemented in the USA, Germany, Great Britain, and thus in the EU and euro area. The accumulated needs in all these national economies is enormous. Loan capital at low interest rates is available, and investments in infrastructure would improve the conditions of life and production.

An effective social reform policy is tied to a radical change of direction and a socio-political overall concept. Full employment can be achieved with the extension of state expenditures on public investments or for a qualitative change in mass consumption. By contrast with the approaches to macroeconomic global management implemented up to recent years, these measures need to be rooted in a long-term planned structural policy, both in terms of taxation and in the expansion of public investments and mass consumption. Without an expansive wage policy no lasting domestic economic growth can be created. It is not a matter of more economic growth within the traditional income and consumption structures but of the formation of a socially and ecologically more sustainable mode of life. A fundamental reform of the capitalist economy has to be planned such that a long-term structural policy is pursued through combatting the existing inequality in income distribution.

Such a restructuring has to centrally focus on four dimensions. First, the big disparities in income and assets have to be reduced. In the first place, the 'accumulated claims upon production'³ have to be cut back through taxation. Second, the extent of flexibilisation – both on the factory level and

throughout the society – have to be regulated. Third, in every reform of the social security systems account has to be taken of the actual precarisation of sections of wage labour and the increased significance of interest and asset income. We have to expand the financial basis of social security from work income to other forms of income or revenue (interest, rent) if we want to realise a universal security system for all members of society. And, fourth, we need a new regime of controls on capital movement and of the control and taxation of international financial flows.

The debts that have been created in order to uphold the illusion of growth and prosperity have become unbearable and are increasingly smothering the economy. The mountain of debt has so far been prevented from collapsing only through low interest rates. Therefore an important first step is the cleansing of bad debt within an orderly process.

Part of this orderly clean-up is the reduction of the unsecured liabilities funding pension and healthcare benefits in an aging society. For years, experts from the Bank for International Settlements have been calculating the actual debt of western industrialised countries – that is, including the hidden burdens on future benefit entitlements – at several hundred percent of GDP and have called for drastic countermeasures.

The world's leading politicians and central bankers have set out on a bridging operation, when they did not allow the economy in winter of 2008/2009 to collapse but instead intervened. The road map reads: the central banks make liquidity available and buy time so that government policy can create demand through investment programmes and tax cuts and at the same time implement a sustainable economy through structural reforms.

The central banks were left in the lurch. With growing desperation they have repeatedly bought time, but the politicians have let this tick away unused. The signs are now increasing that the central banks have come to the end of their road. The collateral effects of their extreme policy, for example the negative rates of interest, are becoming increasingly painful, while the danger of new, potentially disastrous speculative bubbles is growing in the financial markets.

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NOTES

- 1 *World Economic Outlook* (WEO), Subdued Demand: Symptoms and Remedies, October 2016.
- 2 WEO, Subdued Demand.
- 3 Marx, MEGA II/4.2 (Ökonomische Manuskripte 1863-1867. Teil 2. (Manuskript 1863/65 zum 3. Buch des ‘Kapital’)), p. 524.

The Left: Past and Present

The Left and the Labour Movement in Europe – What History? From the 19th to the 21st Century

Serge Wolikow

At the middle of the second decade of the twenty-first century, the left in Europe is in such a state that it seems to have come to the end of a long history. Split up between different components, it appears to be headed for extinction. Not only observers but also some governmental representatives who call themselves left, such as the current Socialist prime minister in France Manuel Valls, predict its end. Actually, they welcome it while pretending to be worried in order to legitimate their own leadership of the left. To what extent can one speak of a global European situation and a general evolution when there are, even from the point of view of forces that call themselves left or are perceived as being a part of it, considerable national disparities? What is original in the current state of the left when its history in Europe has seen numerous twists and turns for more than a century? In the end, what are we then speaking about? In political discussion there is nothing new about proclaiming that the crisis of the left is definitively consigning it to the past of industrial societies – this has been the talk in particular of the conservative and neoliberal revolution for almost 40 years now. What is newer is the rise in the very heart of left political forces of a major concern about their points of reference and identity. Some insist on the disappearance of foundational left political and social paradigms, notably the fight for equality and an orientation to class struggle, to make way instead for new cleavages that will structure political confrontations that are now to pit conservatives against progressives, and people against elites. Moreover, does the distinction often drawn by analysts between radical left and government left take account of the differing evolution of the left on the European scale and describe a definitive and stable differentiation or only the umpteenth episode of left transformation?

The historical approach must not ignore these questions even if it does not claim to give definitive responses to them. But because of this approach we need to make a detour to better pose what the current questions are. In the first place, we need to come back to the disparate use of left terminology in discourse, in action, as well as in political confrontations within different European countries. We also need to see whether there is a strong relation between the left and the labour movement, the left and public social policy. It is impossible not to address the long history of the divisions and unifications within the left as well as the history of its governmental experiences and its activist mobilisations.

To invoke the left in Europe in 2016 is to refer to political realities that are different but which relate collectively to a certain number of principles that remain characteristic of political currents and forces that link liberty and equality, political and social democracy, and international solidarity.

If the left today appears to be in major difficulty it is because it had a remarkable bright spell at the end of the 1990s, at least in western Europe if not also in some countries of central Europe. In the course of the 2010s the electoral setbacks and loss of global influence of social democratic parties spared no country even if this weakening took different forms. In most countries this diminution benefited extreme right political forces but there was also the emergence of new critical political forces situated on the extreme left. Using the plural seems necessary in designating and characterising these different forces whose improbable alliance usually leaves room for confrontation. But can we only distinguish them as being either on the side of government or on the side of contestation?

In this panorama, troubled as it is but marked by a worldwide slump of left forces, historical reflection is instructive in analysing the present situation. It means a retrospective undertaking applied to more than a century, taking into account present-day Europe as a whole, even if the geopolitical changes have lastingly fragmented the conditions of political life in Europe.

We propose a framework for reflection centred on the twentieth century with occasional incursions into the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twenty-first. The structure and influence of the political and social forces calling themselves left have seen major fluctuations, cycles through social and political developments that have transformed the geopolitical and social map of Europe. From this point of view, when the political analysis covers the European continent over a long period, one of the main conceptual difficulties is envisaging the dovetailing of persistencies and transformation, specificities and the common evolution.

In what follows I will try to evaluate how the left in Europe has worn

various faces and experienced contrasting periods.

If there was ever a cliché to resist, it is the notion of a linear evolution: that the left, after a difficult emergence, went through a first affirmation, for example at the end of the nineteenth century, which led it in the course of the twentieth century to be consolidated before it entered a phase of decline at the end of the twentieth century. Such a simplifying representation skips over the crisis moments, indeed the decomposition, of the left during the twentieth century, whether it was at the time of the world wars or facing fascism and the counter-revolutionary regimes. We need also to take into account the recompositions and transformations within left political forces, the split of the labour movement right after the First World War, the East/West geopolitical division after 1945, and the crisis and then collapse of the Soviet system. Bearing this in mind, we can distinguish some major moments allowing us to put forward a perspective on the ups and downs of the political and social forces of the left by introducing the essential geographic differentiations throughout the period. Having a European approach to the question implies awareness of these differences that still have an effect. This European history must be distinguished from a world history often quite different both in its chronology and its components.

We therefore propose a reflection on the French origins of the left, then on three moments of its evolution at the European level and in its relations with the labour movement. In the first place, we will look at the inter-war years, the period of crises, splits, of the first government experiences but also of setbacks and regression; then the renaissance of the left in 1945, the hegemony of its values after the victory over fascism in a Europe that was destroyed but divided just like the left itself yet from then on facing the challenge of government management in most countries. Finally, we need to look at the last third of the twentieth century, which for the left in Europe is the period of entering a major crisis with a decomposition combining electoral fluctuations, sociological decoupling, and uncertainties. This last period, which is far from over, extends up to the first decade of the twenty-first century.

At the end of the nineteenth century, France was the only country where the existence of the left took on political substance. The existence of the left, with its institutions and coherent activity, is older in France because it is rooted in the history of the French Revolution. The Republicans through the monarchist Restoration and then through the second Bonapartist empire self-identified as left, with the radicals becoming the wheeling flank. During the last decade of the nineteenth century the political left affirmed itself against the partisans of a state based on its high functionaries and the church;

the Dreyfus Affair was the terrain of a right/left cleavage, which is not found in the same way in other European countries, even if the topology of forces corroborate the right/left opposition. In fact, the reference to the left is just as much linked to the political confrontation around the republican form as it is around the social question, that is, the place of the world of labour, principally of industrial wage workers, in public and political space. There were thus two forces which saw themselves as advanced republicans, demanding a liberal republic, on the one hand, and a social republic, on the other. They come together again against the reactionary attempts that associate those nostalgic for the monarchy and the advocates of new authoritarian forms of state. This convergence is expressed in France at the beginning of the twentieth century in the alliance called the Bloc de Gauches, bringing together radicals and socialists, but it was also exceptional then in Europe, as was the republic and universal suffrage. In most of the countries of western and central Europe, the labour movement, with its political and trade-union organisations, was the force that appeared as the bearer of protest but also of hope for an amelioration of the political condition and rights of the world of labour, involving both the rights of suffrage and social rights. The actual political demands around the form of state, the organisation of public powers but also the national dimension were taken charge of by liberal forces, often connected to the bourgeoisie, who, moreover, were quite open about this – there was no real connection with the labour movement. In most countries of northern Europe, the organic link between parties and workers' unions centred class activism on the side of social reform without intervening on the question of a global political change except on the national question. In southern Europe, the French model is found in part, but the democratic and liberal currents confronting the church, the main support of the aristocracy, were very dissociated from the nascent labour movement whose base was in small enterprises and workshops. In adhering to anarchism, the labour movement largely placed itself at the periphery of political space.

This diversity, which draws from a European history with its unequal economic and social development and which has been called the political persistence of the ancient regime, was not erased by the First World War. However, the upturns resulting in Europe from the war from 1914 to 1920 largely modified the conditions of political confrontation at a continental scale. The crumbling of empires, the emergence of nation-states, the irruption of the working and peasant masses into political space, and the impact of the Russian Revolution transformed and widened the politicisation. In most of the new European states, the national question, the institutional question, and the social question came onto the agenda and overlapped.

After the period of revolutionary effervescence at the beginning of the 1920s, conservative stabilisation prevailed, and the social reforms enacted to obstruct the popular mobilisations of 1919-1920 remained limited or emptied of content. Nevertheless, the political landscape was modified in most European countries with the emergence of political forces based on the labour movement and social democracy. At the same time, cleavages open up, which, on a continental scale, distinguish those who hold to gradualist theories and those who affirm their revolutionary convictions. The division between communists and socialists, from the beginning of the 1920s, restructured the labour movement without there being any true European generalisation of the model of the left, which at this epoch is still something mainly particular to France. This decade corresponds to a period of the global weakening of the labour movement after the ephemeral revolutionary spurt of 1918-1920.

However, the political influence of social democracy was affirmed in the countries of northern Europe. Government experience after the episode of the First World War grew in certain countries – in Great Britain, in Sweden, and in Germany, the parties making up the pillars of the socialist workers' international, reconstructed with difficulty after the crisis of European socialism following the war, were engaged in government participation, often allying with liberal parties, to realise a policy of limited social reforms but answering to the demands of the trade-union movement. These experiences gave the parties of the socialist workers international an opportunity to mark their distance from Marxism or express their hostility towards class struggle. This was the situation from the beginning of English labourism, but also with German social democracy, which declared it favoured organised capitalism, or with Belgian social democracy, which asserted the need to go beyond Marxism. These reformist advances were hit very hard by the economic crisis in the face of which these parties and unions were caught off guard but refused to modify their orientations. They remained hostile to any reconciliation with the communist current, which was criticising them harshly. The latter, which was very much a minority on the whole within the labour movement of western and northern Europe, with the exception of France and Czechoslovakia, was, moreover, reduced to clandestinity in many countries of central and southern Europe. With their long-standing denunciation of social democracy for its betrayal of revolutionary ideals, it reaffirmed the latter by leaning on the USSR as a model, while hoping for a revolutionary radicalisation induced by the economic crisis. After having interpreted fascism as a sign of the decomposition of bourgeois democracy which opened the way to revolution, the coming to power of the Nazis

upset this scheme. The communist movement engaged in an antifascist defence strategy of political democracy turning towards other forces of the labour movement – the socialists but also the liberal parties.

The orientation of the Popular Front is important in the history of the left in Europe to the extent that it legitimates the definition and realisation of a project of political and social reforms, explicitly intended to block the forces of the reactionary parliamentary right allied to fascist projects of establishing authoritarian regimes in the name of nationalism and a war context. If France was the epicentre of this antifascism, it spread to other countries, Spain in the first place, but also to certain countries where the democratic forces were reduced to illegality, as in Italy. Even if the alliances of the Popular Front were in the end only established in a limited number of European countries, they initiated inter-classist political rapprochements, which conferred on the world of labour a new political place, in particular in France where trade-union reunification and the mass strike movements came to support the electoral victory achieved thanks to the reciprocal willingness of the different parties allied in the Popular Front to not run separate candidates. This political activism, bringing together demonstrations, electoral mobilisation, and social movements, constituted the crucible of a new practice that subsequently nourished Europe, in particular via the participation of refugees and immigrants in the political and social struggles in France. Antifascist engagement to defend republican Spain equally helped spread the common ideals and a practice of combat that forged activist experiences and knowledge, which were appropriated by the popular strata, workers above all but also some salaried intellectuals. The communist movement grew in influence and audience in France and Spain, but it showed little progress in other European countries. In the immediate present, the balance sheet both of the Popular Front in France and antifascism on the European scale turns out to be limited. The hopes for unity between the two workers' internationals – socialist and communist – came to a sudden end. The English Labour Party, like the Scandinavian social democrats, expressed its hostility and defiance vis-à-vis an international antifascist cooperation despite Italian, German, and Japanese aggression.

Division within antifascist forces was reactivated by the difficulties encountered in realising an innovative politics in the social realm, which was very limited in terms of economic measures. Internal divisions at the core of socialist parties, the rise of mass repression and the big trials in the USSR, the lack of support given to the Spanish Republic, abandoned by the governments of western and northern Europe, triggered numerous rifts and true disillusion amongst antifascist forces. In 1939, they were at their

lowest point, soon divided and weakened by the repression that struck them when war broke out. Incapable of standing up to this, they simply disappeared, which is what happened to the Socialist International, or they went underground, in the case of the communist movement. In sum, despite the emergence then of antifascist mobilisation, the forces of the labour movement and of the left were particularly weakened and seemed incapable of having an impact on the destiny of the countries dragged into war.

Five years later, with the victory over Nazism, the political situation was characterised by a return of left forces to the forefront of political life in a number of European countries. Despite different forms, all of them subscribed to the same perspective, associating political with social democracy, which now appeared inseparable after the implementation of the combat of the United Nations against the fascist powers. The ideas of the left, bolstered by the cooperation of the economic power of the United States with the military power of the USSR, enjoyed an unprecedented expansion in the European continent. They gained influence through the programmes of social and political forces involved in the fight against fascism. Nevertheless, in a Europe devastated and unequally affected by the war, in a territory divided up by the victors, the common principles proclaimed at the creation of the UN in spring 1945 were far from being uniformly applied. The left organisations themselves experienced different fates depending on the particular region of Europe, their influence and capacity for action due not only to their local anchoring but also to the relations of geopolitical forces in Europe between the Soviet forces and the forces called western, that is, American. Everywhere, the legacy of the war was very present particularly through the bloody scars of the fascist regimes, which had crushed left-wing currents. In most of the countries, the reconstitution of left organisations occurred in relation to the international context, either directly or indirectly. In the Iberian peninsula these organisations remained subject to repression and could not enjoy a legal existence; in Greece the resistant activism of the communist party was criminalised at the instigation of British forces and then of the Americans, who asserted their control over the southern zone of Europe up to Turkey.

In the sphere of Soviet influence the cohabitation of left forces was of short duration. The antifascist alliances concluded in the period of clandestine struggle were rapidly transformed to the benefit of the communist parties, which, with the two notable exceptions of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, acquired a dominant position leaning on Soviet power whose intervention gradually shaped a political power in which the communist parties, starting in 1947, had a hegemonic role within an institutional framework that in fact

liquidated multiparty political democracy. Despite a real social mobilisation around the reconstruction and promotion of popular milieus, the communist left, complemented by the unions whose autonomy disappeared, was to contribute in these countries to the separation of a left point of reference from political liberties in systematically lumping together the efficiency of the state and public organs.

This presence of the political and trade-union left in the state apparatuses is also found in the countries of western and northern Europe but under different political conditions. From then on, the labour movement occupied an important place in the political system on which it left its imprint. Doubtless, the political forms diverge from Scandinavia to Italy, passing through Great Britain, West Germany, or Belgium. In the old countries subjugated by fascism the labour movement played a political role by way of the resistance, and then through the democratic constitution in Italy, for it was the Communist Party and the CGIL that had persisted in the antifascist struggle, just as in Western Germany it was a party connected to the Catholic church, the Christian Democrats, who took charge of political democracy by combatting the influence of the labour movement and its goals of redistributing economic and social power. From this point of view, in West Germany the reconstitution of the Social Democrats, linking party and union occurred not without difficulty due to the deep scars left by Nazism including in the world of labour and due also to the division of Germany, which served to discredit left ideas in West Germany through the denunciation of the situation in East Germany. From a subaltern position, the German Social Democrats then engaged in a process aimed at reacquiring the trust of the world of labour through a programme centred on the expansion of rights in the enterprise and a wage policy entailing a redistribution of profits. In France, as in Great Britain, the labour movement and its political representatives had a majoritarian political audience that went beyond the sociological categories of the world of labour alone.

Despite the differences in the landscape of political and trade-union forces – here a powerful social democratic ensemble, there a labour movement in which the communist party dominated with a left divided but united on a government programme – economic and social reforms took place lending substance to the idea of a social state backing up the restored or consolidated democratic policy. What the conservatives and the followers of neoliberalism were to denounce as the ‘welfare state’ was maintained despite, and in a certain sense because of, the climate of the Cold War in Europe. Public regulation of the economy, especially of the financial system, the nationalisation of major public services or enterprises, and the

development of the parity principle accompanied the growth of the western European economy, allowing the western states to meet the challenge offered by the USSR and the 'people's democracies'. The western states were, moreover, weakened by the crises accompanying the crumbling of the colonial empires of Great Britain, Belgium, and France (from 1947 to 1962). After antifascist unity, which only lasted a few years, the cultural and social hegemony of left forces began to crack. In the countries of northwestern Europe the influence of the communist movement rapidly declined; after the bright spot of the immediate post-war years it was the social democratic parties and associated union movement that were henceforth the only force that counted, in government or in opposition, in facing the conservatives. The Socialist International, reconstituted only with difficulty in 1947-49 at the instigation of the English labourists, affirmed its will at the end of the 1950s to support the reinforcement of the socialist parties against the communism of eastern Europe and in southern Europe. The German Social Democrats, who had an active role in this, were to revive the ideological project of abandoning Marxism in favour of a new conception of organised and regulated capitalism. In France, as in Italy, the communist parties, with their ties to the main trade-union confederations, represented the principal force of the labour movement and the left, but their political capacity was hampered by their isolation, even if their power restrained the questioning of the social conquests of the post-war period.

The divisions amongst the labour organisations and the capacity of the right-wing parties in power, for example the Christian democrats or Gaullists, pushed the different parts of the labour movement to seek alliances at the price of programmatic compromises that abandoned the revolutionary perspective for the sake of achieving greater political and social democratisation in the present. Then at the end of the 1960s the first signs of the economy's and society's running out of steam combined with the emergence of the new aspirations of wage workers in enterprises and universities; left forces were involved at the same time as they were caught off-guard by the mass movements whose complexity and diversity were unfamiliar.

If 1968 opened up a decade more favourable to the electoral progress of left forces, which in numerous European countries were able to strengthen their institutional moorings, this was not accompanied by any major doctrinal renewal at the very moment that right-wing forces were beginning to regroup behind the neoliberal thinking which called for the destruction of the reforms enacted after the victory over fascism. The political and social transformations in Europe and the world facilitated this paradoxical

development. In fact, new general political conditions came to modify the position of labour-movement and left forces in Europe. The crisis of the dictatorships of southern Europe from Portugal to Greece, passing through Spain, gave Europe's left forces a common horizon. The establishment of democratic governments in these different countries involved in one way or another forces which were rapidly to present themselves as the main actors of a coming European integration presented as the most favourable political solution deterring struggles for a profound democratic transformation of institutions and of society.

Taken together, the economic and social, and then political crises that affected the countries of eastern Europe in connection with the internal difficulties of the USSR, reinforced the project of the European Union where the social democrats and Christian democrats came together. When at the end of the 1980s the political system of the people's democracies fell apart the social-democratic left seemed to emerge victoriously from this major historic episode.

The electoral progress of socialist parties in southern Europe and the increase in the number of parties belonging to the Socialist International did not cease from 1980 to 1989, and in eastern Europe the honourable showing of the old communist parties rallied to the Socialist International seemed to herald a new advance of socialist influence at the European scale consecrated by the many national electoral victories and a massive entry into the European Parliament just when the communist influence was sharply diminishing in the countries of Europe's south. Far-reaching developments contributed to undermining the working-class anchoring of left political forces even when the latter claimed this anchoring. The diminution of trade-union strength coincides with neoliberal measures that were to favour and accelerate deindustrialisation and the development of financial capitalism; it is in Great Britain that this process began with a confrontation with the trade-union movement. Within the Labour Party, the line triumphed which adapted itself to the neoliberal development that contested public policies, and this intensified the disarray in the left, especially in working-class milieus. In France, with a time lag but analogously, the coming to power of the left and the establishment of a public economic and social policy based on the modernisation of the means and organisation of production and on nationalisations soon went out the window with an abandonment of the initial programme and a *laissez-faire* approach to deindustrialisation that led to deep incomprehension in the labour movement. The weakening of a trade-unionism that was disoriented and divided contributed to the emergence of social movements which sometimes organised themselves at

the margins; these are the *Coordinations*¹ whose development mushrooms from 1985 to 95. In many countries of Europe's south and east, the injection of capital and the upheavals brought about by commercial and financial globalisation led at first to new earnings at the same time as they deconstructed the old industries and services and weakened trade-union organisations. At the beginning of the 1990s, the political future of European social democracy seemed to be consolidated thanks especially to the twofold extension of its influence in eastern and in southern Europe even if the first signs of difficulties appeared in the social democratic landscape. With the support of the Socialist International, the communist competition disappeared, the socialist parties felt liberated from any threat to their left, and they set about to conquer the majority for which they were contending with the liberal right. Their electoral gains, varying according to country, grew throughout the decade. Nevertheless, the first signs of cracks appeared in their relations with the trade-union movement and within the forces of the left.

Globally, from about 1995 to the mid-2000s, the ties between the trade-union movement and the social democratic parties eroded. With the wave of deindustrialisation and privatisations in the public sector, an important part of the workers' movement distanced itself from the socialist parties which accepted all or part of the dismantling of the welfare state and of their public policies enacted since 1945. These socialist parties developed a doctrine of accommodation if not acceptance vis-à-vis financialisation and commodification. However, from the mid-1990s, this political development was contested from the left by political forces which proposed not only to resist it but also to implement political solution permitting another kind of political and social development. The reaction in Europe to the globalisation and financialisation of capitalism has occurred in the context of the international movement of the alter-globalisation forums. The emergence of what was soon to be called the radical left took place through different processes depending on the country, but they all brought together activist political and trade-union cadres representing a break with the social democratic organisations but also with communist organisations. These movements or parties of the radical left, whose audience grew at the beginning of the 2000s, translated protest and dissatisfaction arising from the drift of most socialist parties, many of which, having come into office, implemented a policy whose basic guidelines signalled a de facto submission to the expectations of the ruling economic milieu. This evolution had an international and European dimension expressed in the mobilisation of the social forums of Porto Alegre, Florence, Paris, and London. The criticism of financial capitalist globalisation and the north-south disequilibrium was

not exempt from the contradictions between the traditional organisations of the labour movements – the parties and unions – and the mobilisations that referred to the new social movements. From the north to the south of Europe, the radical left strove to give itself a structure in the face of the parties and organisations that claimed to pursue a social democratic politics. The creation of the Party of the European Left in 2004 and the mobilisation for the 2005 referenda in France and the Netherlands regarding the European institutions exhibited a real capacity of the radical left to come out of its political marginality. Nevertheless, the financial crisis and then the economic recession that swept Europe after 2008 sped up the disintegration of the left within a process characterised by a major decline of social democratic parties and organisations, which retreated in all European countries and lost their government positions as well as their majority in the European institutions. Although the conservative and liberal forces progressed, it was above all the parties of the extreme right which benefited from voter disaffection with the government left. The radical left experienced very variable, and on the whole weak, progress even if public austerity policy continued with very high levels of unemployment. The 2014 European Parliament elections testified to the scant attractiveness of the left as a whole, which confirmed a political geography in which political forces in eastern Europe exalted the alleged national identities, while in northern Europe the extreme-right currents combined xenophobia and social demagoguery, and the radical left political currents here and there in southern Europe still succeeded in preserving their following amongst the popular milieus.

In this difficult situation for Europe's left, its future, as has been the case at other moments of its history, is uncertain. Divided and weakened, its reconstruction would have to proceed through building the capacity to make itself the spokesperson for the impoverished and precarised popular strata but also through proposals promoting a new economic and democratic development. This also requires thinking and formulating the renewal of alliances, of practices of political action but also of internationalism.

The situation of Europe's left is inseparable from the mobilisation of the organised labour movement and the broader world of work. From this perspective there is certainly no possibility of a true rebound without this mobilisation, which presupposes new modes of alliance to be imagined and developed.

NOTE

- 1 The *Coordinations* appeared in France in the 1980s at the time of diverse social movements and outside any pre-existing organisation, particularly trade unions. They were generally created where unions were too weak (this is how the National Coordination of Nurses arose in 1988 and also the lorry drivers' *Coordination*) or were seen as too inactive (amongst teachers or students, for example). They are thus not intended to endure. The phenomenon is, moreover, in decline, particularly because the unions have by now themselves adopted the new forms of activism.

The Left, the People, Populism

Roger Martelli

The right-left divide seems to be breaking down in current political representation. In fact this goes back some thirty years when the right turn of European socialism began to blur the boundaries between left-wing and right-wing government management.

It is true that the extreme right has always dreamed of obliterating the major divide of political life. In 1927 the formula ‘neither left nor right’ was emphasised by Georges Valois, a disciple of Georges Sorel and then of Charles Maurras, who was at one point fascinated by Mussolini and founded the prototype of France’s fascist party, the Faisceau. Also in France, fifty years later, the Front National has made its watchword ‘Neither right nor left but French!’¹

The new reality is that the criticism of the right-left dualism has become general, reaching into the ranks of the European left. In January 2015, Jorge Largo, a leader of the new Spanish political formation Podemos, said to the French magazine *Les Inrocks*: ‘I am a republican of the left. Will claiming to be left help people?’ He added emphatically: ‘Defending the health system is neither right nor left [...] We have to break with the ideological discourse that has prevented us from seeing reality and building a social majority.’² Already by 1986 Cornelius Castoriadis declared in *Le Monde*: ‘For a long time now, in France and elsewhere, the left-right divide has corresponded neither to the major problems of our time nor to things that are radically opposed to each other.’³

A left-right axis that has been blurred, but ...

In fact, the available opinion studies do not suggest an unequivocal movement but a contradiction.

In 2014 in France, an extensive survey undertaken by the Centre de recherches politiques de Sciences Po (CEVIPOF) established that for nearly three-quarters of individuals questioned notions of right and left no longer

mean anything.⁴ Still, the overwhelming majority of those polled continue to classify themselves according to the right-left axis. Also in 2014, at the beginning of November, the CSA polling institution notes that 70% of those asked situate themselves on the right (28%), on the left (28%), and at the centre (14%), while only 30% say that they are neither right or left or are indecisive.⁵

In the very long run, we see a permanent, nearly equal tripartite division between those who classify themselves as left, those who choose the right, and those who refuse to be classified. The particular historical moment certainly expands or contracts any of the three groups but without altering the relation between them in any spectacular way. People decreasingly believe in the divide but they continue to position themselves along the axis it traces. This is doubtless because, by and large, this positioning parallels strong differences in values. People question the relevance of notions of right and left but the fundamental outlooks continue to confront each other in terms of right or left positions. Half of those who consider themselves to be on the left say they are ‘revolutionaries’; they prefer community, equality, the public sector, crime prevention. Half of those on the right claim to be ‘conservative’, three-quarters of them say they are ‘realists’, and they prefer the punishment of crime, the private sector, and individuality.

On the other hand, it is true that one’s position on the right-left axis coincides less than it previously had with the existing system of parties. What still sparked electoral mobilisations in the past no longer works. In recent years in France, neither the unity of the left nor defensive invocations (‘Help, the right is returning!’) have caused an electoral spurt. For the journalist Christophe Ventura, ‘from now on the left has been reduced, on the electoral level, to the nucleus of its minoritarian sociological bases (the sector of stable wage earners of the public and industrial sectors and the progressive intellectual middle class)’.⁶

On closer inspection, it is not the values of the two major groups which are decreasing but their trust in those who are supposed to express these values in political institutional space. They continue to relate to the structuring symbols of the right and the left but no one thinks that these political organisations are helping the forces that are working to embody these values.

The end of the major ideological conflicts?

In the past, the rejection of this division was very much a right-wing reality. The 1931 formulation by Émile Chartier, member of the Parti Radical,⁷ is often quoted: ‘When someone asks me if the divisions between right-wing

and left-wing parties, between people of the right and people of the left, still has meaning, the first idea that occurs to me is that the person that has asked this question is not a person of the left.' This is no longer completely the case, and uncertainty has transcended the old barriers. The left has been affected by this at its core.

The exhaustion of sovietism, the weakening of the great alternative models, and the apparent triumph of the liberal idea have, since the early 1990s, fed the notion that major ideological conflicts belong to a bygone age. The American Francis Fukuyama expressed this in his famous concept of the 'end of history'. New divisions have accompanied the transformation of societies: along lines of gender, ecology, the included/excluded, Nation/Europe, identities, openness/closedness, materialism/post-materialism, etc. These divisions mostly cross through the left and the right and thus elude the traditional divide.⁸

The 'alternance' of different parties in government and, still more, French socialism's centrist reorientation have bolstered the notion that referring to the left is at once ineffectual and a source of confusion. This is the view of the philosopher Jean-Claude Michéa. In his essay on the 'Mystères de la gauche' (Mysteries of the Left), he dates the origin of the left to the Dreyfus Affair.⁹ As he tells us, this 'birth act' was at the same time, 'one of the major points of acceleration of the long historical process that was gradually to dissolve the original specificity of worker/popular socialism in what from then on was called the progressive camp'. For Michéa, the world of workers traded the message of the original figures of socialism (Leroux, Proudhon) for the scientism of Marx and the opportunism of Jaurès. Immersion in the left and submission to the norms of material growth ('the surrogate name for the accumulation of capital') stifled the critical force of the class.

If one believes Michéa, the liberalist refocusing of the present government is nothing other than 'the logical outcome of a long historical process whose template was already inscribed in the tactical compromise negotiated at the time of the Dreyfus Affair by the leaders of France's workers' movement'. Michéa here goes back to and develops the old criticisms levelled by libertarian currents and revolutionary syndicalism, which saw in socialism's opening to the left a betrayal of worker autonomy and a dampening of proletarian combat. In fact, Michéa's entire text is simply a carbon copy of Georges Sorel's words, who, as a ruthless adversary of Jaurèsian socialism, was a brilliant theorist of revolutionary syndicalism and the general strike as well as a thinker of the ultra-left and of revolutionary violence.

Calling for the abandonment of the myth of the left, Michéa proposes starting not from the class but from the people. The people of which

he speaks does not like the individual. It cultivates ‘the natural sense of belonging’, which is opposed to ‘abstract individualism’. In contrast to modernity, which devours capital, and to ‘bourgeois cosmopolitanism’ it prefers a national rootedness, the respect of ‘traditional values’, a concern for familial transmission, and for ‘the values of decency and civility’. This brings us back directly to the counter-revolutionary critique at the end of the eighteenth century of Louis de Bonald and Joseph de Maistre.

Reading him, questions open up. Michéa starts from the left – his tradition of reference is communism – but where does he go? Less towards class struggle than towards the battle of the ‘small’ against the ‘big’. Through explicit references, Michéa locates himself somewhere between the ‘utopian’ socialism of the early nineteenth century and the French Communist Party (PCF) of the 1930s, that is, the PCF that had adopted the sectarian strategy of ‘class against class’. In reality, with the social and symbolic bases of these epochs having disappeared there is a danger that nothing will remain as a point of reference for the ‘little people’ other than ... the Front National. In a biting critique published in the left journal *Contretemps*, the philosopher Isabelle Garo feels that her colleague ‘ends up not at all renovating a class discourse but proposes a completely different division, ethical in appearance, whose only effect can be decomposing the political landscape on his left flank’ even more than it already is.¹⁰

Being of the people rather than of the left?

If the outrageousness of Michéa’s proposal leads him to slippery horizons, it is not the case that every critique of a worn-out left leads to the disastrous contemporary fascination with the Front National. One cannot just brush off the reticence expressed, for example, by Podemos in Spain or the major objection reiterated in France by the Comité Invisible, which became known in 2007 for publishing *L’Insurrection qui vient* (The Coming Insurrection), locating itself in an old ultra-left current that prefers insurrection to political action. In its most recent publication, *À nos amis* (To Our Friends), the Comité openly asks the question: ‘Perhaps we can wonder what of the left remains among revolutionaries that dooms them not only to defeat but to being almost universally detested.’¹¹

This is not the first time in the last two centuries that the misguided behaviour of the French left in power has driven that part of public opinion most attached to equality to get round the trap of a discredited left. In 1870, the Proudhonian August Vermorel, who disliked ‘bourgeois’ republicans, rejected the binary division, preferring to distinguish a ‘socialist party’, a ‘liberal party’ (in which he placed the moderate republicans), and ‘reaction’.

In the late 1920s/early 1930s, the Communist International saw the fault line running between communism and fascism from then on and with this logic saw the socialists as no longer social democrats but ‘social fascists’. Still later, in the 1950s and 1960s, when socialism was mired in ‘third force’ Atlanticism and colonial wars, it appeared to a part of the left that the east-west opposition was relegating the left to the rank of accessories. At that time, the French Communists ferociously denounced what they called the ‘American party’,¹² while a socialist official unhesitatingly affirmed that the Communist Party was ‘not on the left but to the east’.

We are reliving one of these confused phases in which people no longer know how to describe the mainspring of the major political divisions.

Pablo Iglesias’s and Podemos’s wager is thus to say that ‘from now on the faultline opposes those who like us defend democracy [...] and those who side with the elites, the banks, and the market; there are those on the bottom and those who are on top, [...] an elite and the majority’.¹³ Questioned by Jean-Luc Mélenchon, a Bolivian official close to President Evo Morales conveyed the same idea: ‘So I ask how we define ourselves. We say that we are of the people.’¹⁴ Attracted by this, the French leader enthusiastically took up the idea. If it is true, he said that in Bolivia as in Spain ‘the system is not afraid of the left but of the people’, then the political solution is not to assemble the left but to constitute the ‘front of the people’.

Recently, the philosopher Chantal Mouffe has lent prestige to the rejection of the old dividing line. In 2008, in an essay ‘The Illusions of Consensus’, she still accepted its cogency, though revising its usage.¹⁵ In 2016, in an interview for the magazine *Regards*, she comes back to her earlier assertions. If she then believed in the importance of the boundary between right and left it was because she thought it possible to radicalise social democracy and give it back a left identity. From the moment that this hypothesis became unfeasible, that is, from the moment social democracy showed its incapacity to resist liberal tropism any reference to the left is an illusion, she contends. What has to be unified is not the left but the people. ‘To speak of left populism means noting the crisis of social democracy, which no longer makes it possible for us, in my view, to re-establish this boundary between the left and the right’. In an agonistic political space, she claims, we need to redefine the faultlines: If the right-left dualism no longer works then it has to be substituted by the dualism of ‘people’ and ‘elites’ or the confrontation of ‘them’ versus ‘us’.

The impasse of a left-wing populism

Chantal Mouffe's proposal takes cognizance of the European left's failure to halt the rise of the extreme right. She wants it to be realistic: rather than rejecting the concept of populism it is better, she says, to turn it against its dangerous users, better to not discourse in general on the right and the left but oppose a 'left populism' to a 'right populism' ... The formulation is simple; but it is also questionable. Why? Because although categories of popular strata exist concretely the people does not exist but has to be constructed politically.

It cannot be constructed by referring to it nominally or by distinguishing it from its supposed opposite (the elite) but by gathering it around the project that emancipates it at the same time as it allows society as a whole to emancipate itself. It is therefore no accident that in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the parties of popular emancipation did not peg their principal identification to a sociological denomination, popular or worker, but to the project that they intended to promote. They called themselves 'social democrats', socialists', and 'communists'; the content of their project took precedence over their social determinants.

They had sound reasons for adopting this approach. In the broad social struggle, the accumulation of mobilisable components is nothing without the binding element that makes them into a coherent force rather than a mere numerical aggregate. To achieve this bonding is it enough that the dominated groups have a common enemy? Finance? It cannot be seen. The elite? Its boundaries are fuzzy, either too extensive or too restrictive. What is more, the elite adversary can be the 'privileged' functionary against the private-sector wage earner, the stable worker against the precarious wage earner, those who are too poor to pay taxes against those who are not very much less poor but who do pay taxes. The most convenient enemy is in fact those who are closest – in general this enemy is below us and does not resemble 'us'. The immediate enemy is the 'other', especially when we are repeatedly told that this is the age of the clash of civilisations and the defence of threatened identity.

What is it then that can unify people for their emancipation? Neither the adversary nor the enemy. Neither class against class nor camp against camp, nor centre against periphery nor the bottom against the top, nor people against elites: the heart of every contestation is the clash of the projects of society that underlie them. In the 1930s the popular categories with a working-class base resembled each other, less through the designation of an enemy than through the perceived danger of a regression (capitalist crisis and fascism) and the possibility of progress (the advent of a republic that would

finally be social). It was by raising oneself to the level of the 'everyone' of the social totality that the working-class and wage-earner 'we' was not closed in on itself but permitted the majoritarian momentum which brought the world of the worker out of the ghetto in which the owning classes confined the 'dangerous classes'.

It is thus more germane to say that the mobilising affect of the popular critical movement has to be found not in the exaltation of a 'we' opposed to the 'them' but in the activation of the popular values of equality-citizenship-solidarity connected to a global project of emancipation, which necessarily has a national dimension but which is not 'national above all else'. What popular impulse lacks today is a coherent project of rupture with the existing order/disorder. This once was the 'sacred equality' of Paris's sans culottes during the French Revolution, the 'communalism' of Babeuf, and the socialism and communism of the labour movement. It is what was called the 'social republic' in France's republican and worker's movement.

In bringing together workers' struggles with the political left, the representatives of historical socialism and communism did not sacrifice the class. They understood that the multitude of dispersed popular categories could not become the people in the political sense of the term (that is, the central protagonist of the polis) without politics putting together a concrete social experience, a struggle for dignity and for the existing institutions. It was through political action and hence through the conscious work of transforming the Radical Party's notion of the left that French workers went from being 'we' to 'all', from communitarian withdrawal to society as a whole. It was on the basis of this broad ambition that Jaurèsian socialism, and then the communism of the 1930s and 1950s, fought for the authority of the left against political formations considered more moderate. On this basis the world of workers was able to occupy a major position within the 'Jacobin bloc' that united all the left majorities, from the Dreyfus Affair to France's Common Programme of the 1970s.¹⁶ Without this project the 'we' of the most popular social categories is destined either to isolation and political ineffectiveness (the US model) or to a subaltern position due to the populist frameworks that annihilate any possible progress of popular emancipation.

Such a project certainly must be a long-term one; it will doubtless not proceed from the brutal upturns resulting from wars. However, its horizon must be an alternative to the dominant logic of competition and of 'governance'. Can it be established today in all of society, amongst all of the people? No, because the people are divided and disoriented. However, it is possible from now on to create a majoritarian movement in favour of a global transformation – economic, social, and cultural – in which the spirit

of rupture would no longer have to be minimised, as it has been ever since the beginning of the 1980s.

Polarity on the left

This is where we relocate the left/right duality. Once again we have to agree not to use the two terms to designate fixed entities, like drawers in which all we have to do is put individuals, political currents, and parties. Defining the left and the right as the sum of their components is useless. The vocabulary, images, and terrains of this division, as well as the historical issues, are constantly shifting. At most, it is not necessarily the vocabularies of the right and the left that express the antagonisms of a certain historical place or moment. What counts is not the label but the movement that pits the currents in opposition: no one pole means anything without the polarity that connects it to the others.

Let us forswear the logic of classification, at least in the beginning. For example, let us not ask how much of a left there is.¹⁷ Let us not seek to decree who is left and who is not. Let us rather ascertain that which simultaneously produces the relative unity of the lefts and their heterogeneity. Instead of the metaphor of compartments in which the political ‘families’ are duly placed we ought to adopt the metaphor of magnetic poles. The pole aggregates particles, and in a force field what counts is the power of attraction of each of the poles. From the moment that the Revolution established politics as a distinct space of conflicts it inscribed the logic of polarity into the organisation of behaviours and representations. The left, anchored not in the idea of progress in general but in the perfectibility of the human species, sees equality between human beings as the only legitimate foundation of social cohesion; the right, convinced of the opposite (*homo hominis lupus*), makes order and authority the intangible basis of every society.

However, at the same time as the Revolution establishes the central polarity, it produces another polarity within each camp. On the right, it produces a distinction between those who wonder if order should be introduced into the new space opened by the Declaration of the Rights of Man and those who think that order cannot be fully established unless it derives from the juridical inequality between the intermediary bodies and the authority of divine right. The former accepted the framework of the new society while the others wanted a return to the ancient régime. In the French left there is another polarity which emerges after 1789 and which is deepened and transformed in the succeeding decades. From the beginning everything depends on the way one conceives the field of equality: should it remain that of law (formal equality) or become equality of conditions?

The majority of members of the Constituent Assembly (which formed the core of future liberalism) leaned towards the first option. Later, once it was recognised that the Revolution would ‘stop where it began’ (Bonaparte), the question shifts substantially. With the new bourgeois society being henceforth unavoidable should one integrate into its mechanisms (the play of the market and state) in order to correct its most negative features? Or, on the contrary, since the new society (or ‘capitalist’ society as one would say in the nineteenth century) was inherently unequal should not those who desired equal conditions envisage its radical transformation, including its disappearance if necessary? Accommodate or subvert? The global relationship to the dominant social order becomes the organisational pivot for the left’s political arena.

The concrete forms of tension have changed (Feuillants and Montagnards, Girondins and Jacobins at the time of the 1789 Revolution, later opportunists and radicals, radicals and socialists, socialists and communists, social liberalism and anti-liberalism ...). The polarity as such persisted. The distinctive elements – sovereignty, nation, the right to vote, secularism, social rights, reform and revolution – shifted but the principle of distinction remained intact. In every historical moment, the propulsive force of each pole – adaptation to the ‘system’ or rupture with it – was at work. In pendulum fashion, in a cycle of 12 or 15 years, either the spirit of adaptation dominates or that of rupture. But it is on the basis of a dual polarity, on the right as well as the left, that the (shifting) ideologies, the (evolving) practices, and the (ephemeral) organisations are articulated. The polarity of the right and the left underlie the unity of the left (the principle of equality or rather the principle of equality-liberty – which Étienne Balibar calls ‘equiliberty’). The internal polarity on the left produced a diversity that cannot be summed up either in the existence of ‘two lefts’ or in that of an infinite number of ‘families’.

Panta rhei (everything flows), the Greek philosophers said with Heraclitus. The advantage of the metaphor of the poles is that it excludes all simple continuity. The play of opposites is built through a constant fluidity of its forms, which discourages any static vision of closed categories or of intangible ‘camps’. No Chinese Wall separates the lefts, even when they sharply oppose each other. Every stabilisation around a pole or a sub-pole is called into question by new differentiations as soon as the global system is transformed. Nevertheless the essential polarities reproduce themselves, enough to remain the active principles of distinction and classification of currents in the long run.

In the twentieth century, in all of Europe, the fundamental polarity of the

left is mainly, but not exclusively, fixed by the rivalry between communism and socialism, the one resting on the social model of sovietism, the other on that of the welfare state. In France a result has been the integration of socialism into the institutional mechanisms (1936 – 1959 and 1981 – 2012), the expansion and then petering out of communism of Bolshevik–Stalinist derivation, the marginalisation of the extreme lefts whatever their anchorings. As a whole, the years 1970 to 1990 led at once to the failure of the welfare state and the disappearance of sovietism. From the purely formal point of view there is an equivalence between the crisis of the old social democracy and that of Bolshevik descent; therefore we can say that there is a twofold exhaustion of, on the one hand, social democratic reform and, on the other, a historical form of revolution. This does not mean that the dilemma of ‘reform’ and ‘revolution’ is obsolete. If anything is obsolete it is perhaps the essentialist exclusiveness; instead, it is not the case that all reform can be reduced to ‘reformism’; nor can all breaks be considered ‘revolution’. But the stances of rupture and of accommodation remain active.

A popular but not populist pole

What is essential is that the polemic of equality is pivotal when the right/left polarity is operative.¹⁸ Accepting the disappearance of the original political divide today presents two major disadvantages.

First of all it means forgetting that every transformation, partial or radical, rests on majority movements. A transformational goal requires us to think of majorities that are, first of all, not founded on uncertain social similarities but on integrated conceptions of the social dynamic. If truth be told, there is absolutely no point in pulling together ‘the people’ if it is not around a project that puts an end to its alienation. From this point of view, the triptych of equality, citizenship, and solidarity is doubtless the only one that allows us to build, in the long run, the popular movement on sentiments other than fear of the other, the acrimony of social insecurity and resentment, which is the historical leaven of all extreme right movements.

It is because of this that it is worth developing the polarity of right and left. And if it is wobbly there is nothing more expedient than to refund it, making it the vector of anti-systemic mobilisation. One can always dream of winning majorities by dodging this divide or by playing at its edge and therefore in the political centre;¹⁹ in reality, however, it is in the nuclei of mobilisation, at the heart of the left and of the right that the deep electoral dynamics are decided.

We should add that we are in one of those moments in which it is explained to us – in either a learned or a gross way – that the age of equality is past and

that the age of identity has arrived.²⁰ It is no longer supposed to be sharing that forms the basis of social equilibrium but the protection of identities. 'Being at home' is supposed to be the acme of good living and freedom. We should not accept this paradigm for a minute; for, on the contrary, it is galloping inequality coupled to the exacerbation of discrimination, to the erosion of citizenship and of solidarity which is the cause of all our ills. This is what we have to try to counter.

But if equality is to remain at the heart of popular struggles, then the left remains a necessary major actor – a transformed left, rebalanced, refounded, and totally incompatible with the dominant social liberalism. A left, that is, that must aspire to being popular, critical, innovative, which requires frankly turning one's back on what socialism has promulgated in France for more than three decades now, and not only since the downward shift to the right under Hollande and Valls.

At bottom, rather than dodge the question of the left in Europe it would be better to tackle head on the major historical problem, our problem: that is, our societies have become too accustomed to the idea that a historical rupture with the dominant order is not possible and that, whatever one thinks of it, the horizon of a recentred and 'social-liberalised' social democracy is the only conceivable horizon. When the labour movement, sovietism, and third-worldism weighed on the whole of the social arena, the 'alternative' spirit of 'radicality', or of 'rupture', more or less dominated left space.

Rather than setting the utopian objective of collecting the 'whole people', which is only an abstraction, it is better to set the goal of basing ourselves on popular expectations and on the existing critical movement in order to give meaning to popular left majorities, not centred on the battle against the 'elite' but against a social 'system' that produces the division between the exploited and the exploiters, the dominant and the dominated, the alienators and the alienated, the popular categories and the elites.

Consequently, there is a necessary link between the constitution of the 'people' as a political subject and the radical refounding of the right-left divide. Provided that each of its terms is clarified anew, the old trilogy of equality, citizenship, and solidarity can again become a principle for gathering together a majority (not the totality) of the popular classes. There is no consistent popular politics that is not left; conversely, I fear that there is no populism that is not right-wing.

The temptation of a left populism is, certainly, not an abomination; there are solid arguments for it, but it can become an impasse. It wants to be combative but is in danger of already preparing its future defeats. We do not compete with the extreme right in the question of the nation;

instead popular sovereignty needs to be opened up to all political spaces without distinction. We do not compete over collective identity, national or otherwise; instead, we plead for free identifications, for freedom of affiliations, and for the massive revalorisation of equality, which are the only durable bases of the common. We do not compete with the extreme right over populism; instead, we delegitimise its hold by counterposing to it the constitution of a popular pole of emancipation. It is this pole, popular and not populist, this pole of popular dignity, which should be the focus of all our efforts.

NOTES

- 1 This is the title of a 1996 book by Samuel Maréchal, then in charge of the youth group of the Front National.
- 2 Mathilde Carton, 'Podemos: la "machine de guerre électorale" fête son année d'existence', *Les Inrocks*, 17 January 2015.
- 3 Column in *Le Monde*, 12 July 1986, reprinted in Cornelius Castoriadis, *A Society Adrift: Interviews and Debates 1947 - 1997*, New York: Fordham University Press, 2010.
- 4 <<http://www.enef.fr/>>.
- 5 <<http://www.atlantico.fr/decryptage/28-francais-se-disent-gauche-28-droite-14-au-centre-et-30-nulle-part-yves-marie-cann-csa-1838388.html>>.
- 6 Christophe Ventura, 'Gauche captive', *Contretemps*, 24, 4^e trimestre 2014.
- 7 The Parti Radical, founded in 1901, was then a republican party of the left. It participated in the Popular Front in 1936. In 1972 it split, with its left wing joining the communists and socialists who signed the Common Programme and created the Movement of the Radicals of the Left (first known as the Movement of the Radical Socialist Left). The remainder of the Parti Radical is now a part of the moderate right.
- 8 On this point see, for example, Cevipof, *La gauche et la droite: les limites d'une identification politique*, résultats du Baromètre Politique Français (2006-2007), 4^e vague – February 2007.
- 9 Jean-Claude Michéa, *Les Mystères de la gauche. De l'idéal des Lumières au triomphe du capitalisme absolu*, Paris: Fayard, 2013.
- 10 Isabelle Garo, 'Au nom du peuple, J-C Michéa réécrit l'histoire', *Contretemps*, 26 January 2015.
- 11 Comité invisible, *À nos amis*, Paris : La Fabrique, 2014.
- 12 An expression indicating the ensemble of groups and lobbies in post-war France that supported a U.S. or Atlantic alliance against the Communists and Gaullists, both of whom advocated a more independent France.
- 13 Pablo Iglesias, 22 November 2014, <<https://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/2015/01/LAMBERT/51929>>.
- 14 Jean-Luc Mélenchon, *L'Ère du peuple*, Paris: Fayard, 2014 (second edition, 2016).
- 15 Chantal Mouffé, *On the Political*, New York: Routledge, 2005.
- 16 Roger Martelli, 'Les gauches, les classes populaires et les classes moyennes', Paul Bouffartigue (ed.), *Le retour des classes sociales. Inégalités, dominations, conflits*, Paris: La Dispute, new edition 2015 (first published in 2004 in the series États des lieux).

- 17 The historian Jacques Julliard, for example, explains that in France there are four families of the left – liberalism, Jacobinism, collectivism, and libertarianism (*Les gauches françaises 1762-2012: Histoire, politique et imaginaire*, Paris : Flammarion, 2012). The extreme Trotskyist left is accustomed to counterposing the ‘two lefts’.
- 18 Norberto Bobbio, *Left and Right: The Significance of a Political Distinction*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996 (*Droite et gauche*, Paris: Seuil, 1996).
- 19 Thus, in April 2016, France’s Minister of the Economy, Emmanuel Macron, declared that ‘the right and left are separated by a Maginot Line that has become obsolete, and the real faultline today runs between progressives and conservatives’.
- 20 Roger Martelli, *L’identité, c’est la guerre*, Paris: Les Liens qui Libèrent, 2016.

The Left Alternative – The Search for a Subject of History

Ludmilla Bulavka-Buzgalina

Globalisation is increasingly influencing us. On the one side, it opens up new forms of a networked internet civilisation; on the other side, it entails irresolvable contradictions. The events of the recent period show that today, both for the West and for Russian society, it is not the challenge of modernisation that is becoming central – this train has long ago left the station; instead, what is on the agenda is a revision of the bases of its future development. These bases, whose first element has to be the idea of the human being as the subject of the socio-historical and cultural development of society, would constitute a left idea. But this is only possible if the creative individual him/herself changes the social relations in which he/she lives.

According to Marx, self-change and changing conditions coincide in revolutionary activity. This idea was further developed in the works of leading Marxists both in Russia (Georgi Plekhanov, Vladimir Lenin) and in Europe. Erich Fromm accurately states that Marx saw that no political force can fundamentally call new things to life if the latter have not already grown in the womb of the social and political development of the given society. Therefore one must and can seek alternatives within the present to an existence in which the individual is assigned the role of a mere function. The necessity of a fundamental renewal of the social system both in the West and in Russia is directly tied to the search for a new vector of historical perspective. How does the problem appear now and how can it be solved?

The lack of alternatives produces a regressive dialectic

Almost 100 years ago, in 1917, the Bolsheviki challenged world imperialism with their socialist alternative at the end of the First World War. In post-Soviet Russia, in 1991, the opposite occurred. It was not just the liberal vector, the vector of regression, that was chosen. The rejection of the search for an alternative both to neoliberal capitalism and to Soviet bureaucratism

after the fall of the USSR diverted the development of the Russian system into the tracks of a regressive, reversive logic. This regressive movement led, on the one hand, to the disintegration of everything that could have represented the potential for real development and, on the other hand, to a strengthening of old (Soviet) forms of alienation as well as the emergence of a new ‘mutant capitalist’ form of alienation. We constantly see examples of it. The ideologues of Russian liberalism think that the market is the only possible alternative to Soviet bureaucratism, but the market reforms have led to a corrupt bureaucracy synthesising the worst features of the Soviet and capitalist systems. This negative convergence is the essence of the regressive dialectic resulting from the subordination of the former socialist countries to capitalist globalisation. It is thus no accident that the assignment of their role within global capitalism was only possible based on the disintegration of their own identity. In the following analysis, therefore, we will concentrate on one of the most important and least researched lessons of the recent decades involving the left’s social-cultural alternatives.

From the USSR to Russia: Six lessons of the degradation of the country’s cultural potential

The reversive capitalism in Russia is drying out everything that had remained alive in production, science, and culture. This hit everyone hard, but the left in particular. The reason is simple: the absorption of Russia’s cultural potential as part of the liberal reforms cut off the possibility of forming a left alternative as a cultural project. This is true both on the level of political demands and that of the practical realisation of such projects. Not only the course of events but also the lessons of this frightful process are of fundamental importance for the future, and so we will develop its key points here.

First, in the course of the reforms the dominion of private interest increasingly crowded out the interest of society, the realisation of the former became the main content of all fundamental socio-economic institutions: the market, state, political parties, and also the church.

Second, in the reform years a qualitative change took place in the foundations of the system, which determined its development. While the basis of the Soviet system (despite all its contradictions) was the principle of practically changing reality, the basis of the modern Russian system is the relation of buying and selling, the total market. For the majority of its citizens the collapse of the USSR represents, on the one side, a historical catastrophe and personal tragedy and, on the other side, an opening up to the consumption possibilities of Western civilisation (clearly only for those who have the money to afford it). This meant a change in the meaning of

their existence. To the extent that the cultural-intellectual content of life activity was emptied out the spirit of consumerism increasingly won out. And just as the assortment of market goods is being constantly renewed so the possibility of consumption (if people have the means for it) is insatiable and produces the appearance of continual renewal. In reality, however, it generates in Hegel's words a 'bad infinity' as a simulation of development. The dominant place in the post-Soviet individual's system of coordinates is the space of buying and selling, in which history is no longer understood as something in movement and culture is no longer seen in relation to other social spheres. And this mode of existence – market-oriented in form and sterile in content – is praised by the ideologues of Russian liberalism as the ideal of modern Western civilisation to which we must supposedly all aspire. But the pursuit of market happiness is a simulation of movement that only produces meaninglessness.

Third, the rejection of subjectivity – from the new man to the petit bourgeois. The new man was above all a person who overcame the limits of the old world (the world of social alienation). He was the subject of the restructuring of his surrounding world by means of the resolution of the contradictions produced by the domination of various forms of alienation. But he was no *Übermensch*. The new man is the subject who creates history and culture, and the nature of his activity is the creation of new social relations. By contrast, the *Übermensch* realises his power not in creative praxis but in the system of power relations, in the establishment of his domination over the masses. But even an absolute power over the masses cannot transform the *Übermensch* into a subject of history and culture. Through his alienation of creative-constructive activity he is intrinsically thrown back onto non-subjectivity.

And there is still one more difference. If the new man is the concrete general form of the revolutionary individual then the *Übermensch* is the quintessence of the conformist petit-bourgeois masses over which he wants to erect his dominion.

The nature of the new man, behind whom there was always a concrete personality, consists in the fact that his activity was fundamentally directed towards naming the social contradictions of Soviet reality in order to find an approach to solving them under the given circumstances. And he did all of this under conditions of a continual battle not only with openly internal and external enemies but also with the petit bourgeois just as much as with the Soviet bureaucracy. Nevertheless the new man was in a position to accomplish the cultural revolution of the 1920s; to carry out the industrialisation of the 1930s; to defeat world fascism in 1945; to be the first

to fly into space in 1961; and to create a new international culture, a Soviet culture, during the decades of the USSR's existence.

The new man carried in himself the contradiction of his epoch, he 'emerged out of it', and expressed the future contradictions that he himself created. He – I am referring to convinced Bolsheviks, rather than dissidents, who wanted to work as teachers, physicians, agronomists amongst the peasants and workers – paid a high price for this, often that of his own life.

The opposite of this life activity, the rejection of the principle of subjectivity, is in essence nothing other than the rejection of the idea of man as the creator of history and culture. But this objectively transforms the individual into a bourgeois philistine for whom the arena of the market has become organic.

Fourth, the elimination of man as a personality. The modern system of total alienation only assigns man the role of a function. Therefore he exists not principally as a personality but as the bearer of one or another abstract sign: for example, a series of different numbers (bank or credit cards, insurance numbers, etc.), which he needs for his virtual existence on the internet.

When in the nineteenth century the new liberalism clarified its positions and ideals the question was posed in Russian literature of the tragedy of the 'superfluous person'. Russia's zombie liberalism, reanimated now after two centuries, expresses this, unabashedly and cynically, in a different way: 'man is superfluous'. In the economic sphere man is a function of capital and the total market. In politics he is no more than a unit of electoral plankton. In culture he is not an author but in the best case an interpreter of foreign texts or a private commentator of news.

And all of this has been made into law: capital's global hegemony is only capable of producing a private individual, an anonymous being alienated in form and content. As a rule, all of this drives the individual into reactionary-conservative forms of existence, transforms her/him into a bearer of alienation, an epidemic that is no less dangerous today than medieval plagues were.

Fifth, the alienation of the individual from culture. Social practices that are alternatives to the world of alienation pose the question of an alternative cultural space. And this is the most contemporary problem for the left in the twenty-first century.

The private individual today is becoming, on the one hand, ever more anonymised and, on the other, continually more dependent on the globalised networks of the market and bureaucracy. This unsolved contradiction becomes the most important condition for the development of social reality

through the ‘globalisation of total alienation’. Through it the alienation of the individual from culture likewise becomes more total. In his quality of being a function the individual objectively begins himself to work at the reproduction of these networks and finally at the production of simulations of culture, for example in the case of gamers. In contrast to the ‘mass man’ of twentieth-century consumer culture, the private individual in the epoch of neoliberal globalisation becomes not only a bearer but also a producer of diverse cultural simulations. And if we consider that the production of mass media contents has been transformed into a locomotive of the world economy, and has also gradually become the dominant form of the modern global market, so too is there an objective growth in the significance of the consumer who works at the reproduction of this kind of business. In the end the consumption of simulated culture makes the life of people itself into a simulation.

Sixth, the alienation of the individual from creative activity. The alienation of the active person from his/her own creative activity has increasingly become a paradox of contemporary capital, which prompts the growth of a so-called ‘creative class’. The dominance of ‘technologism’ gradually transforms the creative person into a function that services the orders of the market or of political institutions (thus the massive employment of talented workers in spheres of the production of simulations like advertising, public relations, financial operations, etc.).

The modern human being thinks of creativity as something complete that has results, something that is developing and is aimed at changing the world. Yet at the same time the backward-looking forms of reality that dominate him are felt by him as transcendental, that is, not created by people; he accepts them as ‘natural’ and therefore not criticisable. This is the contradiction in which he now lives. His world view rests as a rule on the recognition of the prevailing conditions of alienation as an absolutely unchangeable reality that determines his existence but which in no way depends on him. Since because of his alienation from reality the individual cannot become a social-active subject he is deprived of the capacity to grasp the contradictions dialectically and to critically analyse them. These changes of culture, the result of the 25-year-long liberal reforms in Russia, are the caricatured and grotesque reflection of analogous problems in the West.

The ideal of the new man as the subject of historical reconstruction was thus replaced by the petit bourgeois ideal of the philistine, which in essence is a comfortable and cozy existence that is market- and prestige-oriented in content.

To be fair it should be said that the philistine tendency also existed in

the USSR (Mayakovsky wrote a great deal about this). But what is most important is that post-Soviet regressive capitalism has cultivated it intensively and legitimated it intellectually and ethically.

Breaking out of the world of alienation: challenges

A cultural politics of the left ought to assume that the prevailing rules of the game determined by global capital are not something we should accept. We must and can say a decided 'no': first of all to the total commercialisation of human life in general and of culture in particular; second, we say 'no' to the private man and his alter ego, the individualism of the private property owner; third, we say 'no' to the annulation of subjectivity and to the philistinisation of man; fourth, we say 'no' to the elimination of man as a personality; five, we say 'no' to the alienation of man from culture and creative activity.

These imperatives would seem obvious (at any rate, they are obvious for the democratic left in Russia), but for much of the left in the West deciphering and transforming them into practical slogans proves difficult. This is because these imperatives would involve not just a renunciation of the method but also the practice of post-modernism, the recovery of grand narratives, and this not only in theory and politics but also in ideology, ethics, and aesthetics.¹

This presupposes definitiveness in our position on criteria of progress; and this means positions on good and bad, beauty and ugliness, definitiveness in questions of ethics and aesthetics. It is not about which picture corresponds to the criterion of progress and which does not. We have to convince people and society that criteria of progress exist and that we are proposing them but not imposing them.

For many leftists such words seem antiquated and echoes of totalitarian consciousness. But without definitiveness in politics the left will always lose out to neoliberalism in questions of culture. Furthermore, in the wake of neoliberal politics we will also lose against the extreme right. They have a reactionary but positive position and to the mind of the majority who are so distant from the spirit of postmodernism every definiteness is better than none.

When we speak about who would be the subject of the socialist alternative we have to pose another important question. On what basis is it possible today to gather the forces that could build an alternative to the globalisation of alienation? Might it be that the nation-state offers solutions here? This solution is increasingly becoming popular among conservatives. And here, in turn, it is important to remember some positive practices and lessons from

the USSR. The principle of universalism was one of the most important linchpins of the three cornerstones of Soviet experiences: revolution, culture, and the resistance to fascism. Precisely from these three connected pillars of the Soviet heritage grew the great fraternity of peoples not only of our country but, and this is especially important, of the world as a whole. And finally the important question: on what basis can we organise the relations between diverse peoples with different cultures, religions, and customs? A dialogue is needed between all sides. Here a critical analysis of the past can contribute much to the present and the future.

Look to the future through the analysis of the past

It may be that this is why today in Russia, a country that brings together the contradictions of global capital under a burning lens, people are increasingly turning to an analysis of Soviet practice. Admittedly, in doing so different forces are looking for different things.

We can perhaps discern three basic tendencies:

- the Stalinist-imperial tendency;
- the social-paternalist tendency;
- the subjective-action-oriented tendency.

The turn to the idea of the USSR is also connected to the fact that there is a historic precedence behind it whose logic of development, despite all its contradictions, raised society and the individual to put them at the centre of world history in the twentieth century. Today's interest in things Soviet is, alongside nostalgia, also an attempt to build bridges to the future through a critical analysis of the past. This is not a matter of nostalgia but of a Renaissance, a critical research into Soviet experience, and, in the first place, cultural experience.

Social creativity – breakthrough to culture

One distinctive kind of provocation in such a discussion could be turning to the social and cultural practices in the Soviet Union of the 1920s. In this period the Stalinist deformations still played no determining role, and the germs of social emancipation, as well as the contradictions in the birth of a new world and culture, were relatively clearly visible. Similarly visible was the contradiction between the objective necessity of including the broad masses in the process of social reconstruction and the lack of the cultural potential needed for this.

The resolution of this contradiction and the conjunction of the proletariat's enthusiasm with culture were the objects of sharp discussions, which had already begun before the Revolution. Characteristic for the approach of the majority of the intelligentsia to resolving this contradiction was that the

cultural level of the proletariat first had to be raised and that only then would it tackle the Revolution.

The position of the Bolsheviks on this question was dialectical in the Marxist sense. Only through the direct inclusion of the revolutionary masses in the practice of social reconstructions could one produce in them an objective need for culture, in which process it would be important to tie this need closely with their material interests. An attempt to circumvent this, that is, the failure to include the masses in the resolution of these contradictions, would create the risk of collapse at the first cracks in the social reality.

The need to include the revolutionary individual in the social restructuring produces in him the objective need for culture. This need was dictated by three circumstances. First, the need to materially rebuild the world, which had been destroyed and crippled by crises and by a recently ended war. Second, the endeavour to secure the political achievements that could be successfully defended in a difficult class struggle. Third, the task of understanding how one could rebuild the world in accordance with one's own class interests. All of this transformed culture into an ineluctable necessity.

The praxis of social transformation not only produced in the revolutionary individual the need for culture but also required that he/she live this culture, in the most comprehensive sense of the word. Thus the confirmation of the subjectivity of the revolutionary individual in this period was the consequence of the activity connected to the fundamental change of the social system and which it is fully justified to call 'social creativity'. The individual him/herself created qualitatively new social relations in that he/she removed the domination of the external powers of alienation (the power of the market, capital, the state, etc.).

Therefore social creativity in the 1920s bore within it not only the logic of the solution of social contradictions but was also a form of the development of the personality of the revolutionary individual in all its wealth of concrete phenomena and potential. This experience of the USSR shows that the common praxis of changing the real world was not only an abstract idea (national, religious, political) but the material basis for the emergence of an authentic internationalism in Soviet history and the principle of universalism in Soviet culture.

To summarise: Renouncing the subjective Being of man in history and culture means in reality the end of culture and history – and finally of man himself. At some point in his discussion with Gustav Janouch, Franz Kafka answered the question whether he thought man no longer had a part in

creating the world (which he apparently no longer understood). Kafka replied, ‘You again misunderstand me. On the contrary, man has rejected his partnership and joint responsibility in the world’.²

NOTES

- 1 In the author’s view, postmodernism is the legitimization of the idea of negation of culture. As such it is the banner of the anti-human nature of a world built on the domination of capital’s global hegemony. The hegemony of capital and the totality of the market only allow the individual to fulfil the role of an anonymous market agent. The individual does not exist as a subject. Without a subject, however, there is also no personality, that is, no relations that make a person into a personality. But the essence of culture is precisely these relations. See Ludmilla Bulavka-Buzgalina, ‘Postsovetskaja real’nost’: prinuždeniek k mutcii kak imperative simuljativonogo bytija’, *Al’temativy*, 2012, No. 2, pp. 97-98.
- 2 Gustav Janouch, *Conversations with Kafka*, New York: New Directions, 2012, p. 126.

What is Left in Europe: A Comparative Analysis of Survey Data on Left Self-Location

Jukka Pietiläinen

What is the political left in Europe? Does left-wing orientation and its links with other socio-political questions exist as more or less one configuration found throughout all European countries, or are there differences which divide, rather than unite the left across the European Union? This article intends to point out the common features of the European left and define some national and regional differences.

The data for this analysis has been collected from the International Social Survey and Eurobarometer in which people have been asked how they position themselves in terms of left and right on a scale of 1 to 10. In addition, Eurobarometer surveys also sometimes include a question on voting intentions in European or national elections. This data has been used here as well. The links between self-placement on the left and other socio-political issues has been analysed.

The data applied includes the European Values Study (EVS)¹ collected in 1990-1991 and 2008-2009, the Eurobarometer survey 71.3 collected in 2009, and the Eurobarometer survey 81.4 collected in May and June 2014. The data was downloaded from the archive of the German Social Science Infrastructure Services (GESIS) and analysed by using correlations and cross-tabulations.

The results indicate that there are common elements of the left, but they do not exist in a completely similar combination in all the countries. However, there are some political issues such as government ownership of enterprises and the question of equality before freedom that are connected to left-wing self-positioning, although in some countries this connection does not exist. In general it can be said that in the northern Europe left self-location more clearly correlates to opinions on political issues while in eastern Europe and also in some southern European countries this relation is less clear or even disappears.

Theoretical foundations and former research

Europe's left parties emerged from different traditions, and they are in very diverse phases of their development. The Scandinavian parties all have a strong ecological profile; other parties, like the Parti communiste français in France or the Partito della Rifondazione Comunista in Italy, are still strongly Eurocommunist² in character, and many parties are democratic-socialist parties, while some such as Komunistická strana Čech a Moravy in the Czech Republic have a strong traditional communist character.³ In many European countries left parties are small and without major popular support or are not represented in the national parliaments at all.

The self-positioning on the left-right scale, usually measured from 1 to 10, is a continual question in international social surveys, and there is increasing research on that issue. It has been shown that the concept of left and right is a powerful predictor of mass attitude and political behaviour.⁴ However, more recent research has indicated that 'the issues that explain left-right orientation may not be the same issues for all people, and that even if they are, their effects on individuals' left-right orientation may vary'.⁵

However, there are only a few studies that compare the impact of left-right placement in different countries. Earlier research has found 'a high degree of stability in the willingness of the mass publics in Western Europe to place themselves on the left-right scale', but there 'is, however, a pronounced tendency for the mass publics to place themselves increasingly in the centre of the left-right scale'.⁶ Left-right orientation has been consistent, but in the Netherlands the supporters of different political parties have become closer to each other: the average supporters of right-wing parties have become more left while the average supporters of left-wing parties have moved to the right; in simple terms, the parties have tended to move towards the centre.⁷

Aspelund, Lindeman, and Verkasalo have analysed the relationship between political conservatism and left-right orientation in Western European and Central and Eastern European countries and found out that both aspects of conservatism, resistance to change and acceptance of inequality, were positively related to right-wing orientation in Western countries. In the former communist countries, the relationships were positive, negative, and non-existent; they differed between the countries and varied between 2006 and 2008. The results indicate that conservatism can be related to left-wing or right-wing orientation depending on the cultural, political, and economic situation of the society in question. The results also show that despite the shared communist past, former communist Central and Eastern Europe is a diverse region that should be treated as such in research.⁸

Furthermore, some personality factors such as openness to experience and altruism relate to the left-right scale; people who are more open to experience and more altruistic tend to place themselves on the left in Germany.⁹

Also, relationship to left-right placement and opinion on European integration has changed over time. Initially, EU market integration mainly sparked left-wing opposition; after Maastricht the intensification of political integration additionally produced nationalist Euroscepticism among the political right, but the effect on the left was mixed.¹⁰

The size of the left

The citizens of the European Union are mostly right-wing or centrist while only less than one third can be considered supporters of the left. According to a Eurobarometer survey in 2014, 26% identify themselves as left (values 1-4 on a 10-point scale from left to right), while 37% position themselves in the centre and 20% on the right. As many as 17% did not reply to the question. Considering this, the left-wing group can be understood as stronger than the right-wing group, with a major section situated in the centre. The countries included were all EU countries and candidate countries (Turkey, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Iceland).

The most left-wing countries were Sweden, Spain, the Netherlands, France, Belgium, and Cyprus, in which over 30% of all respondents placed themselves to the left. Also, in the eastern part of Germany over one-third of respondents located themselves on the left, but this was not the case in Germany as a whole.

On the other hand, low levels of left-wing orientation were found in the Central Eastern European (CEE) countries (especially Poland, Estonia, and Hungary) and Ireland, Finland, and Greece in which below 20% of the respondents positioned themselves on the left. We should bear in mind, however, that in Eastern Europe the understanding of what is left might be different from what it is in Western Europe. In CEE the countries with the largest share of left-wing people were Slovenia, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia.

In general, thus, there are more left-wing people in Western Europe than in the East. In general, it appears that the presence of a major radical left party or even a large socialist party can have a positive impact on how many people position themselves on the left, but, conversely, a major left-wing party can only exist if there are people who position themselves to the left.

Countries in which the number of non-responses was highest were all in Central Eastern or Southern Europe, with the highest values being recorded in Slovenia and Malta (38%), Cyprus, Lithuania, Romania, Italy,

Portugal, Poland, and Bulgaria. In northern and north-western Europe the number of non-responses was smaller, the smallest being in Sweden and the Netherlands. In CEE the lowest non-response was in the Czech Republic.

The high level of non-response can usually be interpreted as poor understanding of the question or the issue itself. Still, we can conclude that in many countries of eastern and southern Europe the left-right scale is not so well understood. It seems that in countries with traditional class-based parties (such as countries in northern and north-western Europe) the understanding of the left-right division is better than in countries in which political parties are based on other issues (often simply around personalities) and in which the political system and party structure has been in turmoil for the last 30 years. And ideology-based major parties (radical left, socialists and social democrats, and conservatives and Christian democrats) tend to make left-right division come through more clearly. However, the countries with high non-response include Portugal, which has a rather clear political party structure (although Portuguese social democrats, for example, are more right-centre than left-centre).

Between 1990 and 2004 the number of left people increased significantly in Austria (from 17% to 26%), in Denmark from 22 to 32%, in Sweden from 25% to 36%, but it decreased in Italy (from 31% to 21%). The decrease in the amount of people positioning themselves to the left can most often be explained by the increase of the share of those who did not reply, for example in Italy where the share of those answering 'no' or 'difficult to say' did increase from 25% to 40%. In other countries the changes were smaller.

Common aspects and national left differences

The results indicate that there are very few issues which divide the left and the right on the European level. The issues vary from country to country, and high correlations (due to the high number of respondents even marginal correlations are statistically significant) between left-right positioning and opinion on political issues are not easy to find on a Europe-wide level.

The common Europe-wide tendency of left-wing orientation is visible around those issues which have usually been seen as left-right issues: The values most widely supported by the left were the preference for equalising incomes rather than increasing incentives for individual effort, the belief in social welfare, support for government ownership of enterprises, and also the putting of equality above freedom (EVS 1990-1991). This connection could be observed in similar way also in EVS 2008-2009.

Specifically, on equality versus incentives for individual effort, a majority of left-wing people, 54% in 1990-91, 62% in 2008-2009,¹¹ favoured

promoting income equalisation rather than incentives for individual effort, while amongst right-wing and centrist respondents two-thirds preferred incentives for individual effort. The correlation between left-wing self-positioning and support for income equalisation was highest in northern European countries (Finland, Sweden, Norway, and Denmark), while this connection was low in Germany, Austria, Hungary, Portugal, Slovenia, and Ireland. In this respect, there was no clear distinction between East and West, but the North clearly formed a group of its own.

It is left-wing people, more than others, who also support a strong government role in the economy. In 1990-91 one-third of left respondents preferred government ownership while amongst right-wing and centrist respondents only 20% did. In 2008-2009 the connection was less close but still visible; 43% of self-identified leftists preferred government ownership while just 33% of centrist and right-wing people did. However, this connection could not be found or was very weak in Portugal, Ireland, Hungary, or Poland in 1990-1991 and in Hungary, Latvia, Poland, Portugal, Romania, and Slovenia in 2008-2009, while it was strongest in Finland, Sweden, Norway and Denmark, and also in Spain, France, and the Czech Republic.

The question on social welfare had different manifestations in different European countries. In general, people on the left do not believe as often as the right-wing respondents do that their welfare systems are too expensive; nevertheless, on the European level as many as 53% of left-wing respondents think this of their welfare systems, while as many as 64% of right-wing people think so. Especially in CEE, people on the left have doubts about the cost of the welfare system, while in some countries such as Sweden and Finland, even a majority of centrist and right-wing people do not believe the welfare system is too expensive. In general, in most countries the difference between leftists and rightists is clear and predictable. However, in Spain it is the centrists who most strongly support the statement that the welfare system is too expensive, while disagreement with this statement is strongest among the right wing.

The question of freedom versus equality in EVS 1990-91 brought out some differences in how people positioned themselves on the right or left; the majority of the right-wing and centrists prioritised freedom (57% vs. 33%), while those on the left were almost equally divided between both alternatives. In 2008-2009 the difference was approximately the same – 37% of right-wing people cared more about equality with 49% of the left feeling the same.

Interestingly, in comparing how the left views some of these issues in different countries some important disparities come to light. Equality was

supported most clearly among left-wing people in France, Italy, Spain, and Portugal, and also in Eastern European countries, while in some Western European countries such as Finland, Germany, Austria, Sweden, Norway, and Great Britain left-wing people rated freedom over equality. However, in these countries too left-wing people were in general more inclined to favour equality than right-wing people did, while in some Southern European countries (Portugal, Slovenia), right-wingers and centrists more often favoured equality over freedom.

People on the left believe that things in their own country are heading in the wrong direction. Among leftists as many as 49% believe this of their own country (compared with 43% among right-wing respondents), and 41% believe that things are going in a wrong direction in the EU. However, this was valid only in some countries, especially in those countries hit by economic or political crises (Spain, Greece, Portugal, Ireland, Iceland, Hungary) but also in countries such as Sweden, Britain, Estonia, France, and the Netherlands.

In some other countries such as Italy, Austria, Romania, France, and Malta leftists felt more often than did right-wingers and centrists that things were going in the right direction, and in some countries there is no real left-right difference of opinion on how things are going.

However, in 1990-91 only few leftists (8% in total) regarded revolutionary changes as necessary in their own societies, while 80% favoured gradual reforms. However, the contrast with the right was manifest: among right wing people only 5% were for revolutionary changes, and as many as 23% opposed any change.

In 2014, leftists had a slightly more positive opinion of the European Union than right-wing people. Around 40% of leftists saw the EU in a more positive light, while 26% had mainly a negative attitude. However, national differences are important. In many large countries such as Germany, France, Italy, Britain, and Poland leftists see the EU more positively than right-wing people do, while in countries that have suffered from neoliberal policies, such as Spain, Portugal, Greece, but also Bulgaria, Cyprus, and Finland, right-wing people have more positive opinions of the EU than do leftists.

There is a small left-right difference in terms of voter turnout. People who located themselves on the right tended to vote more in European elections, but the most passive voters are those who place themselves in the middle on the left-right scale and those who are not able to position themselves on the left-right scale (only 12% of them voted). In this respect, consciousness of the left-right dimension is strongly linked to voting, at least where European elections are concerned.

Left-right positioning is related to support of left political parties but not exclusively. In many countries various green and ecologist parties, as well as regionalist parties, have strong left-wing profiles. Amongst socialist and social democratic parties only those in Belgium, Italy, France, Finland, and Sweden get more support from the left than from the centre. In Spain, one-third of Green Party supporters located themselves on the left, and one-fourth of Green Party supporters did the same in Sweden, Great Britain, and Finland.

Voting for radical left parties (parties belonging to the European Parliament's GUE/NGL group) does not always clearly follow left-right self-positioning. Most of the supporters of the Party of the European Left (EL) locate themselves on the left (86%), yet the EL only gets 15% of the votes among even the most left-wing people (those responding 1 or 2 on the ten-point left-right scale). However, if only those who vote in elections are counted, the left-wing parties get around 25% of their votes from the most left-wing respondents (responses 1-2 on the 10-point scale) and 16% of all left voters. Only in Cyprus, Greece, and the Czech Republic do left-wing parties get a majority of votes among those who position themselves on the extreme left. The largest share of left voters usually corresponded to social democratic parties with more left profiles rather than resulting in stronger support for a radical left party. However, these figures concern the European Parliament elections of 2009, and the situation may have changed after that, especially in Greece and Spain. On the other hand, for example, Ireland's Sinn Féin party is one of the least left-wing parties among those belonging to the GUE/NGL, and it also has centrist and right wing supporters, as only about half of Sinn Féin voters position themselves on the left.

Only some political issues, such as support for social equality and a government role in the economy, are linked to left-wing votes. Other values may be linked to left-wing voting in some countries, but the differences are striking. For example, in France economic growth is positively linked to left-wing voting, while in Western Germany, Finland, and Sweden the opposite is true. Therefore, the links between left-wing voting and some issues are not always very strong on the European level even if they can be strong on the national level.

The results indicate that many opinions on social issues are related to left-right self-positioning and that this relationship is similar in almost all countries. The issues which are most clearly linked to the left are lack of trust in the church, NATO, large corporations, and the armed forces but also trust in trade unions as well as a critical attitude towards private ownership. Post-materialist values also have support among left people.

These are the most important political opinions tied to left-wing self-positioning in the EVS conducted in 1990-1991 in 24 European countries and in the EVS conducted in 2008-2009 in 45 countries.

Leftists also felt that homosexuality should be accepted as well as abortion, divorce, soft drugs, sex under the legal age, and battling the police. However, for example, in Germany the use of soft drugs was not approved more often by left wing people than others, and in the Czech Republic leftists did not approve of homosexuality or abortion more than right-wing people did. The last two items, sex under the legal age and battling the police, were supported more often by left wing people in most of the Western European countries while in northern and especially in Eastern Europe the correlation was close to zero; there was thus no connection between left-right positioning and approval of these issues. On the other hand, correlations with the left-right scale and approval of tax evasion, littering in public place, and lying in one's own interest was very close to zero. In general, on those questions which are clearly not related to politics, the left-right scale does not apply, while in questions related to politics, it is usually discernible. Interestingly, leftists tended less often to be proud to be citizens of their home countries.

The critical view of the church exists both in Catholic and Protestant countries, and on this score there is not much difference between countries with much or little religiosity. Similarly, opposition to NATO could be observed both in NATO member countries and in militarily non-aligned countries.

Interest in political participation, especially in terms of forms of participation going beyond voting is in general linked to the political left. Leftists do participate in occupations of buildings, lawful demonstrations, boycotts, and unofficial strikes more often than right-wing people do (according to the EVS 1990-1991). Of those who located themselves on the left 38% have already participated in legal demonstrations, 15% have already participated in boycotts, while another 38% might be willing to participate in them; 10% have participated in unofficial strikes, while 30% might do so. Especially regarding unofficial strikes the left clearly differed from centrist or right-wing people, two-thirds of whom would never participate in an unofficial strike. However, in willingness to sign a petition, there was no major difference on the left-right scale.

Leftists also more often approved of the antinuclear, disarmament movement, women's, and anti-apartheid movements, and also, though with less of a clear difference, the human-rights and ecological movements.

Since the European Union is conducting and financing the Eurobarometer surveys, one of the key topics has been the European Union itself. One of

the most frequent questions has regarded satisfaction with the functioning of the European Union.

Left-wing self-positioning is linked to dissatisfaction with the state of democracy in the European Union: a majority (51%) of left-wing people are not very or not at all satisfied with the state of democracy in the European Union, while amongst right-wing respondents only around 40% are unsatisfied.

In many countries the left connection to this issue is not visible or is close to zero, but at least a 0.10 correlation¹² can be observed in southern European countries (Greece, Spain, Portugal, and Cyprus), northern European countries (Finland and Sweden), as well as in eastern European countries (Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Romania, and Bulgaria). On the other hand, in Hungary and Malta left-wing people are satisfied with democracy in the European Union more often than are right-wing people. In Hungary, the explanatory factor might be the difference between the state of democracy in their own country and in the European Union; there leftists feel that in relation to the problems of democracy in their own country the European Union is comparatively less undemocratic.

In an earlier 1999 EVS a critical attitude towards the European Union can be observed among left people in Denmark, Finland, the Czech Republic, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Spain, but in countries such as Britain, Germany, and France the correlation was non-existent, and in Malta a left-wing attitude was positively connected to trust in the EU.

EU-membership of their home country was seen as positive by a majority of leftists in 2014, but among the right wing this majority is a bit stronger. Those leftists who feel that EU membership is a good thing are quite naturally more satisfied with democracy in the EU; still, one-third of them remains unsatisfied. Also those left-wing people who had neutral opinions on the benefits of the EU were mostly critical of the state of democracy in the EU.

Conclusion

The result of survey data analysis indicates that there are some common elements shared among left-wing people in different European countries. On the other hand, it can also be said that the left-right axis is situated differently in different European countries depending on local political issues and political history. This is also visible in the lack of left parties in some European countries, even though a significant number of people there may position themselves on the left. The existence of a major left-wing party is not necessarily connected with the popularity of leftist positions in a country, although left-wing self-positioning is the clearest indicator of support for a

leftist political party. Certainly, these reinforce each other.

In northern Europe the left orientation is more visible in many economy-related issues, such as government ownership, while countries in Central Europe are more divided among themselves. On some issues a clear difference between Germany and France could be observed and on many issues there is a divide between eastern and western Europe.

In many countries, especially in CEE, left parties are weak or non-existent, and people with left orientation may also vote for populist and even right-wing parties.

Left politics exhibits certain common traits in Europe, but national differences are also clear. Long political traditions, which have shaped left parties and have had influence on general thinking in terms of the place of the left in society and in the value structure may have some impact. In this respect, the CEE countries occupy a completely different position in many respects.

NOTES

- 1 <<http://www.europeanvaluesstudy.eu/>>.
- 2 By Eurocommunism I refer to those political ideas which developed in the 1960s and 1970s in the communist parties of France, Spain and Italy, which emphasised a national rather than Moscow-oriented line.
- 3 Dominic Heilig, *Mapping the European Left. Socialist Parties in the EU*. Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung New York Office, 2016, pp. 7-9, <http://www.rosalux-nyc.org/wp-content/files_mf/theleftineurope_eng.pdf>.
- 4 Richard M. Coughlin and Charles Lockhart, 'Grid-Group Theory and Political Ideology. A Consideration of Their Relative Strengths and Weaknesses for Explaining the Structure of Mass Belief Systems', *Journal of Theoretical Politics*, January 100:1 (1998), pp. 33-58; Corrie Potter, *Left-Right Self-Placement in Western Europe: What Responses and Non-Responses Indicate*, Madison WI: Political Behavior Group, University of Wisconsin, Madison. 2001.
- 5 Wiebke Weber and Willem E Saris, 'The relationship between issues and an individual's left-right orientation', *Acta Politica*, 50,2 (2015).
- 6 Oddbjørn Knutsen, 'Europeans Move Towards the Center: A Comparative Longitudinal Study of Left-Right Self-Placement in Western Europe', *International Journal of Public Opinion Research* 10,4 (1998).
- 7 Rob Eisinga, Philip Hans Franses, and Marius Ooms, 'Forecasting long-memory left-right political orientations', *International Journal of Forecasting* 15 (1999).
- 8 Anna Aspelund, Marjaana Lindeman, and Markku Verkasalo, 'Political Conservatism and Left-Right Orientation in 28 Eastern and Western European Countries', *Political Psychology* 34,3 (2013).
- 9 Ingo Zettler and Benjamin E. Hilbig 2010 'Attitudes of the selfless: Explaining political orientation with altruism', *Personality and Individual Differences*, 48 (2010).

- 10 Erika van Elsas and Wouter van der Brug, 'The Changing Relationship Between Left-Right Ideology and Euroscepticism, 1973-2010', *European Union Politics* 16,2 (2015).
- 11 In 1990-91 a total of 24 European countries were included (Canada and the USA were also part of this survey but are not included here), while in 2008-2009 the number of countries had increased to 47 to include the countries of former Yugoslavia and most republics of the former Soviet Union.
- 12 Correlation varies between -1 and 1, zero indicating that there is no connection between two variables. In social research, usually the highest correlations are on the level of 0.3 or 0.4, so a 0.1 correlation is in general very low, although significant because of the high number of respondents.

Europe's Old and New Left and Its Constituencies¹

Alberto Garzón Espinosa

The aim of this general reflection on the transformations undergone by Europe's social and political left is to suggest strategies and tools for promoting a more just economic and social system. For analytical purposes I see three historical steps:

The first stage, is from 1989 to the present. It is a period of defeat connected to the fall of actually existing socialism, which was accompanied by the decline of the communist and socialist parties in the West, and it affected the left's world view. This also involves the dominance of neoliberalism as a sociocultural project from the 1980s and the strong emergence of post-Marxist and postmodernist critical theories.

The second period goes from the crisis of 2007–2008 to the present. It raises the question of why the capitalist system's biggest crisis since the Great Depression did not lead to a global or left European alternative but rather its opposite, the deepening of neoliberalism.

The third goes from the emergence of Podemos in Spain to the present moment. Here the left reference point in Spain is Izquierda Unida (IU) and the question of how and why it has been electorally overcome by this new political force and what it should do to reorganise itself as an anti-capitalist political project.

I would first like to raise some key ideas of how the social structure has changed. Next I will look at the electoral profile of the European anti-capitalist parties and their classification. Then I will consider the differences between IU and Podemos voters. And finally I will draw some preliminary conclusions.

The transformations of the social structure

Today there is a certain consensus that the post-war Fordist accumulation regime evolved into a new post-Fordist regime in the 1970s and 1980s. It is

also widely accepted that this transition has been accompanied by significant changes in the social structure, which has in turn affected the electoral behaviour of citizens.

The Fordist accumulation regime, which laid the foundations of the welfare state in most Western countries after the Second World War, was essentially characterised by the virtuous circle of production and mass consumption. Its main features were: assembly-line mass production with manual semi-skilled labour; a quite stable macroeconomic system that was highly regulated nationally and internationally; companies which although featuring separation between control and direction nevertheless were very centralised and planned to grow in size to take advantage of economies of scale; wages based on a capital-labour partnership in which productivity increases were distributed through agreements between employers and unions; massive growth of consumption, an urban-industrial society, and the existence of a social wage in the form of pensions, public healthcare, education, and other social benefits.

The dynamics and evolution of capitalism were stressing the system to the point of crisis. Around the 1970s and 1980s a new regime of accumulation opened up characterised by deregulation and a greater role for the free market as the guiding economic institution. With good reason, David Harvey has called it the regime of flexible accumulation because the essential feature was just that: flexibility.² Bob Jessop calls it the Schumpeterian competitive state because of its hypercompetitive character.³ There are considerable doubts about its medium-term stability. It is characterised by: new forms of flexible production based on networks and outsourcing systems and the use of new information and communications technology; flexible labour relations combining highly skilled workers with unskilled workers; the general deindustrialisation of Western economies, with relocations to countries with cheaper labour costs; strong downward wage competition; a volatile macroeconomic environment characterised by deregulation; changes in the bureaucratic forms of companies towards horizontal and leaner forms; dismantling of the welfare state and increased inequalities.

This transition has greatly changed the socioeconomic reality of Western societies. Although each country has had its own specifics, this transition is common to all. Most importantly for what interests us here, the change in the production structure and labour relations has also greatly changed the social structure. At the end of the day, the social base of anti-capitalist parties, particularly the communists, could have diminished as a result of these changes.

The parties of the radical left

It would seem evident that the combination of the collapse of the countries of actually existing socialism and the processes of deindustrialisation in the West harmed left political parties – on the one hand because the strength of the alternative socialist vision deteriorated, and, on the other, because it is assumed that the greatest electoral strength of the Communist and radical parties is among the classical typically Fordist blue collar working class.

In reality, studies have revealed that the communist parties never have been the parties most supported by the working class, not even the flourishing Italian Communist Party. Nevertheless, their electorate has been largely composed of working-class voters. Therefore changes in the social structure could have affected the anti-capitalist parties. The recent study published by Luís Ramiro is a good starting point for looking at the profiles of voters of the radical or anti-capitalist left in the period from 1989 to 2009, which abounds in relevant data.⁴

First, Ramiro emphasises that there is no direct relationship between belonging to a disadvantaged social sector and voting for a radical left party, even when we are talking about the working class (whether manual worker, professional worker, or public-sector employee). This is somewhat counterintuitive because anti-capitalist parties define themselves as representatives of the working class and claim to defend the most disadvantaged sectors. Ramiro notes that there is a lot of competition in these sectors, both from socialist parties and from far-right parties.

Ramiro presents empirical evidence about those individuals who either self-identify with the working class (what we call class consciousness), are affiliated with a trade union, practice no religion, identify themselves as leftist, are discontent with democracy, or have a negative perception of the European Union. In all these cases the probability of voting for an anti-capitalist party increases. At the same time, there is also evidence voters of anti-capitalist parties tend to be either very unskilled or highly skilled. Also, in terms of age, there are indications that the profile has changed over time, becoming younger.

These findings are extremely relevant because, in Marxist terms, they show a displacement of the voter/party relationship from the economy to the superstructure. It seems that voter attraction occurs more on the subjective and intangible level (class consciousness, ideology, and worldview) than the material and objective level (the connection between the interests of the working class and an organisation that claims to be a legitimate representative of those interests). This seems to fit with the thesis of Ronald Inglehart on post-materialism, according to which the unusual ability of industrial

societies to meet basic needs has produced a shift in political preferences, causing the left to be supported by post-materialists, leaving out the popular sectors. In short, it seems that the connection of the anti-capitalist parties with the most popular classes or the disadvantaged has disappeared, or it never existed in the first place, except in political rhetoric. This is consonant with what Owen Jones warned about in his book *Chavs* when he insisted that the true working class had been abandoned, while the left was in a certain sense looking towards the middle class.⁵ However, and this is also clearly indicated by Ramiro, the study highlights that issues such as ideology, union membership, or class consciousness remain relevant despite the economic changes of recent decades.

Classification of anti-capitalist parties

So far we have talked about anti-capitalist parties, but actually the category used by scholars like Ramiro is radical left parties. These can be defined as the parties that reject the economic structure of contemporary capitalism, its values and practices, and defend an alternative economic and power structure involving a better redistribution of resources. We are talking, in short, about the parties grouped in the Party of the European Left (EL) and in the European Parliament group of the European United Left – Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL) as well as those not in either of these but with a strong anti-capitalist character.

Naturally within this category there is significant heterogeneity, and Ramiro and his co-authors provide a more detailed analysis.⁶ Studying the political programmes of left political parties since the 1940s, they have divided these parties into two categories: traditional and new left parties. The traditional parties are those that focus on issues such as anti-imperialism, labour, social justice, economic planning, and nationalism with a Marxist analysis, while the new left parties are those for which the centre of their politics are issues such as democracy, peace, environmentalism, or the rights of social minorities.

For example, left parties with highly traditional rhetoric are the Greek Communist Party (KKE) and the Portuguese Communist Party (PCP), while on the other side there are the Nordic left parties. Interestingly, Izquierda Unida and Italy's communist parties (the Party of Communist Refoundation and the Party of Italian Communists) fall into the category of the new left since 1989 and 1994 respectively, although they are only at the edge of this category.

Interestingly, in comparing the type of voters, the study reveals that traditional and new left parties do not differ in terms of their voters' age,

gender, city or country location, class consciousness, or union membership. However, the researchers did find that the voters of the new left parties are more professionally qualified and less religious than those of the traditional parties. The studies also reveal that new left voters are more moderate, less Eurosceptic, and are more dissatisfied over issues of democracy.

In short, it seems that these discursive transformations have to do with phenomena such as the fall of the Berlin Wall, which has reduced the traditional or orthodox component of parties, and the economic and social transformations that have given greater importance to issues that go beyond the capital-labour contradiction. But, as the study always bears in mind, neither the traditional parties nor the new left are clearly connected with the popular classes that they both claim, in one way or another, to represent.

The Spanish case

It seems clear that what we need to explore is the emergence of Podemos as a party that belongs to the anti-capitalist group, because it in fact is a member of the GUE/NGL. One can assume, however, that its characterisation as a populist party – with a discourse based on the dichotomy caste versus people – and its programme – very focused on concerns of the immaterial kind – would place it among parties of the new left. What interests us, however, is to explore the differences that may exist between IU and Podemos voters.

As has been said above, it is true that the popular classes do not vote for Izquierda Unida, but they also do not vote for other radical parties like Podemos. The unemployed, pensioners, and workers of the domestic sphere are an important niche of voters for the Spanish two-party systems and particularly the Popular Party. This group of course constitutes a small part of the electoral base of radical parties.

However, the emergence of Podemos in 2014 is a unique phenomenon in Europe where populism has so far been essentially connected with the extreme right. Why has Podemos emerged as a radical left party when Izquierda Unida was theoretically already occupying that place?

One possibility is to think that Podemos has reached the same audience – that is, globalisation's losers – as the populist right-wing parties have elsewhere in Europe. The voter profile for those parties is: unemployed, low-skilled, highly exposed to international economic competition. However, research shows no evidence that Podemos is the party of globalisation's losers. In fact, Podemos is no more attractive to them than IU is. Moreover, Podemos has as much support as IU does from highly skilled people.

The only small difference is that Podemos has greater acceptance among Eurosceptics and among non-voters. At the same time, Podemos also

has more support among those who declare no ideology. It has reached people who see themselves as being outside the left-right axis. Interestingly, Podemos has a huge acceptance, more than IU, among ultra-left people, though it has also deeply penetrated more moderate left milieus.

Another possibility is that we are dealing here with dissatisfied voters who are skilled but fear losing their jobs or becoming more precarious. Indeed, research has found that with this voter profile the probability of voting for Podemos increases much more than does voting for IU.

The final group of possibilities has to do with the profile of the protest vote. This involves a vote that reflects dissatisfaction with democracy or the specific economic situation. We said that the new left parties are often more characterised by concerns of a democratic nature and intangible issues. What researchers reveal is that between IU and Podemos voters there are no differences in terms of patriotic attitude (despite Podemos's attempt to appropriate that space), and yet there is evidence that there are more centralist voters (who want to preserve Spain's political unity), in terms of territorial administration, who are inclined to vote Podemos rather than IU.

Finally, the researchers have found no evidence that Podemos and IU voters differ in their worry about the economic situation. But where there were differences was regarding the view of the political situation and perception of the government and the opposition, since Podemos voters show a much greater level of dissatisfaction. This supports the hypothesis that Podemos voters are more anti-mainstream than IU voters and more concerned with issues of democracy.

In short, research seems to show that Podemos's success in its electoral competition with IU has been its channelling of the anti-mainstream and anti-elite profile of the party, along with a protest vote that includes not only democratic issues but unmet expectations of the most skilled people. I venture to say that this is more targeted to the middle classes frustrated by the impact of the crisis and by recent economic and political transformations than in the case of IU. However, it is difficult to guess anything more than this.

Conclusions

Among these ideas there are some elements that stand out.

First, and most troubling, is that no radical or anti-capitalist party has managed to reach the popular classes and become its representative, in the sense of being its mirror. On the contrary, support for radical parties has more to do with cultural and ideological issues, while as more and more social groups are hit by the crisis and globalisation they continue to be orphans in

relation to the left. In many parts of Europe, these sectors are tempted by far-right parties in particular, which pose a real threat to democracy.

Second, we should note that Podemos has not reached these sectors despite its left-wing populist strategy of aiming precisely at this objective. What Podemos has achieved that is new is to attract ideologically moderate or non-voters on the basis of protest voting or unfulfilled expectations rather than to connect with the popular classes. The rest of its space is, essentially, the same as that of the traditional voters of IU.

Third, IU and Podemos belong to the same political family despite being different political projects. Both belong to the radical or anti-capitalist left, and both have a discourse and programme that includes elements of the so-called new left, which goes beyond the capital-labour conflict. The emergence of Podemos, however, has created tensions within IU which had shifted back to traditional left-wing positions as an intuitive form of electoral protection. But contrary to certain clichés, the ideological element – class consciousness and union membership – remain relevant variables in support for parties, possibly including Podemos.

Fourth, although these points are clear, some semantic discussions about the historical subject – whether the working class or citizens – and arguments over symbolic points of reference – hammer and sickle, acronyms, etc. – are really liturgical because none of them are anchored in the everyday reality of the popular classes and their problems. That would explain why in IU, and perhaps also in Podemos, we occasionally see currents wrap themselves in last century's rhetoric of red flags while when they turn to the practical level they resort to a politics that is deeply eclectic, which in the end amounts essentially to revisionism.

Fifth, a notable difference between IU and Podemos voters involves the vision of the political regime. It would appear that the most anti-regime, anti-mainstream, and anti-establishment voters have so far opted for Podemos because IU was, in the public's consciousness, closely connected to the classic political parties that have underpinned the political regime that is now tottering. This is normal, not only because of the different histories of IU and Podemos but because IU has participated in several social democratic governments in the past and also because there is a thorn in the side of the Communist Party (PCE) called Eurocommunism that advocates economic alternatives without political ones. This trend, or soul, within IU is deaf to concepts like regime crisis or constituent process and, consequently, has not understood anything that has happened in recent years.

Sixth, it is impossible to foresee future developments at the electoral level. Podemos is not a coherent political force (with strong incoherence

at the discourse level); it has articulated alliances based on electoral interests rather than discursive coherence, going, as it has for example, from centralist patriotism to multi-nationalism in hardly a month, or first denouncing the idea of a left-right axis and then inserting it into its public discourse according to the needs of the moment. Voters might become disoriented. At the same time, IU is in a process of renewal looking for a mix between the tradition of the labour movement and the new social movements (that is, the new left as defined above).

In any case, in conclusion, it seems clear that despite the electoral competition between Podemos and IU neither has done its homework in terms of the construction of a social base – again, as I insist, a social base and not just an electoral base. It is a job that someone has to do, since it is the only thing that can transform society in a real way. Knitting social networks of mobilised and conscious people together around social conflict is the only way to connect to the popular classes with political organisations, which must also have mechanisms of democratic representation. Perhaps the best example of combining presence in the conflict with political education is that of the PAH (Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipotecas). This organisation plays the role of collective intellectual as defined by Gramsci, which is clearly what some of us think is needed to achieve our goals of working-class emancipation.

So we have a task ahead of us: to equip ourselves with an instrument that fulfils these functions, that is, which is useful for the popular classes. And this instrument is, in my opinion, far beyond what both IU and Podemos currently are. It is in fact what we might identify with the broad concept of popular unity. Or said differently, and at the risk of being tiresome, it is not about a battle of acronyms in an election but class struggle on the ground – even if some, on both sides, seem more intent on being executive directors of party-brands, with their tactical manoeuvres and changing liturgies according to the ups and downs in the political stock exchange, than creating political organisations for social transformation. And I say that we will have to be more patriots of the class than of the party, because otherwise we risk being mere accessories of this political-economic system based on exploitation.

NOTES

- 1 This article was originally published in the Journal *Nuestra Bandera* Vol 1 (2016).
- 2 David Harvey, *The Enigma of Capital and the Crises of Capitalism*, London: Profile Books, 2010.
- 3 Bob Jessop, *The State: Past, Present, Future*, Chichester: Wiley, 2015.

- 4 Luís Ramiro, 'Support for Radical Left Parties in Western Europe: Social Background, Ideology and Political Orientations', *European Political Science Review*, Vol. 8.1 (2016), pp. 1-23.
- 5 Owen Jones, *Chavs. The Demonization of the Working Class*, Verso: London, 2011.
- 6 Raul Gómez, Laura Morales, and Luís Ramiro, 'Varieties of Radicalism: Examining the Diversity of Radical Left Parties and Voters in Western Europe', *West European Politics*, 39.2 (2015), pp. 351-379.

Back to the Roots?

Lutz Brangsch

How left movements and parties see themselves in society and how they behave towards people outside of them has been continually changing in the last 150 years. As a result, they have been able to reach specific social groups more successfully while others have tended to elude their reach.

Left movements and parties emerge as self-organised movements, as movements of social, economic, cultural, and political self-help and self-assertion. In this emergent phase, reaching people means finding common paths towards the realisation of one's own interests and of mutual aid. The earlier organisations were not detached from the masses; they were part of everyday life. The representation of political interest, social protection, the organisation of economic struggles, militant solidarity, conscious internationalism, and the appropriation of culture and education constituted a unity. This was a common feature of all left movements and parties that arose in this period. In the following brief theses, this question will be traced using the example of the German labour movement.

The crowding together of people in factories and residential areas created the space for this. The disappearance of this space and the social relations tied to this disappearance since the 1970s is seen as a primary factor in the decline of left movements. Certainly, this aspect is important – but more important still is the question of why left parties and movements could not appropriately react.

The cause can be traced to the beginning of these movements. The founding of the Social Democratic Party by August Bebel and Wilhelm Liebknecht already had its organisational-political background: under Lasalle an organisation had emerged that was concentrated on his personality or those of his successors. The new organisation, according to Bebel, ought to be not only socialist but also democratic. In 1869 he declared that as soon as a party recognises a specific person as an authority it moves outside the realm of democracy – because the belief in authority, blind obedience, and the cult

of personality are in themselves undemocratic. The rise of German social democracy thus rested on two pillars – the political separation from bourgeois liberals (carried out by Lasalle) and its constitution as a democratic force in itself. The emancipatory claim vis-à-vis society had its counterpart in the emancipatory claim raised in relation to each other, in its own organisation and its own culture. Reaching people meant giving them a political and cultural activity that they would have to shape together with their comrades.

However, already by the end of the nineteenth century this democratic feature came under pressure and began to lose its relative weight. The apparatuses and parliamentary groups moved back to the centre of political initiative. Rather than in the party organisation itself, the emancipatory elements were manifested in a rich social democratic associative life and in economic struggles. In Western Europe, on the one hand, and in Russia, on the other, different organisational models developed under different conditions. The professional revolutionary of the Leninist type and the organisation based on him became the point of departure of a then generalised type of communist party within the Communist International. In German social democracy, Rosa Luxemburg, already by the beginning of the twentieth century and with increasing exasperation, had criticised the gradual disenfranchisement of the ‘simple’ party members. With the approval of war credits in 1914 and the impeding of the further advance of Germany’s November Revolution in 1918 this process was completed. From being an organisation of self-empowerment the party became an organisation that disenfranchised, that confirmed that the masses were not ready to lead a society. It finally became an electoral association that could be borne by its members but only on condition that the latter let themselves be led. It conveyed the certainty that the leadership already knew what is to be done.

In the Communist current a similar process took place. Following Lenin (but partly also distorting him), the apparatuses essentially adopted the same path as social democracy, only under different ideological auspices: the members were to trust the functionaries who know the path and the means. The parties, originating as self-organisation, began to choose their members; the selection and, if need be, sorting, evaluation, and control of the membership increasingly became the privilege of the apparatuses. To reach people now meant to find those who were ready to be inserted into a framework that had already developed. With the Stalinisation of most communist parties the tradition of self-organisation as a constitutive factor rapidly lost ground. Self-organisation was relegated to the area of ‘party-affiliated organisations’ and was thus devalued. The class’s claim to leadership became the party’s claim to leadership, which then became the claim of

the party apparatus. This constellation emerging in the 1920s changed little in the following decades. In the countries of actually-existing socialism this claim was reinforced by a partly concrete conflation of party and state apparatuses – culminating in the mass terror of the Stalin era.

Naturally, the element of self-organisation and self-empowerment never completely disappeared. However, this active representation of oneself was gradually subordinated to the representation of interests via an abstraction, that is, the party. It was no longer so important that actual bearers of working-class interests were independently active – what was important was that they let themselves be led and were active in the given framework. This is not to say that this structure of political action could not score successes; certainly many protagonists of this path subjectively had a praiseworthy goal of people emancipating themselves, within this framework, from the given social limitations. But historically this approach failed.

If the nineteenth century was the century of left self-organisation, then the twentieth century was the century of left representational politics: interests were represented, and the left was proud of this. The problem is that this permitted a leadership claim, and finally the power, to define interests. It worked as long as various promises could in fact be fulfilled. In the end, the assumption of responsibility by this stratum for improving living conditions was also convenient – one could benefit from the results without either the burden of endless debates or the strenuous activism that would otherwise have been required. But in the process the masses also lost their capacity to recognise and articulate their own interests and appropriately organise for them. Parties were not seen as entities that offered a space and a support for one's own activism but as corporate bodies that emerged in the place of that activism. In this sense, the communist parties became social-democratised, not ideologically, not in relation to their political demands and their social-political goals but in terms of their path – the path 'from above', even if this 'above' differed from the social democratic above and the discourse was one of revolution. Even with this surrogate top-down character, the parties were still fully expressions of the members' self-organisation. In fact, this paradox is the essence of twentieth-century communist parties. At any rate, not only were the successes substantial in terms of binding people to the organisation but also with respect to two claims linked to the 'left mode of life': trust and truthfulness. The validation of the leadership's indictment of fascism, its heritage of anti-fascist resistance, tangible results in constructing socialism in the GDR, courageous and principled stances in the West as well as social conquests for the working populations, etc. inclined party members and large parts of the populations to grant the leaderships considerable credit and

look the other way, and, for example in the GDR, to trust the leadership even if things appeared to differ from the way the leaders depicted them. In the GDR this largely lasted until the late 1980s when the party's successes appeared hollow and it became clear that the high officials had lied about the real situation; it was really only then that the bond of trust was broken. According to contemporary witnesses in 1989/1990, the SED's loss of its member base among workers was above all connected with the feeling of having been lied to by the party leadership and functionaries – in relation to its own history, the real economic, ecological, and social situation, and also the financing of party work.

In 1990 the PDS tried, as a membership party, to break with this logic and return to the roots of left movements as expressions of their members' self-organisation. The attempt very quickly failed. However, time is required to reach the masses, the more so when a party is accomplishing a 180-degree turnaround regarding a certain tradition. The consolidation phase was assured especially by the self-initiative of many members in the various interest communities and work groups. After this phase a new generation of substitutive/representative politicians appeared on the stage. This seemed logical – the masses apparently did not want self-organisation but representation. He who represents them well has voters; he who has voters has seats in the parliaments; he who has seats in parliament has money for the organisation; he who has money for the organisation can represent people better and win better representatives because personal survival can be ensured. The cultural-emancipatory demands of those represented thus recede into the background and are imperceptibly transformed from an end to a means. An example is the recent demand, prompted by sagging poll numbers, to present Die LINKE once again as a 'care party'. However, this caring for the social concerns of concrete individuals in the 1990s was inseparable from the self-organisation of members and tied to related rights; the party offered an organisational framework for this. This framework no longer exists. Recreating it would require a reform of the party.

The participation in state governments in some eastern-German federal states starting in 1998 appeared to provide a means of reaching people in a completely different way.

In the balance sheet Harald Wolf draws of the PDS's and LINKE's government participation in Berlin from 2002 to 2011, he vividly depicts how these questions played out, concluding that the 'party of government' and the 'membership party' stand in a complicated relationship to each other – and, we would have to add, there is an enormous internal-party power gap dividing them. Wolf shows that false promises were frequently made in

electoral campaigns in order to win voters. He establishes that as a result of government participation there was a transition from a 'clientelist-parasitic capitalism' in Berlin to a 'normal capitalism'. Leaving aside for now the need to qualify this formulation, there is no doubt that this transition is a success – but only insofar as it can be converted by the party into an increased capacity of the masses to act. In this Wolf takes up an old argument in the left – what is the sense of parliamentary struggle at all and what is the relationship of government participation to it? What goals can be realistically formulated? Are reforms an end or a means? For Rosa Luxemburg, parliamentary struggle was important for creating more favourable conditions for the everyday struggles of the workers; for her, the measuring rod for all parliamentary action was whether the labour movement could gain more freedom of movement and learn to understand the system. This presupposes an active party membership between elections. Winning people for left politics via parliamentary or government activity thus presupposes the existence of two parties within the one party – one of them creates the possibilities for action and the other uses these possibilities. But with this a part of the party necessarily comes into conflict with the other. The resolution of this contradiction increasingly becomes the precondition for the winning over and retaining of new co-combatants.

There is no way back to the nineteenth century. The form of representation in nineteenth century social democratic movements and parties corresponded to the conditions of the period: the wage earner as a type was hugely visible, forced to similar forms of resistance and self-assertion through similar life conditions, and experienced this similarity literally every minute. The workers reached each other – that was the way in which the party reached the masses. Although the class condition of being a wage worker has not changed it presents itself in a completely different way today. The old 'reaching others amongst ourselves' no longer exists. In the course of the establishment of the welfare-state compromise and the general cultural evolution many arenas of self-empowerment and self-assertion have been taken over by the state or private economic institutions. Why should and how can one offer people a framework for self-organisation when there are so many possibilities to express oneself non-committally? Yet the idea of a self-organised political party is actually still contemporary. Never before have wage-dependents been so skilled; they are no longer tied to a specific operation – which blinded them to social contexts – because of the new kind of consolidation of the social division of labour as a complex process, and they are consequently truly capable of gaining control over society together. Not to speak of the possibilities that the internet offers today. Why

then do they leave the managing of society to lawyers, business economists, professors, and officials, that is, people with very limited views of the world but with greater rhetorical skills?

The problems of self-organisation in political space have been brought to people's attention by the Pirate Party. In order to consolidate as a party it had to find someone to represent other than themselves – which actually contradicts the basic approach of the party. The base for this remained narrow.

Representation is indispensable. But how should it be shaped if a political, party-like organised force with left goals and demands is to achieve mass influence? Another way to express this is to ask what the right question is: how can an organisation bind people to it (in which case the organisation is conceived as a constant to which people have to accommodate)? – or: how can something be created around which people can themselves organise?

Against this background the question of how the left deals with forms of direct democracy, or of another kind of connection between direct and representative democracy on all societal levels and in the organisations themselves, takes on an existential significance. The opportunities for participation, created by today's late bourgeois state under pressure of quite different factors, needs to be actively used just as much as alternative practices emerging in apparent 'niches'. The retreat from public space, its privatisation, commercialisation, and fragmentation, as well as the emphasis on the internet as an unbinding and thoroughly commercialised surrogate for public space – all of this must be resisted – or, in the case of the internet, be relativised – by forms of encounter in which people can experience each other directly and openly deal with their contradictory as well as coinciding interests.

If the left movement wants to reach people once again then an organisational model is required that gives self-confidence and trust in one's own capacities back to 'simple people'. The communist and the social democratic expropriation of this kind of self-confidence has to be reversed. This in turn is first of all a cultural task. In one's own organisations a break with the habits of the past, with the behaviour of the past, has to be accomplished. No organisational model, however cleverly it is conceived, can substitute for this step, which has to be accomplished subjectively.

What Produces Democracy? Revolutionary Crises, Popular Politics, and Democratic Gains in Twentieth-Century Europe

Geoff Eley

Contemporary assumptions about democracy are still darkly shadowed by the whole process of post-Communist transition since 1989. In that Eastern European context, the prospects for democracy were thought to rest *not* on popular participation, but on two types of restructuring: one affecting the economy, and one involving civil society. In the first case, democracy required following through on a market-centred process of economic reform; in the second case, it required transformations in civil society. Thus, ‘freeing the economy’ in the powerful neoliberal sense becomes the essential precondition for democratic political transition. Likewise, creating a strong ‘moral consensus’ based in a dense and resilient infrastructure of social institutions is thought to be equally crucial. According to this view, without either of these foundations, democracy fails. It can only be a weak and artificial implantation, intruded into societies lacking the civic competence and political culture necessary for it to flourish. In this view, democracy presupposes deep-historical, underlying processes of societal growth and cultural sedimentation, which produce the default behaviours necessary before democratic political arrangements can work – in other words, the habitus of competent citizenship, which (it is argued) Communist societies, frozen into postures of administered conformity, never had the chance to acquire.

In this prevailing approach, the success of the fledgling Eastern European democracies becomes dependent not on the activism of popular electorates and their constitutional freedoms, but on processes essentially beyond this popular democratic control. Political culture (the effective exercise

of democratic citizenship) is made primarily dependent on economics (a capitalist market order) and social history (the growth of civil society). This view also reflects a rarely explicated reading of the history of 'the West' (Britain, France, the USA), where the successful models of longer-run socio-economic development and democratic acculturation are thought actually to be found. But as social historians of those countries will attest, democracy resulted from far more complex histories of popular militancy, societal conflict, and bitterly conducted political struggles, and in current treatments of democracy it is precisely these complicated histories that are invariably ignored.

Contemporary approaches to democratic transition are shockingly ahistorical. They show astonishing disregard for what Western European history might actually be able to tell us. The dominant paradigm of post-Communist transition, in which neoliberal celebrations of the 'market' have ruthlessly monopolised the language of 'reform', suppresses other arguments about democracy's historical conditions of possibility. To adapt Ernest Renan's famous adage, contemporary democratic advocacy registers the necessity of getting one's history wrong, of selectively appropriating some experiences and forgetting others, of ensuring that the past will be misremembered and misread. In this text, I want to consider what other genealogies of democracy we might be able to provide. In what follows, I will try to historicise democracy's conditions and dynamics of emergence. I will do this in three parts: first by looking at the revolutionary conjuncture following the First World War, then by considering some aspects of the period after 1945, and I will end by highlighting the question of gender, which is still mainly neglected in most general accounts.

Defining Democracy

In defining democracy, we need to begin with the constitutional question in the strict sense – that is, the legal and constitutionally formalised conditions of democracy in the state. Juridically speaking, full-scale democratisation entails popular sovereignty and democratic rule, based on free, universal, secret, adult, and equal suffrage, complemented by legal freedoms of speech, conscience, assembly, association, and the press, together with freedom from arrest without trial. We don't get anywhere, unless we begin from these basic elements, and by this standard only the mildest degrees of democracy could be found anywhere on the globe before 1914. Full democracy was introduced only in four peripheral societies – New Zealand (1893), Australia (1903), Finland (1906), and Norway (1913) – plus certain states and provinces of western Canada and the USA.

If we move beyond the more strictly juridical, though, we need ways of theorising the circumstances under which democratic gains can realistically occur. That is, we have to deal with the dynamics of democracy's actual emergence and the haphazard contingency of democracy's recorded gains, the complex histories of its actually existing forms. My argument here is that democracy eventuates *not only* from the achievement of specific institutional changes, juridical rights, and formal constitutional procedures, *but also* from social and political conflicts across a wider variety of fronts. In other words, constitutional definitions have to be complemented by historical approaches focusing on the expansion of democratic capacities in other than juridical ways.

Dialectics of Citizenship and State, 1914-23

If we take the first great wave of Pan-European democratisation after the First World War, then the deficiencies of a legalistic approach rapidly become clear. Of course, struggles over parliamentary sovereignty and the electoral process stayed central to popular democracy. Where revolutionaries dismissed them, democracy suffered grievously as a result. But other aspects of democratisation far exceeded this limited frame. I will mention four aspects:

a) The impact of extra-parliamentary social movements is the first of these additional aspects. These ranged from trade unions to women's movements and various single-issue campaigns. Thus, some developed idea of civil society forms an essential dimension of democracy's definition.

b) The building of a welfare state forms a second aspect. This was 'the making social of democracy', as one might call it.

c) Yet, a third dimension of extra-parliamentary dynamics involved the popular mobilisations of the radical right. These movements were explicitly anti-democratic in conscious orientations. But they practically expanded the bounds of participation within the public sphere in ways symbiotically related to the production of new democratic capacities that became vital for democracy's future.

d) Lastly, the direct-democratic and community-based forms of participatory politics also need to be brought in. These were most commonly associated with the soviets and workers' councils, but were a vital dimension of the popular democratic upsurge in general after 1917.

I am making a crucial point here about the relative significance of the Bolshevik Revolution, because in shaping the democratic gains of the post-1918 settlements the Bolsheviks' insurrectionary example mattered less in itself than the variety of reformist initiatives it helped to provoke. Thus, even where the revolutionary left was weak, and socialist parties grew only

modestly in postwar elections, big reforms still ensued. In France, these included a law on collective agreements, the eight-hour day, and electoral reform (March–July 1919); in Belgium, they comprised the eight-hour day, progressive taxation, social insurance, and electoral reform (1918–21); in the Netherlands, an equivalent package. Similar effects could be seen in Britain and Scandinavia. In Germany and Austria, and in the successor states of East-Central Europe, new republican sovereignties were built via processes of national-democratic revolution, plus varying degrees of social reform. Finally, in most of the successor states and some others (Romania, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Greece, Czechoslovakia, Poland, the Baltic States, Finland), there were major land reforms.

This was a huge increment of reform. In a big part of Europe, the left emerged far stronger than before. However, this took a very specific form – not a specifically socialist advance so much as a further strengthening of parliamentary democracy, the expansion of workers' rights under law, further recognition of unions, growth of civil liberties, and substantial social legislation. The enhancement of the public sphere was a vital gain, especially where public freedoms had been restricted before 1914. This toughening of civil society through enhancement of the public sphere was a key support for democratisation. In the newly created sovereignties of East-Central Europe it was also an essential part of nation-building.

In the post-1918 settlements, there was a vital difference between *winners* and *losers*. The First World War effected a general strengthening of the state across all the combatant countries. But by 1917–18, those states that turned out to be losers were catastrophically damaged – namely, the Russian, Austro-Hungarian, and German multi-national empires. To them may be added Italy, technically on the winning side yet experiencing its victory largely as defeat. In contrast, the victor societies – Britain, France, but also Belgium and by extension the Netherlands – experienced their democratising after 1918 *without* the vacuum of the East-Central European political collapse.

In this sense, the war's outcome vitally affected the extent and stability of the postwar settlements. At the centre of those settlements was the cashing in of the patriotic cheque – popular expectations that big reforms would be conceded in return for the sacrifices required by wartime. Where political authorities collapsed amidst military defeat (Germany, the Habsburg monarchy), the settlement was linked to more radical measures of political democracy and a stronger version of the welfare state. Where states remained intact, enhanced by the prestige of military victory (Britain and France), the settlement was more modest on each count, namely, a less complete extension of the franchise and a heavily compromised social deal.

Popular Cultures of Democracy, 1945-68

As we know, the post-1918 settlements proved anything but stable and lasting. Obviously, there were many explanations, but one key was in the distinction between *constitution-making* and *culture-building*. At one level, the political breakdowns of the 1920s and 1930s reflected the thinness of the emergent societal consensus and the fragility of its democratic values. To make sense of this fragility – and conversely to see how more stable democratic structures might be formed – we need some theory of the public sphere. As I have already argued, the toughening of civil society through the enhancement of the public sphere was a key part of the settlements in both 1918 and 1945: that is, all the ways in which a society's self-organisation acquired legitimacy and legally protected public space – through collective organisation and action of all kinds, through the formation of political identities, through the expression of opinion, through the circulation of ideas, and so forth.

Without benefit of a legally protected national or society-wide public sphere, social movements are more easily kept to their own defensive, self-referential, and largely discrete subcultural space. Without secure access to a wider public domain, subcultures stay chronically vulnerable and weak. They lack access to possible coalitions and therefore to the supports of a broad enough societal consensus. They lack either the national-popular credibility of a plausible counter-hegemonic claim – the necessary moral-political resources for governing – or the capacities for resisting anti-democratic repression, if it should come.

Where a robust societal consensus *can* be built, on the other hand, with simultaneous legitimacy at the level of the state and breadth in popular culture, the resilience of popular democracy can be very strong. In contrast to the fragilities of the post-1918 settlements, I want to argue, *precisely* a consensus of that kind *was* secured after the Second World War, drawing on the democratic patriotisms of the war years, fusing the desires for a new beginning with the logics of economic reconstruction, and organising itself inside the anti-fascist integument of the postwar settlement.

Here is my thesis. Between the late 1940s and the next breaking point of 1968, a democratically inflected societal consensus was produced, providing a kind of template for the popular political imagination. This consensus was organised around a liberal public sphere, which enjoyed strong legal protections. It was fashioned from the popular-democratic momentum of a wartime mobilisation, which became linked to the social contract of a post-war settlement. The reformist strengths of that settlement made it possible for popular consciousness to identify with the state, which thereby acquired

a lasting reservoir of moral capital.

In making this case, I want to use the example of post-1945 Britain. The institutional features of the British version of the Keynesian welfare state are well known. They included: social security ‘from the cradle to the grave’, the National Health Service, the Butler Education Act, progressive taxation, strong public-sector policies, corporative economic management, strong ideals of trade-union recognition, and an integrative discourse of social citizenship. But the persuasiveness and democratic breadth of this post-war settlement also had a vital *cultural* component.

In this context, *patriotism* – British national feeling – had acquired powerful inflections to the left. Pride in being British implied the egalitarianism of the War, the achievement of the welfare state, and a complex of democratic traditions stressing decency, liberalism, and the importance of everyone pulling together, in a way that honoured the value and values of ordinary working people. In the legitimising narratives of popular memory surrounding this patriotism, both the founding rigours of the postwar Labour Government and the normalising complacencies of the succeeding Conservative administrations of the 1950s were important. But the lasting stability of this consensus, which endured into the 1970s, also depended on a larger cultural script binding together the experiences of the 1930s and 1940s. The postwar consensus also evoked images of the Depression, and by these means the patriotic comradeship of the War became reworked into a social democratic narrative of suffering and social redress.

In this narrative, the poverty of the 1930s became a sign for what was different and desirable about the new postwar present. From the vantage point of the 1950s, the 1930s signified a massive failure of the system – the ‘wasted years’, the ‘devil’s decade’, the ‘low, dishonest decade’, in the familiar parlance of the day. The imagery of dismal hardships, mass unemployment, and hunger marches described an unacceptable past that simply could not be allowed to be happen again, a societal misery that needed collective action and public responsibility. Thus, the Second World War was a *good* war – not just because of its anti-fascist character, but because the egalitarianism and social solidarities needed for victory also made an irrefutable case for equitable social policies in the peacetime to come. The breadth of the post-1945 consensus rested rhetorically on this suturing together of the Depression and the War – of *patriotism* and *social need*, *national interest* and the *common good*. In popular memory, this rendition of the 1930s and 1940s became an especially effective and resonant narrative holding together a coherent sense of *Britishness* after the war.

This is where the cultural dimension of democratisation becomes so

important. We need to explore the fields of popular political identification wartime experience brought into being, the complex ways in which they became articulated with a postwar system of politics, the forms of legitimation they provided for the postwar state, and the supports they delivered for one kind of politics as against another.

A society's forms of cohesion and stability, and the conditions enabling them to be renewed, rest crucially on the kinds of identification forged in popular culture with that society's political institutions (with its state). After each of the world wars, the scale of societal mobilisation, the radicalism of the institutional changes, and the turbulence of popular hopes all fractured the stability of existing allegiances and ripped the fabric of social conformity wide open enough for big democratic changes to break through. But in the case of 1918, the forging of a new societal consensus around sufficiently strong popular identifications with the democratic state proved highly contested, as the interwar polarisations and the rise of fascism so tragically confirmed. In contrast, after 1945 the Western European consensus proved both broad and deep with remarkably dense and resilient popular identifications with the postwar social and political order.

That Western European postwar consensus lasted for two decades, subsisting on the doubled memories of war and depression. Its boundaries were only reached generationally, as capitalist reconstruction, the long boom, and the consumer prosperity gradually changed the political landscape. Thus, by the 1960s, amidst the resulting cultural tensions, invoking the benefits of the postwar reforms seemed to a younger generation too much like complacency. The new clash of generations became all the more painful where parents were themselves left-wing and absolutised their own experience, wielding 'the blackmail of past hardships' to silence criticism of the present. As Alessandro Portelli says: 'Older generations, those who went through Fascism, war, Depression, often think they have a monopoly on history and blackmail the younger generation with it.'¹ Thus, for Gaetano Bordoni, a Communist barber in San Lorenzo in Rome recorded in the mid-1960s, his daughter's political complaining and dismissiveness toward hard-won comforts dishonoured his own generation's anti-fascist sacrifices. As he put it: ' . . . when I was ten years old, I carried a machine gun in the hills, along with my father, shooting it out . . . I mean, now at age ten, you have a toy; I had a machine gun'. When his daughter left her steak uneaten on the dinner plate, Bordoni felt the meaning of his life demeaned, because material improvements were identified in his mind with the winning of democracy. By dismissing material comforts as corrupting and irrelevant to 'freedom', and by demanding new forms of radicalism instead, the new

generation challenged the moral hegemony of anti-fascism and its centrality to the politics of the working-class left.

For the older generations, the Second World War was *the* defining experience. In countries occupied by the Nazis (especially Italy and France), the anti-fascist legacies of the Resistance combined powerfully with the reformist languages of reconstruction to make the prosperity of the 1960s feel like a final realising of the promise of the Liberation. In Italy, where workers had barely escaped from the extreme bleakness of the 1950s, the improving standards acquired extra emotional power. What was the image of socialism then (in the 1950s), in the answer of one Italian when interviewed by an oral historian? It was “Everybody eats”, “Food for all”. At the time, this was the most urgent problem, rather than alienation, say, or man-machine relationships [the big issues of 1968].² In Britain, which was spared Nazi rule, the post-1945 welfare state and wartime collectivism worked in analogous ways.

Gender, Citizenship, and Democracy

If we are using a dynamic approach to democracy to see how its boundaries were expanded or contracted, and if we are interested in questions of democratic access to see who exactly was given a voice, then the gendering of citizenship becomes vital. Here, the early 1900s saw the first concerted challenge to the masculinity of the franchise by both mass socialist and specifically feminist movements. The years 1914–23 then brought an unprecedented destabilising and renormalising of gender regimes through both the politicising of domestic life during the war and women’s wartime recruitment into the economy. The early twentieth century also registered increasingly expansive cultures of consumption and commercialised entertainment, epitomised by the department store and the cinema, where women were disproportionately present. Profound changes in the public sphere – coming not only from the northern and central European enfranchisement of women, but also from the regendering of the physical spaces of the city – decisively disrupted how women’s political identities were coming to be understood. In this respect, there were two countervailing logics.

One was a logic of containment that addressed women’s citizenship via languages of motherhood. Before 1914, advocates of women’s emancipation stressed political enfranchisement and enlargement of constitutional rights. But under the impact of war, female citizenship was increasingly measured by women’s patriotic service as mothers. If the war economy depended on women’s massive recruitment into the workplace, their public recognition

occurred mainly via the home. Citizenship claims during the constitution making of 1918–19 were made overwhelmingly on this basis. Given the power of the male breadwinner ideology running through the expanded post-1918 social policies, this maternalist discourse left no space for defending women's rights as workers. Public policies of the interwar years (from the most generous Scandinavian versions, through the welfare state initiatives of Weimar Germany and Red Vienna, to the conservative models in Britain and Fascism in Italy) addressed women aggressively in maternalist terms, recognising them inside the family and the domestic sphere. These became the sole legitimate ground for admitting women to citizenship.

But there was a second logic too. The counter-argument to the discourse of freedom and emancipation was the discourse of endangerment and disorder. As women became more publicly visible, with the limited but meaningful independence of employment, they became objects of social fear. By the 1920s, the new entertainment media or radio, gramophone and film, the new physical spaces of picture palaces and dance halls, the mass circulation newspapers and magazines, the machineries of fashion and style, the new markets for clothing and cosmetics, the appeals of advertising and the relative freeing of the body for display – all these developments gave younger women new forms of public expression:

They took for granted the rights and freedoms won for them by [earlier] generations. They were the first modern generation of women who did not expect to spend their entire adult lives either in motherhood and exclusion from the public world or in rebellion against that exclusion. They were women who could be defined neither in terms of the family, as were their mothers, nor in terms of work, as were their fathers and brothers. They were women of the Machine Age, for whom the machine meant employment, consumer goods, modernity, individuality, pleasure.³

However, these new facts passed the recognised advocates of women's rights by. Feminists were dismayed: 'Can [young women] really follow a difficult scientific demonstration or a complex piece of music, can they really feel the intensities of admiration or love when a good part of their thoughts is concerned with the question: "Is it time to powder my nose again?"'⁴ Male socialists complained about the frivolity and tawdriness of young women's pleasures. Female consumers betrayed their class. They were a fifth-column for bourgeois materialist values. To George Orwell, the new 'cheap luxuries' like 'fish and chips, silk stockings, tinned salmon, cut-price chocolate ... , the movies, radio, strong tea, and the football pools,'

were a boon to ‘our rulers’, and probably ‘averted revolution’.⁵ Interwar socialists spoke contemptuously of ‘the young prettily dressed girls’ and their ‘destructive’ pleasures.⁶ They produced small political sympathy for the new generations of young working women – for the shop girls, hairdressers, typists, assembly-line workers, and cleaners, who poured from the shops and offices at the end of the working day.

Thus the counter-logic to the recognition of women via maternalism was a misogynist logic of disregard. In both cases, the main ground of contention around gender relations shifted away from questions of *political rights* toward ideas of *moral order*. Thus, women entered political discourse between the wars in ways not easily assimilable to the accepted thinking about democracy. On the one hand, a general area of ‘body politics’, or perhaps biological politics, crystallised around the moral and reproductive domains of social policy innovation, including maternal and child welfare, reproductive technologies and regulation (contraception, abortion, sterilisation), eugenicist social engineering, public health and social hygiene, policies for the control of youth, and the general regulation of morality and sexuality. On the other hand, the emergent culture of mass consumption placed new identities on display. These were the twin domains – politics of the body, politics of consumption – which the interwar right brought ambitiously and successfully together, sometimes conservatively (as in Baldwin’s Britain), but sometimes with activist aggression (as in Fascist Italy and the Third Reich).

After 1945, this pattern was repeated. As in the 1920s, when the first wave of women’s votes did disappointingly little to dislodge the given political structures, women’s recognition as voting citizens after 1945 failed to unlock an established gender regime. Once again, the dialectic of difference and equality supervened: even as women exercised their new political rights, the postwar social legislation tracked them out of the public domain. The main logics of postwar social reform fixed women firmly in the familial sphere of the home. ‘During marriage most women will not be gainfully employed’, Beveridge had flatly declared, and European welfare legislation constitutively privileged the male ‘breadwinner’ in his delivery of the ‘family wage’.⁷ Whereas the Algiers Assembly (21 April 1944) ensured that French women won the vote, in the wider field of public policy their place had barely changed. French Socialists and Communists mouthed the old nostrums about productive employment as the precondition of emancipation, while their unions perpetuated the gendered repertoire of female exclusion, family wage, and unequal pay. At one level, women were recognised as citizen participants in the democratic nation. But at the more basic level, women’s politics were almost wholly subsumed by the family form, whether through

the breadwinner rhetoric and the family wage, the restrictive trade union practices for married women, or the prevailing welfare state paradigm.

For women, therefore, the twentieth-century processes of democratisation contained a powerful contradiction. During both World Wars, women were wrenched out of domesticity, brought into employment and other public roles, called upon for a commitment to the collective good. This process was moved implicitly by promises of citizenship, an invitation to equality in the nation at the war's end. Yet beyond the novelty of juridical citizenship, in 1918 and 1945, women were renormalised into forms of domesticity, in a gender regime of public and private, spelling the opposite of emancipated personhood. Even the positive values of the welfare state brought their disabling effects. The maternalist framing fixed women in the home, especially in the strongest pro-natalist variants, with their valuing of the working-class child. In this way and many others, the social democratic achievement of the welfare state constructed a domesticated and dependent place for women. Women were advantaged, but not emancipated, by the languages of social citizenship in the welfare state.

When the main organ of Labour Party support in 1945, the *Daily Mirror*, urged British women to 'Vote for Him', meaning their soldier husbands, it not only sold the promise of women's citizenship blatantly short, but also bespoke a default ground of gendered social and political assumptions. During the Cold War the mobilising of patriotic sentiments against Communism also found the rhetoric of family and home attractive, suturing an idealised domesticity to the threatened security of the nation and its way of life. If women were positioned mainly as mothers in this discursive economy, men were not only constructed as fathers, but more powerfully as the bearers of public responsibility, in rigid systems of gender demarcation. The domestic regime of the fulltime housewife-mother, supplied with social services, free milk, and orange juice, and educated into technical competence, dividing responsibilities with the husband-breadwinner delivering the wage, carried the day.

Conclusion

In this text, I have tried to suggest how the twentieth-century trajectories of democracy in Europe might best be understood. I began by expressing scepticism about the post-Communist triumphalism of the market, which reduces the democratic agenda to the neoliberal utopia of an endlessly accumulating capitalism and the slow accretions of a blandly hypostatised civil society. I continued by insisting on the importance of a stringent juridical definition of democracy if the democratic contents of the various

political systems of twentieth-century Europe are to be properly judged. After presenting my formal criteria for democracy under the law, I then made a series of arguments for expanding the democracy's definition.

First, the most dramatic breakthroughs in expanding the definition of democracy occurred through a series of Pan-European constitution-making conjunctures – (a) in the 1860s, (b) in the period after the Russian Revolution and the First World War, and (c) in the anti-fascist settlement following the Second World War. These conjunctures were connected to wartime societal mobilisations on the grandest scale, and involved revolutionary or extremely radical popular-democratic hopes. Here, the conjuncture of 1989–92, defined by Eastern European Revolutions and European integration, might be added to the list.

Second, democratic capacities are produced from much wider contexts of social conflict and social mobilisation, through which the forging of a social contract vitally shapes the strengths or fragilities of a democratic settlement.

Third, the concept of the public sphere offers an excellent means of theorising democratisation in this wider state-society field. In fact, the stability of democratic settlements requires both a strengthening of the public sphere and a thickening of civil society in this sense.

Fourth, popular culture and collective memory provide a further vital dimension for the resilience of democratic political settlements. Democratic gains prove most lasting where strong popular identifications with the state can be achieved.

Fifth, the gendered dimensions of democratisation consistently provide the hidden hardwiring for political cultures of citizenship, and in egalitarian terms they provide the democratic settlement's weakest part. And, I end the discussion here because the gendered aspects highlight the constraints on democracy's gains. These not only halted at the threshold of the household, leaving patriarchal regimes of privacy broadly intact; they also brought women into public citizenship in skewed and partial ways. Yet gains for women nonetheless occurred only in the course of such broader revolutionary conjunctures. Women achieved access to a democratic voice when revolutionary crises opened a way. Focusing on women also points to the *unfinishedness* of democratic change, and it was the next period of radicalism, in the generalised pan-European crisis of 1968, that reopened the possibilities. The arrival of a new women's movement, the questioning of the family, the new politics of sexuality, the politicising of personal life, and related features of the emergent politics of the later twentieth century were all given decisive impetus by the larger critiques which 1968 set into motion, from the discourse of alienation and the restructuring of labour

markets to the renewed interest in community-based politics, direct action, and small-scale participatory forms.

Since that time, certainly in theory and to a great extent in politics, feminists have turned the relationship of the personal and the political completely inside out, making it possible entirely to remake the connections between everydayness and public life. Feminists have extended the reach of 'the political' across the family and the workplace, sexuality and personal relations, health and education, and the ever-burgeoning demands and pleasures of consumption. Increasingly during the late twentieth century, democratic precepts have compelled application to these domains too, bridging from the previously recalcitrant settings of everyday life to those of political agency and action.

Democracy's expanding relevance in these directions makes it ever harder to subsume its meanings into a narrowly institutional understanding of how and where politics takes place. That kind of narrowness certainly dominated most traditional forms of political history, but since the 1960s and 1970s politics has been spilling uncontainably beyond those older limits. This breaching of the boundaries of politics remains the true cutting edge of radicalism since 1968, whether in the politics of knowledge or in political life itself. It casts the contemporary contraction of the democratic imagination around the dogma of the market in an appropriately reactionary light.

As I began by arguing, since the fall of Communism prevailing definitions of democracy cleave consistently to ideas of the free market and individual rights, confining political action to circumscribed spheres of social administration, the proceduralism of parliaments, and the rule of law. Expecting anything more from politics, contemporary advocates insist, exceeds the realistic and permissible limits of the political domain. In a parallel historiographical development, leading specialists on the Russian and French Revolutions have sought to concentrate the meanings of those great events in similar fashion, postulating a necessary logic of violence, radicalism, and terror once politics abandoned its self-limiting charge. Not accidentally, those revisionist critics began developing these stringently 'political' readings of revolutionary history during the 1970s and 1980s, just as the autonomies of politics in their own times were seriously breaking down.⁸

In treating the two postwar settlements of 1917-23 and 1945-49 as comparable revolutionary conjunctures, I tell a more complicated story. In these operative settings of democratic innovation – democracy's *actuality* – the decisive gains came precisely from excess. Democratising entailed popular mobilisations of exceptional intensity and scale. These became possible only amidst severe socio-economic conflicts, breakdowns of government, and

crises of the whole society. Democratising was also violent, meaning not just the forms of direct action, polarisation, and coercive technique, but also a certain necessary logic of confrontation. The old and given political mechanisms – parliamentary process, proceduralism, consensus-building, rules of civility – had all broken down. Any ensuing gains for democracy, potential or realised, always presumed such crises, whether in 1989 or 1968 or in any of the more restricted national examples, such as Hungary and Poland in 1956, Portugal in 1975, Spain in the mid-1970s, or Poland in 1980–81. In crises such as these, the great democracy-enhancing moments of the second half of the century, parliaments and committee rooms were always accompanied, usually challenged, and occasionally superseded by the streets. At all events, for any successful democratic innovation, the parliamentary committee rooms and the streets have to be organised and inspired into moving together.

NOTES

- 1 Alessandro Portelli, 'Luigi's Socks and Rita's Makeup: Youth Culture, the Politics of Private Life, and the Culture of the Working Classes', in *The Battle of Valle Giulia: Oral History and the Art of Dialogue*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997, p. 241.
- 2 Portelli, p. 240.
- 3 Jill Julius Matthews, 'They Had Such a Lot of Fun: The Women's League of Health and Beauty Between the Wars', *History Workshop Journal*, 30 (Autumn 1990), p. 47.
- 4 Helena Swanwick, in the *Manchester Guardian*, 24 August 1932, quoted by Brian Harrison, *Prudent Revolutionaries: Portraits of British Feminists Between the Wars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 320.
- 5 George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier*, London: Gollancz, 1937, quoted by Beatrix Campbell, *Wigan Pier Revisited: Poverty and Politics in the Eighties*, London: Virago, 1984, pp. 217, 227.
- 6 Marie Juchasz, in a speech to the SPD's Kiel Congress in 1927, quoted by Heinrich August Winkler, *Der Schein der Normalität. Arbeiter und Arbeiterbewegung in der Weimarer Republik 1924 bis 1930*, Berlin: Dietz, 1985, pp. 353–55.
- 7 See Lynne Segal, "'The Most Important Thing of All' – Rethinking the Family: An Overview', in Segal (ed.), *What Is To Be Done About the Family?*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983, p. 19.
- 8 At one dinner party associated with the San Francisco meeting of the American Historical Association in December 1994, François Furet railed against contemporary feminism as 'the new Committee of Public Safety'.

Ecosocialism

– from William Morris to Hugo Blanco

Michael Löwy

What is ecosocialism?

Ecosocialism is a political current based on an essential insight: that the preservation of the ecological equilibrium of the planet and therefore of an environment favourable to living species – including our own – is incompatible with the expansive and destructive logic of the capitalist system. The pursuit of ‘growth’ under the aegis of capital will in the short term – in the next decades – lead to a catastrophe without precedent in human history: global warming.

The planet’s ‘decision makers’ – billionaires, managers, bankers, investors, ministers, politicians, business executives, and ‘experts’ – shaped by the short-sighted and narrow-minded rationality of the system, obsessed by the imperatives of growth and expansion, the struggle for market positions, competitiveness, and profit margins, appear to be following the precept proclaimed by Louis XV a few years before the French Revolution: ‘après moi le déluge’. The Flood of the twenty-first century may take the form, like that of Biblical mythology, of an inexorable rise of the waters – the result of climate change and the melting of the world’s ice caps – drowning under its waves the coastal towns of human civilisation: New York, London, Venice, Amsterdam, Rio de Janeiro, Hong Kong.

Confronted with the impending catastrophe, what does ecosocialism propose? Its central premise already suggested by the term itself is that a non-ecological socialism is a dead-end and a non-socialist ecology is unable to confront the present ecological crisis. The ecosocialist proposition of combining ‘red’ – the Marxist critique of capital and the project of an alternative society – and ‘green’ – the ecological critique of productivism – has nothing to do with the so-called ‘red-green’ government coalitions of social-democrats and certain Green parties on the basis of a social-liberal

programme of capitalist management. Ecosocialism is a *radical* proposal – that is, one that deals with the *roots* of the ecological crisis – which distinguishes itself both from the productivist varieties of socialism in the twentieth century – either social-democracy or the Stalinist brand of ‘communism’ – and from the ecological currents that in one way or another accommodate themselves to the capitalist system. A radical proposition that aims not only at the transformation of the relations of production, of the productive apparatus, and of the dominant consumption patterns, but at creating a *new way of life*, breaking with the foundations of modern Western capitalist/ industrial civilisation.

In this short essay we cannot elaborate the history of ecosocialism. Instead, we will briefly discuss the ideas of two important forerunners, William Morris and Walter Benjamin, and follow with a short survey of the rise of ecosocialism since the 1970s, with special attention to the Peruvian indigenous leader Hugo Blanco.

William Morris

William Morris (1834–1896) was a revolutionary socialist allergic to the productivist and consumerist ideology of modern capitalist civilisation. A brilliant and gifted intellectual, poet, novelist, painter, architect, and decorator, he occupies a singular place in the history of socialism in England. An associate of the very select Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, whose members included Edward Burne-Jones and Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and founder of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, he was to become a socialist and the author, after 1880, of truly revolutionary political and literary works located somewhere between Marxism and anarchism.

In his famous 1894 article, ‘How I Became a Socialist’, he makes the following forceful statement, associating in one single combat art and revolution: ‘Apart from the desire to produce beautiful things, the leading passion of my life has been and is hatred of modern civilization.’¹

His best-known book, the utopian novel *News from Nowhere* (1890), proposes an imaginary vision of a socialist England in the year 2102. Unlike the utopian socialists of the nineteenth century, Morris retained a lesson common to Marx and the anarchists: utopia cannot be accomplished by abandoning the corrupt society to experiment with a harmonious life at its margins; the challenge is to transform society itself by means of the collective action of the oppressed classes. In other words, Morris was a revolutionary utopian and a libertarian Marxist. An entire chapter of the book – ‘How the Change Came’ – tells the story of the dramatic passage from ‘commercial slavery’ to freedom, through a civil war between communism and counter-

revolution, ending with the final victory of the rebels.

Ecological economist Serge Latouche sees Morris as a forerunner of 'de-growth', but it seems more accurate to relate him to an ecosocialist position; in any case, unlike most socialists of his time, he already perceived the disastrous effects of the capitalist domination of nature. His passionate critique of capitalist civilisation seems more relevant today than the productivism which prevailed in the left for so long.

In an article from 1884, 'Useful Work versus Useless Toil', he describes the commodities produced by capitalist commercialism as 'miserable makeshifts' and adds the following comment, whose strong ecological dimension was quite unusual at the time:

These things [...] I will for ever refuse to call wealth: they are not wealth but waste. Wealth is what Nature gives us and what a reasonable man can make out of the gifts of Nature for his reasonable use. The sunlight, the fresh air, the unspoiled face of the earth, food, raiment and housing necessary and decent; the storing up of knowledge of all kinds, and the power of disseminating it, [...] works of art, the beauty which man creates when he is most a man [...] – all things which serve the pleasures of people, free, manly and uncorrupted. This is wealth.²

Morris categorically rejects the Protestant work ethic: 'the semi-theological dogma that all labour, under any circumstances, is a blessing to the labourer, is hypocritical and false' – a 'convenient belief to those who live on the labour of others', that is, the ruling parasitical classes. Labour is only good when 'due hope of rest and pleasure accompanies it', which is not the case in capitalist civilisation: 'how rare a holiday it is for any of us to feel ourselves as part of Nature, and unhurriedly, thoughtfully and happily to note the course of our lives [...]'. To render labour attractive it has to be liberated from the tyranny of capitalist profit, thanks to the appropriation of the means of production by the community; labour will then respond to the real needs of the body – food, clothing, lodging – and of the spirit – poetry, art, science – and not the requirements of the market. After the revolution, labour time will be substantially shortened, because 'there will be no compulsion on us to go on producing things we do not want, no compulsion on us to labour for nothing'.³

In his 1884 lecture, 'Art and Socialism', Morris argued that only by a socialist transformation, putting an end to the inexorable rules of Capitalist Commerce, can we overcome the present sad condition, when 'our green fields and clear waters, nay the very air we breathe, are turned [...] to dirt.

[...] Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die – choked by filth.’⁴ Ahead of his time, by his criticism of the false needs created by commercialism, of the social and environmental disasters generated by industrial capitalism, of the ‘repulsive’ labour at the service of profit, and of the poisoning of nature by capitalist dirt, William Morris can indeed be considered an early prophet of ecosocialism.

Walter Benjamin

Like William Morris, Walter Benjamin was one of the few Marxists in the years before 1945 to propose a radical critique of the concept of ‘exploitation of nature’ and of civilisation’s ‘murderous’ relationship with nature.

As early as 1928, in his book *One-Way Street*, Benjamin denounced as ‘imperialist’ the idea of the domination of nature and proposed a new conception of work as ‘the mastery of relations between nature and humanity’.⁵

Archaic societies also lived in greater harmony with nature. In ‘The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire’ (1938) Benjamin calls into question the ‘mastery’ (*Beherrschung*) of nature and its ‘exploitation’ (*Ausbeutung*) by humans. As the nineteenth-century anthropologist Bachofen had already shown, Benjamin insists that ‘the murderous (*mörderisch*) idea of the exploitation of nature’ – a dominant capitalist/modern concept from the nineteenth century on – did not exist in matriarchal societies because nature was perceived as a generous mother (*schenkende Mutter*).⁶

For Benjamin – as for Friedrich Engels and the libertarian socialist Élisée Reclus, both interested in Bachofen’s writings – it was a question not of a return to the prehistoric past but of putting forward the prospect of a new harmony between society and the natural environment. Only in a socialist society in which production will no longer be based on the exploitation of human labour, ‘work [...] would no longer be characterised as the exploitation of nature by man’.⁷

In the Theses ‘On the Concept of History’ (1940), his philosophical testament, Benjamin hails Charles Fourier as the utopian visionary of ‘a labour that, far from exploiting nature, is capable of extracting from it the virtual creations that lie dormant in her womb’ (Thesis XI). This is not to say that Benjamin wanted to replace Marxism with utopian socialism; he regarded Fourier as a supplement to Marx and he insisted on the importance of Marx’s critical notes on the Gotha Programme’s conformist stance on the nature of work.

For social-democratic positivism – typified by Joseph Dietzgen – ‘the new conception of labour amounts to the exploitation of nature, which with

naive complacency is contrasted with the exploitation of the proletariat'. This is 'a conception of nature which differs ominously from the one in the Socialist utopias before the 1848 revolution', observes Benjamin, and one which 'already displays the technocratic features later encountered in Fascism'.⁸

In Thesis IX 'On the concept of History', Walter Benjamin characterised the destructive progress that accumulates catastrophes as a 'storm'. The same word 'storm' appears in the title (which almost seems to be inspired by Benjamin) of the latest book by James Hansen, a NASA climatologist and one of the world's foremost specialists on climate change. Published in 2009, the title of the book is *Storms of My Grandchildren: The Truth About the Coming Climate Catastrophe and Our Last Chance to Save Humanity*. Hansen is no revolutionary, but his analysis of the coming 'storm' – which is for him, as for Benjamin, an allegory for something much more menacing – is impressive in its lucidity:

Planet Earth, creation, the world in which civilization developed, the world with climate patterns that we know and stable shorelines, is in imminent peril. The urgency of the situation crystallized only in the past few years. We have now clear evidence of the crisis [...]. The startling conclusion is that continued exploitation of all fossil fuels on Earth threatens not only the other millions of species on the planet but also the survival of humanity itself – and the timetable is shorter than we thought.⁹

Ecosocialism since 1970

The truth of the matter is that during most of the twentieth century the dominant streams of the labour movement – trade-unionism, social-democracy, Soviet-style communism – with few exceptions, ignored ecological issues. On the other hand, ecological movements and Green Parties – except for some smaller leftist currents – had no sympathy for socialism.

The idea of an ecological socialism – or a socialist ecology – only began really to develop in the 1970s, when it appeared, under different forms, in the writings of certain pioneers of a 'Red-Green' way of thinking: Manuel Sacristán (Spain), Raymond Williams (UK), André Gorz and Jean-Paul Déleage (France), Rachel Carson and Barry Commoner (US), Wolfgang Harich (German Democratic Republic), and others.

A few words on André Gorz, perhaps the most influential of these pioneers of ecosocialism: an existentialist philosopher – a friend and follower of Jean-

Paul Sartre – with a strong Marxist background, André Gorz attempted, from the 1970s, to bring socialism and ecology together, building on their common opposition to capitalist productivism and consumerism. In a 1980 essay he wrote: ‘Only socialism can break with the logic of maximal profit, of maximal waste, of maximal production and consumption, and replace it by economic common sense: maximum satisfaction with minimum expense.’ The idea of extra-economic and non-market values is foreign to capitalism. ‘It is, however, essential to communism, but cannot take form as positive negation of the dominant system unless the ideas of self-limitation, stability, equity, and gratuity receive a practical illustration [...]’.¹⁰

Although the following will mainly address the eco-Marxist tendency, one can also find radically anti-capitalist analyses and alternative solutions that are not too far from ecosocialism in Murray Bookchin’s anarchist social ecology, in Arne Naess’s left version of deep ecology, and among certain ‘de-growth’ authors (Paul Ariès).

The word ‘ecosocialism’ apparently began to be used mainly after the 1980s with the appearance, in the German Green Party, of a leftist tendency which called itself ‘ecosocialist’; its main spokespersons were Rainer Trampert and Thomas Ebermann. At the same time the book *The Alternative*, by the East German dissident Rudolf Bahro appeared, which develops a radical critique of the Soviet and GDR model, in the name of an ecological socialism. During the 1980s the US economist James O’Connor developed a new Marxist ecological approach in his writings and created the journal *Capitalism, Nature and Socialism*. During the same years Frieder Otto Wolf, Member of the European Parliament and one of the main leaders of the German Green Party’s left wing, co-authored with Pierre Juquin, a former French Communist leader converted to the Red-Green perspective, a book called *Europe’s Green Alternative*,¹¹ which one might call the first ecosocialist European programme. Meanwhile, in Spain, followers of Manuel Sacristán such as Francisco Fernández Buey, developed socialist ecological arguments in the Barcelona journal *Mientras Tanto*. In 2001, the Fourth International adopted an ecosocialist resolution, *Ecology and Socialist Revolution*, at its world congress. In the same year Joel Kovel and the present author published an *International Ecosocialist Manifesto*, which was widely discussed and inspired the foundation in Paris in 2007 of the Ecosocialist International Network (EIN). A Second ecosocialist manifesto, addressing global warming, the Belem Ecosocialist Declaration, signed by hundreds of persons from dozens of countries, was distributed at the World Social Forum in Belem, State of Para, Brazil, in 2009. A few months later, during the UN International Conference on Climate Change in Copenhagen, the

EIN distributed an illustrated comic strip, *Copenhagen 2049* to the hundreds of thousands demonstrating under the banner ‘Change the System, not the Climate!’.

To this one has to add, in the US, the work of John Bellamy Foster, Fred Magdoff, Paul Burkett, and their friends from the well-known North-American left Journal *Monthly Review*, who argue for a Marxist ecology; the continued activity of *Capitalism, Nature and Socialism*, under the editorship of Joel Kovel, the author of *The Enemy of Nature*,¹² and, more recently, of Salvatore Engel-Di Mauro; the young circle of activists called *Ecosocialist Horizons* (Quincy Saul), who recently edited an ecosocialist comic-strip *Truth and Dare* (2014); not to mention many important books, among which one of the most inclusive is Chris Williams’s *Ecology and Socialism* (2010). Equally important, in other countries: the ecosocialist/eco-feminist writings of Ariel Salleh and Terisa Turner; the Journal *Canadian Dimension*, edited by ecosocialists Ian Angus and Cy Gonick; the writings of the Belgian Marxist Daniel Tanuro on climate change and the dead-end of ‘green capitalism’; the research of French authors linked to the Global Justice Movement, such as Jean-Marie Harribey; the philosophical writings of Arno Münster, an ecosocialist follower of Ernst Bloch and André Gorz ; the recent *Manifeste Ecosocialiste* (2013) published by the French Parti de Gauche (Left Party); and the European Ecosocialist Conferences which took place in Geneva (2014) and Bilbao (2016).

While the attitude of the communist and the green parties towards ecosocialism have been cool – for diametrically opposed reasons! – discussion of the ecosocialist thesis has recently begun to appear in their newspapers and journals. The same applies to the Party of the European Left, which approved, in 2014, a resolution sympathetic to the ideas of ecosocialism.

Hugo Blanco

It would be a mistake to conclude that ecosocialism is limited to Europe and North America; there is, in fact, lively ecosocialist activity and discussion in Latin America. In Brazil a local Ecosocialist Network has been established, with scholars and activists from various parties, unions, and peasant movements; in Mexico there have been several publications discussing ecosocialism. And recently (2014) there have been ecosocialist conferences in Quito and Caracas. Last but not least there is a growing interest in ecosocialism in China where the books of John Bellamy Foster and Joel Kovel have been translated, and several conferences on ecosocialism have occurred in the last few years organised by Chinese universities.

But ecosocialism is not only a matter for scholars and intellectuals; in

many countries social activists and popular leaders are taking an interest in it. Indigenous communities in Latin America are presently in the forefront of the socio-ecological struggle against the destruction of forests and the poisoning of rivers and the land by oil and mining multinationals. One of the main leaders of these movements of anti-systemic resistance is the Peruvian indigenist revolutionary fighter and ecosocialist Hugo Blanco.

Initially affiliated to the Fourth International, in the early 1960s Hugo Blanco organised a large peasant movement in the Convención Valley in Peru, which had its own armed self-defence brigades. Arrested by the police and condemned to death, he was saved by an international campaign of solidarity which included Simone de Beauvoir, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Bertrand Russell. Several times elected to parliament, he was forced into exile by Fujimori's dictatorship in 1992. After his return to Peru he joined efforts with the Confederación Campesina de Perú (CCP), the major Peruvian Peasant Union. Today Hugo Blanco's main reference is the Mexican Zapatista movement; he is the editor of the periodical *Lucha Indígena* and despite being over 80 years old still in the front lines of indigenous struggles in Peru.

During the last decade Blanco became increasingly interested in ecosocialism, which he saw as the continuation of the collectivist traditions of the indigenous communities and their respect for *Pachamama*, Mother Earth.¹³ He signed the Belem Ecosocialist Declaration and, heading an indigenous Peruvian delegation, took part in the International Ecosocialist Conference which took place in Belem after the World Socialist Forum of 2009. He has often argued that the indigenous communities, in Latin America and elsewhere, have practiced ecosocialism for hundreds of years.

Conclusion

It is important to emphasise that ecosocialism is a project for the future, a horizon of the possible, a radical anti-capitalist alternative, but also, and inseparably, an agenda for the here and now around concrete and immediate proposals. Any victories, however partial and limited, that slow down climate change and ecological degradation, are 'stepping stones for more victories' – they 'develop our confidence and organization to push for more'.¹⁴ There is no guarantee of the triumph of the ecosocialist alternative; there is very little to be expected from the powers that be. The only hope lies in the mobilisations from below, as in Seattle in 1999, which saw the coming together of 'turtles' (ecologists) and 'teamsters' (trade-unionists) and the birth of the Global Justice Movement; or as in Copenhagen in 2009, when hundreds of thousands of demonstrators gathered around the

slogan ‘Change the System, not the Climate’; or in Cochabamba, Bolivia, in 2010, when 30,000 delegates from indigenous, peasant, trade-union, and ecologist movements from Latin America and the world participated at the People’s Conference on Climate Change, whose document denouncing the imperialist destruction of Mother Earth echoes Walter Benjamin’s writings from the 1930s.

NOTES

- 1 William Morris, ‘How I Became a Socialist’ (1894), *Political Writings*, ed. A.L. Morton, London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1979, p. 243.
- 2 Morris, ‘Useful Work versus Useless Toil’, *Political Writings*, p. 91.
- 3 Morris, *Political Writings*, pp. 96, 97, 107.
- 4 Morris, ‘Art and Socialism’, *Political Writings*, p. 116.
- 5 Walter Benjamin, *One-Way Street and Other Writings* (trans. J. A. Underwood), London: Penguin, 2008, p. 87.
- 6 Walter Benjamin, “Das Passagen-Werk”, *Gesammelte Schriften* (GS), Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, VI, 1, p. 456.
- 7 Das Passagen-Werk’, I, p. 47.
- 8 Benjamin, ‘Über den Begriff der Geschichte’, GS, I, 2, pp. 698-699.
- 9 James Hansen, *Storms of My Grandchildren: The Truth About the Coming Climate Catastrophe and our Last Chance to Save Humanity*, New York: Bloomsbury, 2009, p. IX.
- 10 André Gorz, *Ecologica*, New York : Seagull Books, 2010 (Paris: Galilée, 2008, pp. 98-99).
- 11 Montreal: Black Rose, 1992.
- 12 Joel Kovel, *The Enemy of Nature: The End of Capitalism or the End of the World?*, London and New York: Zed Books, 2002.
- 13 See his book *Nosotros los indios* (We the Indigenous), Buenos Aires: Herramienta, 2010.
- 14 Chris Williams, *Ecology and Socialism*, Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2010, p. 237.

The Consequences of Climate Change for Left Strategy – A Roundtable

In periods of crisis socio-ecological questions are repeatedly pushed to the margins. Apart from the Greens, left parties have difficulty in creating systematic connections between economic, social, and ecological questions and in formulating political projects – reason enough for the editors of Transform! yearbook to organise a discussion on the present crisis and the relative significance and perspectives of left socio-ecological politics.

The dialogue partners from Germany and Austria are **Judith Dellheim (JD)**, consultant for Solidary Economy at the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation in Berlin and active for many years in the Social Forum movement; **Christoph Görg (DB)**, professor at the Institut für Soziale Ökologie of the University of Klagenfurt; **Sabine Leidig (SL)**, transportation policy spokesperson for Die LINKE's Bundestag delegation and former executive secretary of Attac Deutschland; **Andreas Novy (AN)**, professor of economics at the Wirtschaftsuniversität of Vienna and chairman of the Grüne Bildungswerkstatt Austria (the education institute of Austria's Green Party); **Melanie Pichler (MP)**, post-doc at the Institut für Soziale Ökologie of the University of Klagenfurt and editor of mosaic-blog.at; **Daniela Setton (DS)**, former staff member of the Heinrich Böll Foundation, then activist in the movement to end public financial support for coal-mining, and today at the Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies (IASS) in Potsdam; **Ulrich Brand (UB)**, of the University of Vienna, member of the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation and of the scholarly advisory board of Attac Deutschland, moderated the discussion.

UB: We are experiencing and suffering from the apparent paradox that there is, on the one hand, sharp public debate around the ecological crisis, many statements by politicians, more or less binding, but often unbinding commitments and political proposals, while, at the same time, policies of ecological modernisation are not up to the challenges and are counteracted by other, non-sustainable policies. How do you assess this?

AN: I would identify two problems here: On the one hand, the separation of ecological and social orientations, which is deeply rooted in our minds – climate change and organics on the one side, justice and affordable housing, on the other. This corresponds to specific policy sectors, ministries, and scholarly disciplines that foster the fragmentation. When the social question is generally seen as central then ecology falls by the wayside, ‘because there are more important things in the here and now’. Bicycle lanes and organic food then appear to be luxuries, while creating jobs at any cost is seen as realism. What is needed from a left perspective is to systematically harmonise the social and the ecological. It is not that there is social justice, on the one side, and, on the other, ecological justice; rather there is socio-ecological justice.

On the other hand, there is the misunderstanding that global problems need global answers. To regain our capacity to act we would need to understand climate change as a multi-level phenomenon and to implement climate policy precisely on a local and regional level, in the sense of just and ecological mobility, local recreation, local supply, etc.

DS: At present, despite a broadly shared discourse on climate and sustainability, it is evidently not possible to implement more progressive policies because in many arenas ecological change needs to be accompanied by fundamental political, social, and economic change. This meets with fierce opposition on the part of corporations and parts of the economic and political elites. Massive political pressure is required, but this is often only possible under special conditions. And even when there is ‘success’ it often is only possible to advance at a snail’s pace, or the political initiatives for more environmental protection are massively influenced by the interests of the adversary, which considerably weakens their effect or even counteracts it – an example is the EU Emission Trading Scheme.

CG: I agree with you that there is a strong and socially deeply anchored coalition against fundamental changes, which also rests on the fatal opposition of fronts: ecological vs. social, realistic vs. radical/‘Fundi’, global vs. local, technical vs. relevant to everyday life. The alleged realism of the ‘social question’ is especially difficult to break through because it is closely bound up with social power relations. But that is precisely what the task is – to address these false polarisations and discuss the ‘social’ as a socio-ecological problematic. There are concrete growth strategies which are responsible for the social problems and the related crises. And these growth strategies are also responsible for the ecological crises. It is a specific mode of production and life that is in crisis – and the question is on whom the burdens of these

multi-faceted crises and the supposed 'realistic' strategies of reacting to them will be shifted. Unfortunately, all this points to complex problems that are not easy to analyse and still harder to politicise. This challenge has to be taken seriously. How the problems are taken up and thematised – whether as a pure discourse of experts or as a social debate (drawing on expert knowledge) – is in itself a political question.

UB: *Does the population itself not want to know exactly what the level of ecological problems are? Wouldn't there be resistance to a far-reaching socio-ecological project?*

SL: I think it is less the feared resistance amongst broad sectors of the population which determines present policy. Instead, it is, as Daniela and I pointed out, the interventions of big corporations or the safeguarding of capital's interests in general. We can see this in the shifting of costs of the energy turn, as for example in the passing on of the costs for the energy-efficient modernisation of buildings from the real-estate owners to the renters and in the constantly increasing ticket prices of local public transport or the absurdly high CO₂ thresholds for big cars. As long as capital accumulation and the logic of profit are not reined in or overcome it is almost impossible to combine the social with the ecological.

DS: Nevertheless, I would say that in the area of climate policy in Germany we do see notable changes even within the government apparatuses. Intensive confrontations are taking place around new long-term approaches to reducing CO₂ in the context of the Climate Plan 2050. We see a coalition for transformation that is becoming stronger, even if there is still a lot of social resistance to it.

JD: When ecology is subordinated to the goal of global competitiveness and 'security', then it is logical that we will have the problem we have been describing. We only have to look at Juncker's speech 'The State of the Union 2016'. Under 'Preserving the European Way of Life' ecology is not even mentioned. It is within the political confrontations around the old question of 'how we want to live' that the left must represent the idea of the self-determined, solidary, and therefore ecologically acting human being and make it politically effective. Concrete points of departure are the irrationalities in consumption, transportation, and the privatisation of public services, etc., which citizens have themselves articulated. In addition, mega- and free-trade projects, socially and ecologically destructive 'development policy', and the financialisation of nature has been perceived as madness that has to be ended.

UB: *My assessment is that almost no connection to (socio-)ecological questions is coming out of the respective strategies. What does this mean for left forces?*

MP: The left today is concentrating on a defensive battle, in which it is trying to save, as far as possible, the achievements of Fordism/Keynesianism and the inclusive welfare state. However, in my view there is no coherent political project that points beyond the redistributive policy of the post-war years. In at least two ways this is a problem for integrating ecology with the social question: first, this model can only work through stimulating growth (no wonder then that proposals are limited to a green economy and green jobs) and, second, the model is limited to the nation-state.

SL: I am not quite so sceptical in terms of the left. At any rate, the concrete demand for ‘absorption’ of a part of the enormous capital gains is not the same thing as participation in gains from growth. And at least in broad sectors of Die LINKE it has by now become understood that these gains have to be used to finance socio-ecological reconstruction – above all as an extension of ‘public essential services’: of care, education, school lunches, etc. Admittedly, this is still not an offensive position.

AN: I see a core of the right-wing discourse in the statement ‘we do not have to change ourselves’. This conveys the idea that the current unsustainable mode of life can be defended, which is a very attractive idea and so there is broad agreement around it. It denies climate change and conveys the illusion of national communities without migration. A left utopia has to show that there is crisis and that this demonstrates that ‘going along in the same way’ is impossible. Perhaps it is possible to maintain islands of prosperity, but the price for it is giving up the idea of universal human rights and peaceful coexistence. Accordingly, the left is facing the paradoxical situation that the civilisational achievements of modernity (human rights, democracy, social security) in our part of the world can only be secured if we change our mode of life. Therefore there is good reason to say that a left project – picking up on what Melanie said – is also a defence project.

UB: *How can this paradox be overcome?*

CG: Actually, we have to win back ‘the future’. Ecological discourse has for a long time now been conducted either as a catastrophe discourse or as a merely pragmatic question of modernisation strategy. However, there is a third approach, and this is articulated in concepts like *buen vivir* or ‘good life for all’ (GLFA). The question of how we want to live includes the question of how we think of nature in that ideal life. Nature that is increasingly exploited such that crises are generated in which the bases of life

of a large part of humanity are becoming increasingly precarious? Or nature in which a good life is also possible because climate change will be limited and landscapes not completely desolated? Utopias must also be truly liveable as well as socially attractive; this is not a trivial point.

AN: That is right; certainly the force of a political movement first comes out of just such a utopia.

DS: But this discussion has so far stayed on quite an abstract level. And so I would like to give an example that shows that the real integration of questions of society or justice and ecology are not banal; but much more can be done – especially by the left. Especially with wind and solar companies we have the worst working conditions and the lowest paid jobs with the least right of co-determination. If energy corporations are now to be ‘shrunk’ in favour of climate protection then this will also cost many good and secure jobs, which cannot be so easily substituted. Therefore trade unions have been up in arms about attempts to limit coal-fired generation. So work conditions in the environmental branches have to be improved for the employees who up to now have hardly gotten any hearing in the debate. We would, for example, need to concretely define how concepts of life and work would look in an energy transition.

JD: The attribute ‘ecological’ is frequently seen, but – and here I largely agree with Christoph – the constraints and limits for self-determined, solidary, and therefore ecologically responsible action are not continually tested individually and politicised collectively. As a result, there is a lack of relevant practices and credibility. The motto ‘we must pick up people where they are’ can wind up excusing a certain amount of opportunism instead of leading us to work on projects like ‘free public local transportation’ and ‘cancel Greece’s debt and make ecological investments possible’. If there are signature-gathering campaigns against ecologically destructive projects in the countries of the global South but no consistent political confrontation with the causes of the problem – the transnational corporations, economic policy, the economic and social structures in Germany and the EU – then it will not be possible to effect changes.

UB: *From an emancipatory perspective what is involved is not to reach a rather abstract 2-degree goal but to reconstruct the social basic services systems like mobility, food, housing, and clothing. The problem of non-sustainability is the capitalist growth imperative, the patriarchal domination of nature, and externalisation at the global level. This is concrete and takes conflicts and alternatives into account, but it runs the risk of carving itself up into different spheres. What are starting points for thematising and politicising the socio-ecological, that is, multiple, crisis in all its complexity?*

SL: In Die LINKE's Bundestag group we have been concrete about our perspectives and concrete points of intervention in some arenas through what we call 'Plan B for a Socio-Ecological Reconstruction'. But what has gained most popularity amongst the party's rank and file is the 'free local public transportation' offensive. It is absolutely necessary to take the life-world issues we named here as a point of departure – and societal confrontations are indeed taking place over them. But the 'socio-economic tendency' in Die LINKE has so far not succeeded in anchoring the needed change of the mode of production and life as a point of departure for a concrete critique of capitalism and a redistribution offensive. For this, more 'challenges' from outside would be helpful.

AN: In Austria there is clearly a widespread notion that these times are far too serious for us to concern ourselves with the environment and climate. In an increasingly offensive way, the FPÖ (Austrian Freedom Party) is becoming the party of climate denial. This is consistent with its attempt to safeguard a non-sustainable life style. The SPÖ (Social Democratic Party of Austria) and ÖVP (Austrian People's Party) largely de facto practice climate denial because 'the issue does not get votes'. The Greens suffer from the fact that there is no public attention paid to the issue. And it is very hard to link the ecological to the social question although there are some initiatives for this, above all the marvellous 365-Euro Annual Ticket in Vienna, which lowers living costs and at the same time implements sustainability. A closer look at the famous Red Vienna of the inter-war years would show what local and regional government can really accomplish.

CG: Fundamental changes have never before been developed in the party system but only in social movements, after which they can be articulated in the party system when the latter permits it. In view of the present global crisis of political representation I do not have much hope of this. Emancipation means to not just let yourself be represented but to directly articulate your interest. Intellectuals or parties have no control over this – and it is good that they don't. Therefore for me the connecting starting point is not a single issue but the possibilities of political articulation. And today these are being limited by authoritarian forms of politics and populism. The crisis of democracy is thus the actual connecting starting point, and the big challenge is a democratisation of social relations including those of nature. But in the present situation one can hardly say this publicly without being branded a utopian.

AN: Yes, politics cannot be reduced to parties and the state. But it is just as wrong to be fixed on civil-society actors because they all too often are

also co-opted or withdraw to niches and become a club of losers. The art of politics would be to again bring movements and society and party and state apparatus into a constructive tension of supporting leg and free leg. So an important element of a socio-ecological transformation is the transformation of the political in the sense of an expansion of the more decentral, sometimes self-administered, and always more participatory shaping of public institutions and spaces, in short the democratisation of all spheres of life.

JD: After the Berlin State Parliament elections the question of pink-red-green is becoming exciting: After we, as the Berliner Energietisch (Berlin Energy Board), narrowly lost the 2013 referendum on democratic, social, and ecological re-municipalisation against the adverse wind of the SPD leadership, despite the supportive resolution passed at the SPD party congress and the not completely consistent but at least always verbal support of Die LINKE and the Greens, the electoral programmes of the three parties are pointing in our direction. In addition, Berlin has, on paper, an energy and climate-protection law that is not bad. The two long-time spokespeople of the Energy Board are now deputies to the Berlin State Parliament. What is especially interesting about the Berliner Energietisch is that it started as more of an ecology project but when it launched its campaign it became a socio-ecological one.

At this moment we are organising a publicly visible and effective event on the theme ‘With Full Energy Against Energy Poverty’ (20 November 2016) and inviting someone from Graz’s environment office to report on that city’s successful initiative for energy efficiency against energy poverty. New activities should emerge from the event. Things are also getting exciting in public local transport. The Berlin LINKE and the Piraten, who have changed over to it, have a concept of free public local transport. The Greens sympathise.

UB: *How can we think about the democratisation of relations of nature? What would be starting points at the European, nation-state, or local levels?*

MP: For me democratisation means both procedural and substantive aspects. The procedural is that diverse social actors again (or for the first time) take an active part in shaping our life and work worlds. This includes the integration of employees, for example through new forms of economic democracy: whether we are dealing with the reconstruction of energy systems – away from coal towards renewable energy, away from automobilism towards collective forms of mobility – at the regional or national levels, or with forms of participatory drawing up of budgets at the local level.

The substantive aspect means for me that we not only have to listen to as

many voices as possible but that we now for the first time have to come to an understanding amongst ourselves about which spheres we actually want to shape democratically together. How we eat, what technologies we develop further, what forms of mobility we promote, what branches of industry will be subsidised – none of this is in our direct sphere of influence but is mostly ceded to the market and therefore to consumer decisions. We have to politicise this. That sounds abstract but I think it is necessary so that we can at least contemplate concrete measures, decision-making instruments, or paths of development.

JD: Democratisation as collective self-determination should mean consistent and systematic political confrontation with the constraints and limits for ecologically responsible life. Energy, food, mobility, housing, and free time are the key words here.

UB: *The energy transition in Germany is seen throughout the world as a model for entry into a socio-ecological reconstruction. How do you assess this?*

DS: It is clear that in the energy transition there are many challenges and still unsolved problems. But sweeping criticism of it impedes us from seeing the opportunities that lie in this contested large-scale social project for an ecological and social transformation and therefore for left politics. The energy transition would not have been possible without the engagement of many thousands of people in this country, who became active locally for the expansion of renewable energies and also invested in it – to counteract the energy corporations and the great majority of municipal providers who wanted to keep investing in fossil structures. This clearly turned power relations in the energy market upside down. Empirical studies show that what primarily interested and still interests people is not financial advantages but climate protection or regional added value. We also see that through local engagement for the energy transition social cohesion was strengthened and further positive social results were achieved. It is true that only those people who have money can invest, and for many people this is not possible. What is essential now is to fight for the possibility that all people can participate in the energy transition and co-shape it. The policy of the federal government at present goes in precisely the opposite direction.

What is now imperative is to redefine in what direction the energy transition should develop and to use people's immense regard for and acceptance of this large-scale project to accomplish a fundamental reconstruction in the direction of more democracy, more justice, and more ecological responsibility. Up to now the discussion was too narrowed to its technological, economic, and bureaucratic aspects.

SL: The example of the Wolfhagen public utilities company points in a hopeful direction: an energy net and company in public hands with the participation of small investors from the local citizenry; 100 per cent renewable energy for all with no power cuts, orientation to energy saving, and prices that penalise high consumption.

JD: However, two big BUTS have to be mentioned in this success story. First, the success of ‘Germany’s energy transition’ relates only – though this is indeed important – to the additionally produced and consumed energy. In other words, there is no increasing substitution of nuclear and fossil energy provision by renewable energies predominantly produced locally. Second, a corporation-friendly energy policy continues to dominate. Large-scale offshore wind and solar projects involve new ecological problems and reinforce socially destructive corporate and power structures. We still don’t have a truly solidary solar energy transition. Precisely for this reason engagement on a municipal and regional level is very important for truly socio-ecological projects and the organising of forces for a sustainable policy change.

UB: *What status do debates like living well, solidary economy, commons, energy democracy, and socio-ecological transformation have within the left and throughout society?*

AN: For me, GLFA is not only a concrete utopia; above all it challenges us to tie together sustainability and solidarity, equality and diversity, one’s own good life and everyone else’s. In this sense it actually systematically links social and ecological questions as well as local answers through its generalisability. In view of society’s (and the left’s) incapacity to deal with these two contradictions constructively, GLFA thus helps to orient and focus a left political movement. The great advantage of this path is that it enables dialectical thinking and action that can deal with contradiction. While degrowth reduces a complex question (‘what in the great transformation should shrink, what should grow?’) to a simple and provocative formula, GLFA opens a sphere of thinking and acting for a political movement in current transformation processes. GLFA optimally combines with a movement of learning and searching, which, it is true, shares a utopian horizon but undogmatically names the concrete steps and the actors of transformation who can implement what was designed at the drawing board.

CG: I see the advantage of GLFA also in its orientation to the future, which gets to the heart of the matter: How do we wish to live, and what does this mean for nature and our relation to it? Is such a life generalisable? By contrast, degrowth thematises very central causes of the problem, which

are not so directly criticised in the GLFA context: the growth imperative of capitalist-constituted societies (even if the critique of capitalism in the degrowth context is still a delicate plant). Post-extractivism, on the other hand, tackles a specific growth strategy that underlies the development model in some countries. All these concepts address concrete experiences and offer diverse options to politicise them. I would not pit them against each other but would like to promote an exchange between them. No one has found the philosopher's stone here.

DS: I agree with Christoph, these perspectives are not mutually exclusive but establish different focuses. In any case, it is important that these alternatives are not only discussed in 'niches' but in relation to concrete political confrontations. I think the connections between them can be developed. Up to now the left has very largely left the environment and climate discourse to other political forces, and when it does participate its demands are hardly distinguishable from those already in circulation.

UB: *What role do degrowth perspectives play at the political-party level?*

JD: In Die LINKE's municipal electoral programmes and in some of its federal state election programmes free local public transport is an issue, and in Die LINKE's actual party programme the idea has even been extended to public transportation as a whole. Especially in Thuringia, in its capital Erfurt, there are activities designed to lend reality to the idea. In the matter of public local transport there are initiatives in Germany and in Europe, which Die LINKE and the Party of the European Left can help to generalise. But they do not operate under the catchword degrowth. In our workshop at the Leipzig Degrowth Conference there were people who wanted to limit free public local transport to 10 kilometres daily. In that case people from my Berlin district at the eastern periphery could only use it to the eastern part of the city but not to the centre or to the City-West and certainly not back again home. We should mediate between the degrowth discourse and other discourses and activities that aim at a drastic reduction of energy and material consumption as well as climate and biodiversity protection.

SL: To create municipalities with really alternative, socio-ecological practices and develop them into a power basis that goes beyond them – this in my opinion would be the most important task for Die LINKE.

AN: I would like to come back to a point of Daniela's. The utopia of a successful socio-ecological transformation becomes concrete through many small success stories of other ways of working and living; then it seems feasible. This is positive. At the same time many of these alternative projects are organised from below into communities of like-minded people. This

is clearly attractive for many engaged people; but it can lead to social movements remaining apolitical. Urban gardening and repair cafés only become political when conflicts are sought out and alliances forged so that systemic, institutional changes can be put into motion. I think it is necessary to overcome the widespread illusion that there is an invisible hand that makes a better world out of the multiplicity of small initiatives. This is a liberal illusion, which has, in times of neoliberalism, become attractive deep within left circles. No one knows the way such emancipatory systems and institutions would look in the areas of transportation, energy, and care services. Hence the need to seriously try things out and learn.

JD: In my district, where many poor people live, urban gardening is very popular. Municipal housing organisations want to be socially and ecologically proactive. In Berlin there is the Initiative for a Climate-Neutral Hospital and there is the beginning of communication between this project and the Berliner Energietisch.

But the question is whether concrete activities are being supported and networked and becoming new starting points for political intervention for their promotion, generalisation, and further development and whether in so doing society is being sustainably democratised and is becoming increasingly more social, more just, and more ecological.

UB: *It is quite probable that the 2-degree goal, although considered necessary, will not be reached. Although the impact will be different in different places, there will be sharper ecological and therefore social dislocations in the foreseeable future. However, the left will remain weak in most countries. What are the consequences of this?*

JD: The dislocations have long since begun. If the left does not now finally push consistently for more solutions to problems and for democratisation and does not work at building solidary structures they will facilitate the growth of the problems and especially of violence. In this case they would deserve their further marginalisation, but the consequences would be dramatic, especially for the globally and socially weakest members of society.

CG: The 2-degree goal only salvages international climate policy, not the living conditions of those who are threatened by climate change. They are already under threat today in many regions of the world, and this will get worse in some cases (and not only in the small island countries of the Pacific). The only question is: How bad will it get and are we in the industrialised countries and in the global middle classes ready to ask others to make this sacrifice in order to protect our mode of life. One of the most important results of Paris was the success in problematising the 2-degree goal as a politically set goal and to politicise its implications. Unfortunately, it has up

to now been almost impossible to politicise this still inadequate agreement in the direction of climate justice. The social movements in this direction are apparently dying down again, but they have to connect with the themes of degrowth and *buen vivir*.

AN: There is a historically tested way of dealing with big challenges, as climate change doubtless is: to guarantee a good life only for a minority. Here there are neoliberal, ethnic-nationalist, and military protagonists already putting this effectively into practice. A common basis of this today oftentimes still disunited camp could be the protection of our privileged, non-sustainable mode of life using all economic and military means. In order to prevent such an authoritarian and ethnic-nationalist neoliberalism from becoming a reality the broadest possible alliance is needed in my view, one that secures the civilisational minimal standard. Even this will be no easy task if we consider the developments towards ‘managed democracies’ in Hungary, Turkey, Brazil, and in many other places.

MP: I agree with Andreas. A central consequence in my view is that we actually must think in terms of alliances. But I think they do not work as an ‘adding up’ of diverse forces, movements, groups, and parties but have to be seen as a process of searching for new strategies. Naturally, this is not all that realistic since authoritarian strategies are now being pushed through at an enormous tempo.

UB: *Which alliances could promote a socio-ecological transformation, that is, a thoroughgoing change of the mode of production and life and of the relations of forces and instruments that support it?*

AN: On the one hand, what is involved is a fight for a better variant of what exists – for a less excluding capitalism and a liberal constitutional state, for example. On the other, we need to show that in the long term capitalism, consumerism, the growth compulsion, and a view of politics that locates political action only in the state is incompatible with a sustainable mode of life and production. Happily, a consciousness, however diffuse, is growing at least in European society that our civilisation model is not sustainable. Educational work and political mobilisation would have to contribute – in the best Gramscian sense – to laying bare the contradictions and dealing with them in an emancipatory way. This begins with the tragic realisation that the great civilisational achievements of the labour movement were always only possible in times of growth. Even in Swedish welfare capitalism there was little substantial redistribution away from, and constraints on the power of, the local bourgeoisie. In times of crisis, whether in the inter-war years or right now in Latin America, this minority resorts to all means to secure their

own power position. This is why the danger of authoritarianism, repression, and the dismantling of democracy is so great today.

JD: Two questions should be posed and extensively discussed. On the one hand: How – especially in the 1980s when the ecosystems were already dramatically overburdened – was it possible for the neoliberals to win their ‘revolution’ and structurally weaken the left? And, on the other hand: Why, since the outbreak of the most recent global financial crisis, which is linked to the crises of food, the environment, and resources, has the left on the whole remained stuck in a politically defensive position. The left could have been able to try and deploy their organisational force, their solidarity, for an attractive project and use appealing organisational forms on behalf of those who had a material and/or idealistic interest in overcoming these crises. Such a left project for a solidary mode of life was never consistently pursued. Whatever the case, this finally has to be done now – taking into account what has already been put in place and is worthy of further development, which can only be done, and critically/solidaristically accepted, on the basis of great openness, productive self-criticism, and willingness and capacity to forge alliances.

MP: In my view it is by no means only in European society that there is a diffuse consciousness of the lack of sustainability. It is true that in the global South there is a strong desire on the part of many sectors of the population for a western lifestyle. But at the same time there are many struggles and conflicts (for example around the defence of land rights) into which ecological and social questions are automatically integrated. But this only works if ecology is perceived not just as organic products and pedestrian zones but as the bases of life and the problem of resources and is accordingly politicised. For the left in Europe I think it is decisive that the central actors of such struggles are mostly not workers in ‘classic’ wage relations. Instead they are often actors who live and work at the ‘margins’ of the capitalist mode of production (small farmers, the indigenous, immigrants, etc.) and base their interests and demands on this position. In my opinion, this is an important starting point for a shift of perspective within the left.

Gender, Feminism, Antifeminism, and Imperialism

Susan Zimmermann

This contribution to current debates around the so-called ‘refugee crisis’, first presented at the workshop *Crises and Victims* in Budapest in February 2016,¹ discusses from a gender-history perspective past and present invocations of women’s emancipation and women’s subordination in asymmetric transnational and cross-culture discourse and politics. The aim is to understand why and how, since the nineteenth century at the latest, gender has played a pronounced role in negotiating the asymmetric relationship between ‘white’ and ‘brown’ countries and populations worldwide. In particular, I look at various instances and long-term trends of how Western imperialism, some white and some non-white feminisms, as well as anti-feminist and anti-Western ideologies emerging in the Global South, have invoked the ‘woman question’ in these discursive, political, and military encounters. I then discuss how the critique of this long-term trajectory of unequal interaction can help us to counter the growing agitation around male immigrants’ attitudes towards women, including sexual atrocities committed by brown men on white women, and to avoid some of the traps in arguments and politics encountered by activists and scholars who have wanted to counter the appropriation of women’s rights’ discourses into an anti-refugee racism. Specifically, I argue that a consideration of the history of the entanglement between globalising gender politics and global inequality can serve as a conceptual foundation for developing an alternative perspective on the present condition within Europe, when anti-refugee discourse and policy is systematically built on invoking ‘Western’ gender norms. In conclusion, I present some strategies for arguing against forms of reference to women’s rights and women’s equality for racist and imperial aims in present-day Europe.

The invention of globalising gender policies in the long nineteenth century

Historically, globalising gender politics constituted one element of many and historically ever more diversified types of international and transnational policies and discourses within a deeply unequal and hierarchically organised world system. A vignette exemplifying British approaches to treaties with non-sovereign entities in the middle of the nineteenth century may serve as a point of departure for my argument on how gender became implicated in these global interactions. In this period, commanders of the British Royal Navy – at the time the world’s uncontested leading maritime power – and other British authorities concluded dozens of treaties and agreements with dozens of rulers reigning over territories on the African coast. The chief aim of most of the treaties was to establish free trade in these territories and to suppress the African and transatlantic slave trade in which many of these rulers and their subjects, as well as foreign slave traders residing in these territories, were involved. Representatives of the British Crown were granted superior rights to monitor and if need be use force to ensure compliance with the related stipulations. The suppression of the slave trade, repeatedly described as ‘a dictate of humanity’ in these treaties, was one of the most significant humanitarian goals the British pursued internationally in the mid-nineteenth century.² The ‘Engagement of the King and Chiefs of Bimbia’, signed on 31 March 1848 by rulers of a coastal territory in what today is Cameroon, exemplifies this type of treaty-making. These rulers committed themselves ‘to do away with the abominable, inhuman, and un-Christian like custom of sacrificing Human Lives [...] on account of their superstitious practices’, which included sacrificing a ‘Chief’s’ wife upon his death.³ Parallel humanitarian goals included the human treatment of prisoners of war who otherwise would be killed, the fight against ‘polygamy’, etc.

It is important to underline that reference to gender norms and practices was only one of the elements of international humanitarianism and that it took many forms. Despite these complexities the globalising gender and humanitarian policies addressed here were characterised by a number of fundamental traits. They combined their universalising argument about the global reach, and the non-negotiability, of certain norms as rooted in ‘the dictate of humanity’, on the one hand, with the claim that these norms and values were rooted in Christianity or, in the standards of the (originally) European ‘family of nations’ or, later on, the (globalising) ‘international community’, on the other. These policies also de-contextualised these norms and standards so that each of them could serve as a non-negotiable point of reference for trans-border ‘single issue’ policies. As a result, such globalising

gender policies could be considered legitimate in whatever other framework they were pursued, which included global power politics, colonial and imperial policies, military intervention, etc.

International interaction with non-Western entities and powers was thus predicated on their commitment to an evolving 'standard of civilisation' in international law, and recognition of these powers as partners in international law was predicated on their adherence to this 'standard'. Gerrit Gong has argued that gendered norms and gender values constituted one important element of the 'standard' as a legal configuration and the related nineteenth-century policies and discourses. The 'standard' functioned as a malleable legal device, which as its 'most elastic, and most subjective' element involved certain humanitarian norms, namely the 'demand that a country' accepted certain "civilized" norms'. A country was considered civilised only if it was in conformity with 'the accepted norms and practices of the "civilized" international society', including, in these early days, the condemnation of so-called 'sati', i.e., widow burning or widow sacrifice, and polygamy.⁴ These requirements were at the core of the emerging globalising gender policies.

The fundamental traits of globalising gender policies were to be found not only in treaty-making and formal political engagement with non-Western powers and other entities considered non-sovereigns in the (Western-dominated) international system. A similar logic also characterised other dimensions of globalising gender policies, including less formalised global reform and gender discourses as well as intra-empire colonial policies. One of the best researched examples is the long-term British-Indian encounter over so-called sati. In Great Britain, driven by Christian missionaries and the humanitarian movement, a strong campaign against so-called sati in India unfolded after 1810. Its proponents argued that Britain had a duty to bring civilisation to her Indian subjects, focusing in particular on the ill-treatment of women. While the argument was based on reference to 'suffering humanity', it was largely addressed to powerful men who exercised colonial authority to act on behalf of suffering women. In this way, the anti-sati campaign legitimised imperial power in the name of both humanity and Western civilisation, on the one hand, and of saving suffering non-Western women, on the other. A first milestone towards the full abolition of sati in British India was reached in 1829.⁵

Feminism and the discourse of women's emancipation from their very 'proto-feminist' beginnings in the late eighteenth century were deeply involved in this imperialism of globalising gender policies. As Clare Midgley has persuasively argued, already the earliest (proto-) feminist tracts in the period between 1790 and 1869 built explicitly on the identification of

appropriate gender relations and progress in the status of women as belonging to Christian and Western civilisation, and the consequent identification of non-Western societies as despotic or corrupt entities keeping women in a state of abject subordination. In so doing, these tracts construed still-existing women's subordination within Western civilisation as an anomaly and/or as an anachronistic remainder of its 'uncivilised' past. Women's subordination was, in other words, construed as 'un-Western', and women's emancipation as modern and Western in character.⁶ This made it possible, within the various frameworks of unequal global interaction and unequal interaction between dominant and dominated non-white populations, to both construct adherence to women's equality as positive identification with Western values and justify policies of domination by invoking women's equality.

So far I have discussed some of the origins of the association of women's emancipation with the West, as well as the concomitant imperial overtones or substantive imperial traits of globalising gender policies in the nineteenth century. This history was to have dramatic consequences for the fate of women's emancipation in both dominated and dominant world regions, and amongst dominant white and dominated brown populations both globally and locally, that is, in the framework of how 'first world' white societies relate to brown immigration and brown refugees.

The internationalisation of gender imperialism in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries

The twentieth and twenty-first centuries can be considered the period in which globalising gender policies have been transformed into one important element of more modern forms of global governance, which on the surface might appear less imperial than their nineteenth century predecessors. However, even a cursory glance at the history of gendered global governance reveals that this historical process can better be characterised as a *transformation* of imperialism and even an expansion of imperialism.

The origins of this transformation reach back to the multilateralisation of globalising gender policies which began in earnest in the last third of the nineteenth century. In the aftermath of the First World War this was followed by the institutionalisation of international organisation embodied by the League of Nations. In the process, gender imperialism was stripped of important dimensions of its geographical and geopolitical identification with the West. Those gender values which were deemed universal and had formerly been associated with the West increasingly came to be associated with the 'family of nations' and later on the 'international community' as such. This international community uniformly called upon all sovereign countries

to conform to certain standards of acceptable behaviour. In the process of de-colonisation, for the emerging third-world members of the international community progression to sovereignty was connected to invoking these standards. During the short twentieth century the international community thus assumed at least 'soft' authority in terms of monitoring compliance with or approximation to these standards. After the end of the Cold War, with the Soviet Union disappearing as a rival power in the Global South, the soft authority developed during the short twentieth century gradually was complemented by the new 'humanitarian' and military intervention of our day.

Unequally globalising gender policies in the short twentieth and in the twenty-first centuries took on important additional traits. International organisations claimed international authority – instead of imperial authority, as in the nineteenth century – to intervene in gender relations and promote women's human rights in many parts of the world. This international authority was not without imperial bias. One example, analysed by Keith David Watenpaugh among others, was the response of the League of Nations to women and children survivors of the Armenian genocide. During and after the end of the First World War Armenian women and children were, on a large scale, sequestered, forcefully adopted, or enslaved into Muslim households, subjected to forced conversion or marriage, etc. The ensuing rescue operation coordinated by the League and feminist activists working in its orbit focused on the fate of these women, emphatically identified as Christian women in the Muslim society of the dissolving Ottoman Empire. The rescue operation at the time was considered a pioneering intervention because of its truly international character.⁷ Yet it also epitomised the ongoing global inequality which continued to be at the root of globalising gender policies. It was addressed at a weak non-Western power, with its dominant population deemed unable or unwilling to address the problem. It thoroughly de-contextualised the problem it aimed to address and was built on universalised humanitarian values. Intervention in this case was justified with reference to the fate of Christian rather than Muslim women.

Feminist politics were once again implicated in generating new forms of gendered global governance. From the 1930s on, women internationalists seized the new opportunities of globalising gender policies pursued within and around the League of Nations, and later the United Nations, to campaign for the development of an overarching international gender equality doctrine and regime. They made use, on the one hand, of the newly established and gradually expanding global governance and international authority to promote, from above, the emancipation of women everywhere in the world

via instruments aimed at ensuring that gender equality and women's rights are enshrined in international conventions and international law. On the other hand, it became apparent already in the 1930s that success in this regard in the international arena was predicated on the separation of the gender equality agenda from other agendas.⁸ The separation of the gender equality agenda from the problem of unequal global interaction in particular made it difficult to avert the absorption of the emerging international women's rights' regime into various forms of the politics of global inequality. The Cold War decades saw, at least in the Global South, less emphasis on the imperial politics of gender-equality and women's human rights. However, since the 1990s women's rights have been increasingly emphasised in global governance and various military as well as discursive operations – amongst them the paradigms of humanitarian intervention, the 'responsibility to protect' and the responses to 'conflict-related sexual violence'. Sara Meger has shown how, starting with the initial UN Security Council Resolution 1325 adopted in 2000, 'conflict-related sexual violence' has developed into a narrowly defined, and homogenised and objectified, concept which has come to function as a 'a commodity fetish of higher value than all other forms of gender-based violence' in international politics. This has helped Western governments to mobilise support for military intervention abroad by stressing the sexual violence committed by ISIS (while defunding domestic support systems for survivors of sexual violence), and has entailed the 'unanticipated effect' of sexual violence developing into a tool for perpetrators to gain international media attention and increased bargaining power.⁹ This last point raises the question of the global impact of, and responses to, globalising gender policies, a question to which I will turn next.

The global co-construction of gender traditionalism

Imperial policies of globalising Western gender norms historically played an important role not only in terms of 'modernising' non-Western gender regimes. They have also contributed to ossifying, and indeed creating and expanding, gender traditionalism in many places – a fact which in no way exonerates from responsibility those who do not respect women's rights. Two characteristics of globalising gender policies in particular played an important role in creating and sustaining this dynamic.

First, as imperial and Western discourse and policies engaged in a sustained manner with those gender practices of non-Western societies which were deemed 'abominable, inhuman, and un-Christian' they themselves contributed to the reification and culturisation of these practices. Intense discursive and political engagement with these practices and the collection

of extensive information about them inevitably publicised these practices. In some cases the colonisers exaggerated, reified, or redefined the religious dimension of customs, as Jörg Fisch has argued in the case of so-called sati in India, where ‘the British’, because they ‘were so afraid of interfering in religious customs, [...] explored the religious character of widow burning, thereby partly creating this character in practice’.¹⁰ In other cases, colonisers preferred partial legal action, that is, regulation and restriction, over abolition. They were anxious not to unnecessarily antagonise colonised populations or male colonial elites over an issue which easily could be deemed private or subject to religious law and which was not by definition a key issue in terms of the material dimension of colonial policies. Yet even as certain gender practices were relegated to the realm of ‘native’ or ‘religious’ custom, they underwent a process of codification inasmuch as colonial legislation codified and legally subordinated these realms. Whatever the precise combination of these various motivations and policies, taken together they contributed to the legal and cultural reification of what now was considered ‘un-Western’ gender norms and practices.

Second, globalising gender policies provoked outright opposition within the Global South against imperial interference in gender regimes in non-Western settings. Some of this opposition was imprisoned from the very beginning in the very rhetoric created by globalising gender policies itself, namely the language of both global universal values (when talking about gender imperialism) and cultural or religious essentialism (when talking about non-Western gender practices). A petition issued in 1830 by Indian opponents of the abolition of so-called sati by the British directly opposed the invocation of the ‘common voice of mankind’ as a justification for abolition. ‘By what right are the holy dictates of our religion brought down to be measured by so low and vague a standard?’, the petition asked.¹¹

Opposition could be informed by quite a number of divergent interests, and it could be outspoken or silent about these respective interests. In the case of the international rescue operation for Armenian women and children in the early 1920s, for example, both male representatives of the Muslim elite and Turkish feminists defended the practice of enforced integration of these women and children into Muslim households. While the former regarded the practice as one of giving ‘shelter’ to women and children who would have lacked any protection otherwise and challenged the rescue operation as a completely illegal intervention into the domestic affairs of the heads of Muslim male households, one Turkish feminist defended it as an attempt to erase national difference in a moment of extreme threat to the Turkish nation.¹²

Both opposition to and support of cross-border intervention developed numerous tactics of invoking gender imperialism or silencing reference to it. Brown male patriarchal interest could silently make its case for a patriarchal gender order by selling it as an anti-imperial defence of brown culture against interference by the West. The same interest could also claim that brown women speaking out against patriarchal violence or oppression in the country were betraying their own country and serving imperial interest. Numerous white feminists would invoke global feminism and solidarity with brown women when speaking out about patriarchal oppression in countries of the Global South while at the same time remaining silent about the involvement of their global feminism in the politics of gender imperialism. All of these discursive moves exploit the visible or invisibilised interconnection between gender, imperialism, and anti-imperialism.

As globalising gender policies incorporated additional agendas in the later twentieth and the twenty-first centuries, opposition to these policies repeatedly invented new strategies of incorporating these same agendas into their oppressive arguments and action. While there have been many other reasons and motivations for pursuing retrograde and oppressive gender policies in the Global South and worldwide, it is undeniable that these ongoing unequal exchanges have proved harmful for endeavours to advance gender emancipation worldwide. Examples of such harmful exchanges include issues as variegated as the global institutionalisation of gender studies or the cross-border policies of promoting LGBT rights.

The transnational policies of promoting LGBT rights – some of which could be seen as contributing to the reification or even fetishisation of these rights, just as in the case of ‘conflict-related sexual violence’ – have been accompanied by visible cross-border reverberations, for instance amongst radical anti-Western groups. Reporting at length on current Western sexual policies, the English-language online-journal *Dabiq*, which has been associated with ISIS, describes how Western countries use ‘their shirk-based parliaments to legalize sodomite marriage’ and ‘their education system to corrupt their children right from the kindergarten level by introducing books into the curriculum to combat “homophobia”’. *Dabiq* continues: ‘In the midst of this widespread affront to the fitrah (natural human disposition), the Islamic State continues its efforts against these deeds of misguidance – which Western “Civilization” regards as a part of their “values” – by implementing the rulings of Allah on those who practice any form of sexual deviancy or transgression.’ *Dabiq* does not fail to give the recent example of ‘a man found guilty of engaging in sodomy. He was taken to the top of a building and thrown off, as was one of the traditions ... with those who

committed this filthy deed.’¹³

The fate and fortunes of academic gender studies in Eastern Europe is another example of the problematic implications of the imperialism of globalising gender policies. After the systemic change in Eastern Europe, Western science foundations offered large grants and possibilities to Eastern European countries or institutions to develop and institutionalise gender studies, while at the same time construing acceptance of the new discipline as a marker of adherence to liberal and democratic transformation. The fact that in this way gender studies and neoliberalism arrived in Eastern Europe as a package, that is, that gender was appropriated into neoliberalist expansionism, had awkward consequences for the prospects of progressive gender policies in Eastern Europe. The packaging nourished leftist groups’ suspicion that gender studies were something liberal rather than leftist, which consequently reinforced the prevalence of masculinism and patriarchal thinking in the Eastern European left, leaving more critical or leftist gender studies scholars without many allies in the region. Nationalists could sell their endorsement of new patriarchalism and restrictive gender norms as resistance to ‘Westernisation’.¹⁴

The imperialism of globalising gender policies thus has contributed in many ways to the reification and culturisation of retrograde gender regimes and the invigoration of patriarchal social relations and gendered violence in the non-Western world. Reference has been made to women’s emancipation as a Western export to stabilise and rally support for restrictive gender orders. Most recently, news of systematically organised instances of violence against women has been enthusiastically circulated internationally and extolled as markers of heroically anti-Western policies.

It can thus be argued that what usually comes across as a binary opposition between gender equality and women’s rights as a marker of Western societies on the one hand, and the archaic and inherently patriarchal character of non-Western gender orders on the other, needs to be re-conceptualised as a historical co-construction. Imbuing the idea of women’s rights with the idea of the superiority of white Western societies may well have contributed to generating some of the real and discursive gains in terms of women’s rights in the Western world and culture and, at the same time, some of the resistance to women’s rights in non-Western societies and cultures.

No ‘we’ and no ‘them’ in the so-called ‘refugee crisis’: Resisting gender imperialism and resisting patriarchy can never be separate

In conclusion, I aim to demonstrate that some of the problematic aspects of present-day discourses and policies focusing on brown male immigrants’

attitudes towards white women can be more effectively resisted when read against the backdrop of the above analysis of the historical and ongoing constellation of globalising gender policies. This perspective helps develop a set of arguments which might be helpful in countering the massive connection between the currently dominant discourse of women's rights and anti-refugee racism and in avoiding some of the traps those of us who are committed to both women's emancipation and anti-racism encounter when developing our own argument.

While the slogan 'rapefugees not welcome' in this form is propagated by the far right, sentiment and discourse nourished by and implicitly building on this discourse has become widely accepted in large segments of the societies of the European Union, especially after the events in Cologne on New Year's Eve. This sentiment and discourse effectively undermines solidarity with the refugees and legitimates extremely restrictive asylum and immigration policies. Measures such as a temporary ban of male asylum seekers from a municipal swimming pool after an incident of sexual attack by an asylum seeker in the facility have been widely reported in the media and become widely accepted. The discourse of 'how do we react to sexual atrocities committed by asylum seekers' and 'how do we protect our gender values and gender culture against such atrocities' has come to dominate TV talk shows and channels – while concomitantly any alternative political discourse questioning the very discursive foundations of such a discourse has effectively disappeared from public view. The discourse of differential legal treatment (that is, beyond the different treatment long established by now) for asylum seekers and other resident non-citizens and recently naturalised citizens in the event they violate 'our' gender norms has become fully socially acceptable. Gender and women's rights thus have developed into key categories invoked to justify systematic erosion of the rights and normative legal guarantees that once came with citizenship and refugee status. Legitimated by reference to 'our' gender norms there is an erosion of fundamental legal guarantees and categories as such. Intense efforts are underway in terms of the compulsory education of young male refugees in Western gender culture – and, through this process, miniskirts and high heels as characteristics of this culture are normalised more than ever before, while sexual violence committed by Western men remains as closeted as it ever was, and gendered sexual violence committed by brown men against 'their' women is discussed or persecuted only if such discussion serves the policies of domination and exclusion.

Meanwhile, when critical white feminists talk about brown men's sexual misbehaviour in regard to white or brown women their discourse tends

to be effectively and easily appropriated by the mainstream anti-refugee discourse, which insists on the aggressive imposition of ‘our’ gender norms on ‘them’, including the racialised additional punishment for non-citizens or recent citizens. This tendency to undesired appropriation might explain why much of the white feminist critique of the various ‘rapefugee’ discourses tends to focus on the need to address the ongoing sexual violence Western men commit against Western women. However, even when feminists rally behind clearly anti-racist and pro-women demands such as ‘Against sexualised violence and racism. Always. Anywhere. #ausnahmslos [“no excuses”]’¹⁵ they run the risk – as long as they do not make explicit their anti-imperialist grounding – of their politics being appropriated by dominant gender discourses and subjected to their divisive racialising and racist strategies. In addition, dominated groups and brown women, particularly those of lower social status and belonging to dominated groups, will not easily trust such universalising discourses, given their centuries-long appropriation for gender imperialism.

A parallel silencing of critical analysis has been occurring as regards the connection between the particularly hopeless legal status and asylum prospects of certain groups of non-citizens – in other words, the wider context – and the reportedly high crime rates amongst these groups. Any attempt to generate an informed debate about crime – by pointing to possible connections between class and citizenship status on the one hand and crime on the other – faces the immediate accusation that its aim is to ‘excuse’ some brown men’s violation of Western gender norms or ‘relativise’ their criminal behaviour.

The analysis presented above of globalising gender policies and their consequences for gender orders and gender policies on a global scale can help us to systematically unpack and counter these varieties of the ‘rapefugees not welcome’ sentiment and discourse *and* to overcome the impasses in which some of the counter-discourses have been trapped. Against this historical and global background it is easy to see that thinking and acting in terms of the varieties of the ‘rapefugees-not-welcome’ logic reproduces and deepens the false binary between white societies’ alleged commitment to women’s rights and brown societies’ and communities’ assumed inherent patriarchalism. The glimpses into the past and present of globalising gender policies I have provided above amply demonstrate that both this alleged binary and the alleged gender traditionalism of non-Western societies or cultures (among other things) have long been and continue to be co-produced by the unequal interaction between Western global expansionism and non-Western agency. Such traditionalism thus cannot be characterised

as an inherent or autochthonous characteristic of non-Western societies, and if brown immigrants carry it into or learn it in the West, this phenomenon cannot be defined or treated as a problem in which Western and globally dominant discourses and policies are not implicated. The fact that phenomena such as resistance to women's or LGBT emancipation and rights have been co-produced by the ongoing unequal globalisation of gender policy does not of course make any of these phenomena in any way more acceptable. Yet without systematically building the critique of this co-production and connection into our critique of these phenomena we unwillingly get drawn into the pro-imperialist discourse dominating the associated global struggle, even if we consider ourselves to be, among other things, anti-imperialists.

The move first of the 'Christian nations', then the 'family of nations', and now the 'international community', from the nineteenth-century anti-sati and anti-polygamy rhetoric through the rhetoric of gender equality in the twentieth century, to the rhetoric of Gender Studies and LGBT emancipation in the twenty-first has been co-motivated and co-produced from the moment of its origin to the present day by imperialist interest and involvement. Without this imperialist connection, the status of gender rights and gender equality as dominant discourses – but not realities – in the Western world and internationally, yet always imbued with the white Western superiority complex, might not even have been established or the pursuit of progressive gender policies might have encountered even more resistance. The systematic appropriation of some of the claims of women's, and now also LGBT, movements by dominant Western policies has been predicated on this ongoing imperialist connection. Feminism, insofar as it construed itself as being a part of Western civilisation, partook in this dynamic from the very beginning. In this sense it is – in both political and scholarly terms – inappropriate to presuppose that progressive gender policies have been politically neutral with regard to other questions, since these values and policies for centuries have, more often than not, signified global hegemonic policies and the politics of global inequality. Therefore, whenever we talk about these values without distancing ourselves from this imperial connection, we unwillingly acquiesce in these ongoing politics of global inequality.

These analytical insights highlight long-term and ongoing patterns of the imperialism of globalising gender policies and thus help us draw relevant conclusions for relating to and challenging the present situation when the alleged binary between white and brown gender orders plays out in the discourse on the alleged general tendency of brown male immigrants to misbehave in relation to white women. How, then, can we summarise

the elements of a critique of the current invocation of gender in relation to the 'refugee crisis' in Europe, a critique solidly built on left-wing and anti-imperialist foundations and a pro-women- and pro-LGBT-liberation perspective?

In my view, opposition to imperial/globalising gender policies must go beyond the critique of the 'instrumentalisation' by gender imperialism of gender equality and progressive gender norms. This kind of critique essentially leaves scant room for pursuing progressive gender policies since it tends to conflate, or at least can be alleged to conflate, progressive gender policies with imperialism. In addition, it tends to conceptually and politically privilege the anti-imperial element of resisting gender imperialism over the dedication to progressive gender policies which must be part of any progressive policy of resisting gender imperialism.

We must demand that gender policies take on an inclusive character. Only then can they resist the separation of progressive gender norms and policies from larger processes of social, material and cultural transformation. Such separation and the related objectification and narrow definition of women's rights are a condition sine qua non of the imperial type of globalising gender policies. This can be avoided if the anti-imperial element of resisting gender imperialism is always made explicit as one indispensable element of any truly inclusive gender policy. None of these elements of such an inclusive gender policy ought to be conceptually or politically privileged, and inclusive gender policies always must make sure to underline their commitment to each of these elements, since otherwise their pro-woman and anti-racist stance can easily be appropriated into the dominant imperialist racist and binary discourse.

Last but not least, I believe that the voices and struggles of brown women must take centre stage in the fight against sexualised violence and other forms of gender oppression. They live at the intersection between brown hierarchical gender orders, feminism dominated by white women, and white patriarchal and/or imperial interest. Therefore, without their liberation there is no liberation. The documentation *In Our Own Words. Refugee Women in Germany Tell Their Stories*¹⁶ documents some of these voices and struggles.

NOTES

- 1 'Crises and Victims. A Workshop on Refugees, Migrants and Anti-refugee Discourses in a New Way', Budapest, 26/27 February 2016, organised by *Eszmélet. Quarterly Journal for Social Critique*, the Karl Polányi Center for Global Social Studies, and the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation. This text retains the character of the oral presentation; a degree of simplification is unavoidable given the large scope and time-span of globalising

gender policies covered. I use inverted commas to signal distance from a number of terms on their first use, but for the sake of readability omit them in subsequent recurrences.

- 2 Numerous examples can be found in Lewis Hertslet (ed.), *A Complete Collection of the Treaties and Conventions at Present Subsisting Between Britain and Foreign Powers (and of the Laws, Decrees, and Orders in Council, Concerning the Same); So Far as They Relate to Commerce and Navigation; To the Repression and Abolition of the Slave Trade; And to the Privileges and Interests of the Subjects of the High Contracting Parties*, 31 vols, London: Butterworth, 1820–1925; here Hertslet, vol. 7, 1850, pp. 818–9.
- 3 The ‘Engagement’ is reprinted in Hertslet, vol. 8, 1851, pp. 42–3; and Ralph A. Austen and Jonathan Derrick, *Middlemen of the Cameroons Rivers: the Duala and their Hinterland, c. 1600–c. 1960*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 66.
- 4 Gerrit W. Gong, *The Standard of ‘Civilization’ in International Society*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984, pp. 14–5, 19–20.
- 5 Clare Midgley, ‘Female emancipation in an imperial frame: English women and the campaign against sati (widow burning) in India, 1813–30’, *Women’s History Review* 9 (2000) 1, pp. 95–121; Jörg Fisch, *Burning Women. A Global History of Widow Sacrifice from Ancient Times to the Present*, London: Seagull Books, 2005.
- 6 Clare Midgley, ‘Anti-slavery and the Roots of “Imperial Feminism”’, Clare Midgley (ed.), *Gender and Imperialism*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998, pp. 161–79.
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- 9 Sara Meger, ‘The Fetishization of Sexual Violence in International Security’, *International Studies Quarterly* 60 (2016) 1, pp. 149–59.
- 10 Fisch, *Burning Women*, p. 435.
- 11 Quoted in Fisch, *Burning Women*, p. 437.
- 12 This is Watenpaugh’s wording, p. 1333.
- 13 *Dabiq* 7, pp. 42–3. My attention has been drawn to this journal and its relevance for the present text by Lukas Huber.
- 14 Susan Zimmermann, ‘The Institutionalization of Women and Gender Studies in Higher Education in Central and Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union: Asymmetric Politics and the Regional-Transnational Configuration’, *East-Central Europe/L’Europe du Centre-Est: Eine wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift*, 34–35 (2007–2008) part 1–2, pp. 131–60.
- 15 <http://ausnahmslos.org/english>, and <http://ausnahmslos.org/mitzeichnerinnen>.
- 16 <<https://iwspace.wordpress.com/in-our-own-words/>>.

Voters – Right-Wing Appeals and the Left

Right-Wing Populism: An Answer to the Crisis of Democratic Capitalism¹

Bernhard Müller

In broad areas of Europe as well as in North America, right-wing populist movements and parties have a substantial following and have chalked up impressive electoral successes. In Germany too, which had long been an exception, this trend has now set in. In Germany and Europe in general, right-wing populist movements are characterised by four central hallmarks:

- They gather together and articulate the fear and resentment present in broad layers of the population that are primarily based on future loss of status but also on feelings of cultural insecurity.²
- Right-wing populism sees the indigenous population as the victim in relation to foreigners (immigrants, refugees).
- Invoking the people, the modern right radically dissociates itself from the 'ruling political class', to which it attributes a policy of a creeping population exchange.
- The right-wing populist movements call for the establishment of an authoritarian charismatically led 'citizens'-democracy'.

The basis of its political mobilisation are anti-system/anti-establishment feelings. From Copenhagen to Rome, from Paris to Budapest, Europe's right-wing populism is essentially made up of these constant ingredients: xenophobia in general, Islamophobia in particular, as well as a negative stance towards the EU and Europe as a whole, tied to a deep-seated scepticism or even aggressive rejection of the political class.

Right-wing populist criticism of the establishment and resentment

The present mistrust many voters have of the serve-yourself mentality of the political class is leading to a harsh criticism of this class. The corruption and self-referentiality of many political protagonists is connected to the disillusion over proclaimed but unfulfilled ideological goals and promises of

justice – first of the state, then of the market.

The social base for right-wing populism is a historically specific resentment; that is, a feeling of continued powerlessness in the face of suffered injustice and disadvantage underlies the attitudes and actions. It is literally a ‘re-sentiment’, a simple ‘re-feeling’ of a once suffered injury, a defeat, a structural degradation, etc. With all its destructive consequences – the self-disempowerment of the nation-states through the abandonment of state regulation of the globalised financial markets – neoliberal globalisation of the last decades creates the basis for the emergence and spread of social inequality, which is translated into an anti-state, anti-establishment resentment. The resentment is not a spontaneous reflex in reaction to a suffered injustice. The sense of humiliation enables the manifestation and manipulation of ethnocentric-xenophobic, nationalist or anti-Semitic ideological elements and political-psychological needs. These range over issues that are consciously linked to each other, such as immigration, criminality, globalisation, internal security, and national identity.

According to Bourdieu,³ there is no resentment against the lower social class fractions.⁴ The *petit bourgeois*, the type that represents the lower middle stratum, exhibits resentment directed exclusively towards the upper strata while towards the lower strata he only displays contempt. Since upward mobility is permanently threatened from all possible sides, the *petit bourgeois*, always on his/her guard against social abasement and humiliation, cautiously takes cover and from this position ogles those above.

Resentment forges ahead in racist exclusion after the aggravation of social inequality is understood as the consequence of political-social action. Following Bourdieu we can grasp resentment as a reaction to a fundamental violation of social recognition. There is no reason to believe that there is no longer now any resentment on the part of the powerless, downwardly mobile lower middle class and the lower social strata.⁵

The people

A characteristic of right-wing populism is the gesture of a bold ‘breaking of taboos’, that is, dramatising oneself as a political protagonist who is doing away with the moderating language and forms of communication of liberals in parliamentary democracies. This self-staging has a good deal of connection to conspiracy theories. In terms of substance and ideology, right-wing populism exists in a grey area between right-wing extremism and national-conservative tendencies. In the end, racist resentment results in authoritarian aggression against the scapegoats – in the past the Jews, today the refugees from the Islamic cultural areas.

Right-wing populism's credo is: 'We are the people!' In contrast to will formation in democratic societies with their pluralist consensus methods shaped by conflicting interests, right-wing populists assert a direct access to, or identity with, the community of the people, which does not exist as a collection of individuals but as a mystical construction beyond all traditional forms of the articulation of interest. Against politics and the media, the expectation is formulated of following the will 'of the people'. The stated objective of the right-wing populists is the establishment of forms of direct democracy through which this popular will can be uninterruptedly realised.

Foreigners or scapegoats – Germany

Many studies, especially those by the Heitmeyer group in Bielefeld, have demonstrated in recent decades that there has long been a big potential in Germany for a right-wing populist party. Despite this, and in contrast to other European countries, these attitudes remained for a long time without political form. The change in the structure of everyday consciousness, to which right-wing populists react and which they instrumentalise, is also documented in the new study by Decker, Kiess, and Brähler.⁶ While anti-Semitism and general xenophobia are on the decline, prejudices against Muslims, Sinti, and Roma, but also against refugees, are increasingly widespread. Thus ca. 50% of those questioned agreed with the statement: 'Because of the many Muslims here I sometimes feel like a foreigner in my own country.' 80% even feel: 'In considering asylum requests the state should not be generous.'

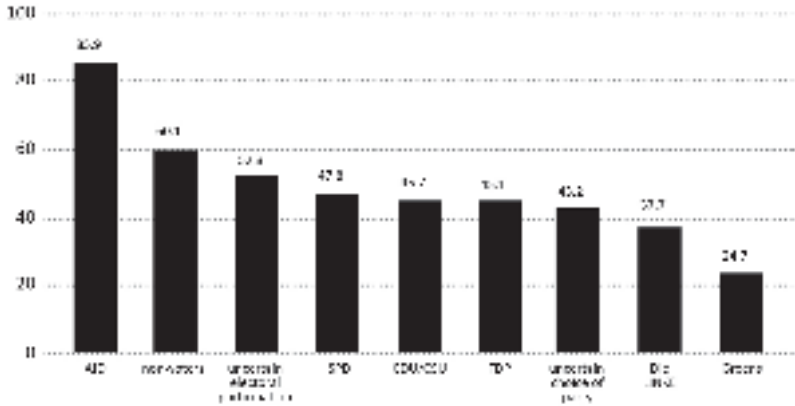
Indeed, xenophobia has, 'aside from a slight stagnation at times from 2002 to 2014, continually diminished, but in turn hatred is now particularly concentrated against certain groups. Thus in 2014 we had to confirm that Muslims, asylum-seekers, Sinti, and Roma are much more strongly affected by prejudices against them than the whole group of immigrants had previously experienced'.⁷ At the same time, endorsement of an anti-democratic, authoritarian politics and the acceptance of violence or the readiness to deploy violence oneself – for example in enforcing one's own interests or to assert oneself 'against foreigners' – is on the rise.

This denigration of Muslims, Sinti and Roma, and asylum-seekers, but also of homosexuals, became still more intense in 2016. The declining or stagnating hostility towards immigrants has to do with changes in the structure of everyday consciousness, which were not covered by the Leipzig right-wing-extremism questionnaire. These changes were also acknowledged by the Leipzig researchers. 'The big problem is that the groups of people against which authoritarian aggression is directed are very variable. At the moment

we are focusing strongly on Muslims, but a couple of years ago it was Turks which attracted this hatred and, if we go back further in the history of West Germany, Italians.⁸⁸ Islamophobia is essentially ‘the same racism in new bottles’.

Graph 1: ‘Too many Muslims’

Agreement with the statement ‘too many Muslims sometimes feel themselves in my own country’ and party preferences (%)



Source: Schäfers, C., *Wahlen 2016*, p. 62

The emergence of factors like xenophobia or Islamophobia in everyday consciousness shows that right-wing extreme attitudes today exhibit a completely specific expression. Xenophobia in the sense of competition is closely related to the migratory movements of recent decades and is particularly dependent, on the one hand, on the economic situation and resulting feelings of insecurity in society and, on the other, on the legitimate demands of immigrants. Islamophobia, that is, fear of the large number of immigrant Muslims and/or of their religious practice in general or in the specific social space of one’s own city neighbourhood, is a phenomenon of recent date. It has been decidedly strengthened once again by movements of refugees in recent years.

On the whole, a change in the form of racism can be observed, in which ‘biological racism’ is receding but a culturally based racism is taking its place, as in the racism directed at Muslims. However, the discrimination against one particular group, the Roma, has remained unchanged. While traditional prejudices, because of the battle that has been waged against discrimination and racism, are in part receding, new ones are emerging, especially around the question of the ‘incompatibility’ of western societies with Islam. Several factors converge in the case of Islamophobia, since it involves at once origin, religion, colonial history, and frequently also social discrimination.

Therefore right-wing populist parties like the AfD, alongside the uncouth

criticism of the political class, are above all anti-Islam and against the increased refugee flows as well as asylum policy, which is at the centre of their political programmes. The modernised new right organisations distance themselves from traditional right-wing extremism and its core elements and in so doing are gaining increasing social acceptance, that is, are becoming de-demonised. The confrontations within the Front National or within the AfD around anti-Semitism are examples.

Modern right-wing populism and the extreme right

Regardless of whether we are speaking of the Front National, UKIP, the Lega Nord, the FPÖ, or the AfD, the truth is that right-wing populist parties are gaining influence in Europe. The parties of the bourgeois camp and of European social democracy, which have shaped society and its power relations, have been crippled. The symptoms are unequivocal: conceptual weakness, growing helplessness in managing defects within these parties, and a growing amalgam of the drive towards self-enrichment as well as overt corruption. The party apparatuses prove to be closed systems with stale leadership figures who are losing contact with the social base as a result of the growing social divisions. Neither of the two party families have convincing answers to the weakening economic growth, the growing gap in the distribution of wealth and the decline of public infrastructure.

The club of right-wing parties is throwing democratic parties and governments into a panic, especially as the borderline between right-wing populism and right-wing radicalism is rapidly becoming blurred. However different their programmes may be, the struggle against the opponents is welding the right together; it is fighting against Islam and globalisation, against the lying press, and gender rhetoric; its main enemy is the European Union and the political elites who betray the people.

The supporters of right-wing populist organisations exhibit a tendency to authoritarian attitudes, which result in the vilification of minorities. The perception of the crass social inequality and the collapse of previous concepts against injustice are leading to political demands to defend the national and welfare state against its 'abuse' and to a political battle against 'social dumping'.

Right-wing populist parties are markedly critical of or hostile to the EU. They especially criticise the increasing internationalisation and centralisation of political decision-making processes in Europe as well as an excessive bureaucracy. In this they see a decoupling of political processes, the loss of contact with the 'real world' or the everyday life of the population.

The success of right-wing populist parties depends on a tight political

organisation and a charismatic top leadership. The resonance of these parties feeds on the sharp distance they maintain from the traditional political class and elite when they assert that ‘the powers that be’ only have their own material-financial interests in mind and that therefore incompetence and more or less overt corruption have become everyday phenomena. At least indirectly the battle is for a complete change of political representation.

The social basis of right-wing populism

Since the end of the Cold War the global capitalist economy has fundamentally changed. Since the 1970s, with the decline of the USA and the rise of the People’s Republic of China, the structure of global value creation and the post-war class compromise (‘post-war settlement’) have been dissolved. Hundreds of millions of people in Asia have been drawn into the global division of labour; within a single generation China has become the workbench of the world and the world’s leading exporter. The international Bretton Woods system and the mixed economy have been replaced by neoliberalism and deregulation shaped by market forces and by a democracy brought into line with the market. As a result of the crises and the growing world disorder, the hegemonic role of the USA as a world superpower has been weakened.

The contradictions and crises have made the promise of a neoliberal revitalisation of capitalism look increasingly ridiculous; falling economic growth, high public and private debt, low-interest policy, the spread of ‘failed states’, and growing social inequities (wealthy elites versus the endangered status of the majorities of populations) raise questions of the future of ‘democratic capitalism’. The collapse of neoliberalism creates a space for culture wars, for example coping with immigration, sexual preferences, same-sex partnerships, etc., which accompany the loss of control of politics in the face of social development and fill the growing gaps in the political discourse. Meanwhile, in almost all democratic countries there are right-wing populist parties or movements that can jump over the entrance barriers to the political arenas, even trigger a deformation of democratic institutions, and endanger the governing capacities and future viability of democratic states.

In Germany, the disillusion at the welfare state configuration of the ‘Berlin Republic’ and at political inaction has for a long time now led to a tendency to decouple from political will formation. Especially within the lower income strata – with low income, greater proportion of social transfers, lack of access to education, etc., precarious work conditions – electoral participation is extremely low.

The mobilisation of previous non-voters in Germany and elsewhere

In the state parliament elections in Germany in 2016 there was a clear rise in electoral participation. It was by far the AfD that was able to win over the most vote of previous non-voters. A central motive for the voting choices of previous non-voters and AfD supporters is refugee and immigration policy. The governing coalitions of the federal states of recent years have seen through a neoliberal consolidation policy – the realisation of budget surpluses was more important to them than an improvement in the working and living conditions of the population. The social democrats and the CDU were hoping there would be recognition of previous progress against underdevelopment and disadvantaging; the forces of opposition – Die LINKE and the Greens – criticised, it is true, the growing disparities but the alternatives they offered were too bland. The conspicuous programmatic weaknesses of the traditional and established parties could not impede the landslide for the right-wing populists – fundamentally because their political communication did not take account of the attitude based on emotions or resentments.

The assumption that prejudices, resentments, and misunderstandings could be countered through information belongs to the realm of myth. What is important to people with prejudices is to have those prejudices confirmed. Prejudices are orientation marks and signposts within a complex world, which is why people are happy to hold on to them, especially when they offer the advantage of explaining the world without contradictions. Finally, it is careless to think that the deep-seated resentment of those who believe that the refugees or Islam are the cause of the miserable distribution ratios and growing world disorder can be countered with mere alternative interpretations and media attention.

Here we see repeated the interesting phenomenon that right-wing populism is basically strong in relatively well-off societies of Europe, for example in Switzerland, in Austria, in Denmark, and in the Netherlands. None of these are crisis or catastrophe areas but countries that (still) function relatively well, but where people have the feeling that they have lost something through a change of the political order or through the loss of democratic control. What then motivates so many citizens to give their votes and thus political mandates to unknown and inexperienced candidates? The political landslide in the Berlin Republic can be described and summarised as follows:

- The AfD sees and presents itself as a counter-voice to the ‘old parties’. In relation to the radical rejection of the political establishments

and the media (the ‘lying press’) the actual programme of the AfD recedes into the background. The party itself is developing and changing its programme; its market-radical, neoliberal demands and rationales are losing importance. For the greater part of voters and AfD supporters its programmatic components are unknown. They are satisfied with the public image that is circulating: being against immigration, against Islam, and against the EU.

- The voters cannot be influenced by the fact that the party leadership is involved in fierce conflicts over its further political course, and the whole leadership is manifestly unwilling or finds it difficult to accomplish clear distancing and exclusion vis-à-vis right-wing extreme contents and organisations.
- The unleashing of resentment also means that right-wing populist outlooks and voter results have never been less ostracised than they are now.
- Since the clear expansion of the movement of asylum-seeking citizens towards Germany in late summer of 2015, the AfD has aimed the emphasis of their euro and Europe criticism towards asylum policy and above all towards a line drawn against immigrants from Islamic countries. It is relying on fears and prejudices in large parts of the population that are sceptical of or against immigration. The AfD promotes and reinforces a one-sided and negative image of Islam. In addition, the AfD caters to a clientele that wants to enforce the traditional family model as a societal norm.
- The particular set of issues around asylum-seekers and immigration has diminished in importance in the recent months of this year only in terms of numbers. In comparison to 2015, since spring of 2016 there has been a sharp decline in refugee immigration towards Germany. Accommodating and integrating the refugees in Germany is doubtless a major social challenge, but it is impossible to speak of ‘overburdening’, not to mention ‘loss of control’.

In a current poll 63 per cent of Germans feel that the current refugee policy is responsible for the AfD’s success. However, a glance at the Europe-wide political shift to the right suggests the thesis that the refugee question is only an accompanying symptom, not the fundamental cause of the political landslide in favour of right-wing populism.

The interconnection between deep-seated disillusionment over social injustice and prejudices towards foreigners, especially towards countries strongly characterised by Islam, is seldom recognised.

The erosion of the lower middle stratum

The often advanced hypothesis that it is above all the lowest social stratum that is responsible for the political system's massive loss of legitimacy is empirically and theoretically dubious. The issue is more complicated; the lower social layer is also disillusioned by the establishment, but it does not expect anything better from elections. What is true throughout Europe is that the more precarious the social conditions of life are the lower electoral participation is. It follows from this that growing regional and social differences lead to political inequality. The more precarious the conditions of life are in a city neighbourhood the fewer people go to the polls.

The conclusion is that the declining voter participation in Europe is the expression of an increasingly unequal voter participation behind which there is a social division of the electorate. Europe's political system is based on a deep social division, and the democratic formation of will is becoming the ever more exclusive affair of citizens from the middle and upper social milieu of societies, while the socially weaker milieus remain clearly underrepresented. The results of long-term studies in western democracies show on the whole that with social inequality there is a growth of political inequality, first of all in the sense of unequal participation. The result is a 'functional chain made of growing social inequality, unequal political participation, and finally decisions in favour of the politically active [...], as a result of which the non-participants are disadvantaged'.⁹

For decades now the social middle stratum has been under pressure from socio-economic tendencies and is complaining about insufficient socio-political cushioning. It is especially the lower middle stratum that translates this frustration into right-wing moods and political protest. However, in the course of its development, the social base of right-wing populism has been changing and expanding; it is becoming a movement bringing together disparate elements, in which parts of the lower stratum and the upper social strata come up against each other. This kind of thing is all the more successful when there can be a 'de-demonisation' of parties or movements, especially through a distancing from right-wing extremism. Then right-wing populist parties or movements can also exercise a power of attraction amongst further social strata, but its central pillar remains the lower middle stratum.

In Germany, for example, that AfD supporters do not overwhelmingly come from precarious situations is corroborated by empirical surveys:¹⁰ 79% of AfD supporters saw their economic situation as good to very good – the average of the 1,026 people 18 years old or more questioned was 76%. The negative attitude towards immigration is clear: 99% of AfD sympathisers are less or not at all happy with Federal Chancellor Angela Merkel's asylum and

refugee policy

In sum, right-wing populism is not a movement of the poor but above all a movement of the lower middle stratum in prosperous capitalist societies. In this respect, right-wing populism attempts a battle for the 'lost paradise'.

Graph 2: Structure of AFD's Constituency According to Social Groups
in per cent

	4 th quartal 2013	4 th quartal 2014	4 th quartal 2015	1 st quartal 2016
Education				
low	37	33	31	28
middle	35	51	57	55
high	28	16	12	17
Labour status				
employed	56	58	61	63
unemployed	5	4	3	3
retiring/pensioner	20	26	28	27
other	19	12	6	7
Occupational category				
worker	18	20	23	26
employee	52	58	56	53
official	6	5	6	7
Self-employed	24	17	15	14

Source: <http://www.afd.fr>, 2016

People do not vote for populist parties because they are happy. They are unhappy with the way things are going. This has to do with their feeling that they are no longer represented politically, that the established parties do not represent them. However, they also believe that it is possible to keep the system working.

Since the mid-1990s, 'the economic basis of the middle strata has been crumbling. In primary distribution, the households with a middle-level market income as a percentage of the total households dropped a good 8 percentage points, from 56.4% in 1992 to 48% in 2013. Although the welfare state could still prevent the social descent of many middle-stratum households it could no longer completely compensate the unequal primary distribution. In secondary distribution as well, that is, after taxes, social security contributions, and social transfers, the share of the middle strata shrank from 83% in 2000 to 78% in 2013'.¹¹

Opinion polls and analyses of speeches, flyers, and posters of right-wing populist parties make it clear that their potential lies in the bourgeois, well-heeled middle strata. Here the propaganda connects with the prejudices of many citizens against immigration and with their alleged prerogatives as natives, but also with authoritarian notions of security in terms of penalties for breaches of norms. '[...] a good 30 per cent of Germans we questioned

exhibit a so-called economic orientation. They compute groups according to their supposed costs and benefits; they think for example that we cannot afford any more losers. A classic bourgeois understanding of democracy, however, is oriented to the common good and people's needs and not only to their usefulness. But, socially and politically, performance justice has prevailed against needs justice.¹²

The AfD – like the other right-wing populist parties in Europe – is only the symptom of an underlying problem. This problem is that about 80 per cent of the population are unhappy with the establishment.

Suppressing their strong-willed voices or ridiculing them does not make people change their minds.

In order to have sustained success, populist parties, starting with their articulation of current protest moods, also have to base themselves on political goals. The most important point of reference of all right-wing populist parties is the deep disillusionment with the current system of political will formation. The most substantial distinction for populists is that of corrupt and incapable elites versus the growing problems of the 'good-hearted' majority of the population.

The right-wing populist parties have had the most success in their respective countries especially with three political issues:

- A partly deep-seated contempt for the political classes or economic-political elites;
- The rejection of the European Union and the austerity policy implemented up to now;
- The demand to seal off national social systems from immigrants, refugees, as well as from 'those who shirk work'.

How can right-wing populism be countered in Europe?

As we have said, it is not possible to work against a widespread resentment and effect change simply through enlightenment – through reason.

If one wants to reach the voters in their rage and hatred of the political establishment and the refugees, then one must first make clear what the demands are, for example for justice and recognition, that stand behind the opposition to the free-trade agreement and against open doors for refugees. Only knowledge and communication around the socio-economic bases of the loss people feel and their fear of downward mobility can take apart the connection between developmental tendencies of society, failure to address problems politically, and emotional reactions.

In the course of globalisation broad strata of the population feel like losers. The neoliberal political establishment has intensified the social division

through deregulation, so that, out of resentment, rage at both the elite and ‘new’ scapegoats has been triggered. The experience of discrimination and political reinforcement is as a rule not taken seriously. The feeling of non-recognition and discrimination can only be countered by taking up the causes of the injury. The politicians would have first to accept that the social division, and thus social discrimination, exists. To listen to the politicians of the established parties in recent years – nationally and Europe-wide – one would think that globalisation, European unification, the common market, and a society that has become more diverse has only brought advantages to everyone. This history of success disregards many people; it contradicts the life experience of a part of Europe’s populations.

‘Successful’ communication has therefore to take the basis of the resentment seriously; it would have to present a politics of pushing back the social division and injustice and could thus oppose another logic to the racist, nationalist interpretation. This political agenda, in connection with a communication strategy to strip the right-wing populists of their uniqueness, could make it hard for them to portray themselves as the only political counterpart of these population groups against the establishment.

Indeed, there is no automatism. Fear of the loss of one’s status does not ‘necessarily’ lead to an attitude full of resentment. But when large parts of the electorate give free rein to their resentment against foreigners, then confronting, distancing, and ostracising these right-wing groups can only be truly and lastingly successful if the causes of the fear of lost status are addressed. We should give back hope to the insecure citizens for a restoration and further development of the welfare state. This would require self-criticism from the established political parties.

LITERATURE

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NOTES

- 1 For an expanded version of this article see Joachim Bischoff and Bernhard Müller, 'Moderne Rechte und die Krise des demokratischen Kapitalismus', Supplement, *Sozialismus* 2, 2016.
- 2 Ronald Inghart and Pippa Norris (see Bibliography) have proposed that economic insecurity is less of an explanatory fact than cultural backlash. According to this thesis, the support for populism is a reaction of the once predominant sectors to a value shift that threatens their status. The position they put forward is that antipathy to the elites has its origin primarily in resentments based on anxieties following growing social inequality. However, cultural resentments (such as resistance to gender practices, family values, etc.) play a role here too.
- 3 Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991. , Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991. For Bourdieu resentment is not exclusively connected to a specific stratum or class – to the middle class here – but designates a specific relation with social space (Bourdieu, *Language*, German edition, p. 47). Bourdieu even interprets student revolts as the resentful grumbling of those who have not been given access to the material honey-pot, as 'the disingenuousness of an ambiguous revolutionary attitude that in the end is fed by the resentment at the condition that appears as declassing in the face of the imagined expectations' (Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, Cambridge, MA : Harvard University Press, 1984 – quoted from German edition: *Die feinen Unterschiede. Kritik der gesellschaftlichen Urteilskraft*, Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1982, p. 260).
- 4 Bourdieu, *Language*.
- 5 While the old petite bourgeoisie is the typical carrier of resentment, the situation is far more complicated in the case of the new petite bourgeoisie (and its related professions). As Bourdieu conceded, every individual in this new stratum, 'who has to invent a new lifestyle, especially for his/her private life, and redefine his/her social location', is forced to locate him/herself in the social arena anew (Bourdieu, *Distinction*, p. 564 in the German edition).
- 6 Oliver Decker, Johannes Kiess, and Elmar Brähler (eds.), *Die enthemmte Mitte. Autoritäre und rechtsextreme Einstellung in Deutschland, Die Leipziger 'Mitte'-Studie*, 2016, <https://www.otto-brenner-stiftung.de/fileadmin/user_data/stiftung/Aktuelles/Mitte_Studie/Die_enthemmte_Mitte_Pra__sentation_PK.pdf>.
- 7 Decker et al., *Die enthemmte Mitte*.
- 8 Decker et al., *Die enthemmte Mitte*.
- 9 Arnim Schäfer, *Der Verlust politischer Gleichheit. Warum die sinkende Wahlbeteiligung der Demokratie schadet*, Frankfurt a.M.: Campus, 2015, p. 88.
- 10 See for example the Infratest survey commissioned by the magazine *Der Spiegel*, March 2016; and Renate Köcher, 'Die Volksparteien sind noch nicht am Ende', Allensbach-Analyse, in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 20 April 2016.
- 11 Gerhard Bosch and Thorsten Kalina, 'Mittelschichten in Deutschland – unter Druck', *Sozialismus* 2/2016.
- 12 Andreas Zick, 'Wir dürfen unsere Toleranz nicht überschätzen', Interview *Tagesspiegel*, 21 May 2014.

Voter Abstention as Class Electoral Behaviour – and the Weakness of Left Approaches

Horst Kahrs

In almost all states of the European Union voter participation in local, regional, national, and European elections is declining – at least in the countries without compulsory voting.¹ For some years now there has been talk of ‘precarious elections’ and of a ‘socially divided democracy’.² For more than a decade in Germany the class behaviour of workers has not been expressed in an above-average probability of voting for the Social Democratic Party (SPD) but in a 50 per cent probability or more of not going to vote at all.³

I

There is no ‘party of non-voters’. It is an invention of political discourse intended to further delegitimise parties, parliaments, and democratic institutions within the neoliberal order in relation to economic forces and market processes. Voter abstention is seen as an expression of disenchantment and turning away from the party system and parliamentary-representative democracy. However, voter abstention is in fact socially and politically heterogeneous; it has many different motives and also diverse political party preferences.

Voter abstention can be tactical behaviour. In every election parties lose and win votes to and from non-voters. In the last Bundestag election of 2013 44% of the increased votes of the CDU/CSU came from former non-voters.⁴ These ‘tactical non-voters’ decide from one election to the next whether they will participate. Their behaviour is comparable to that of swing voters.

These ‘tactical non-voters’ become ‘notorious non-voters’ if they have not participated in more than two elections. They comprise the group that most often confesses to abstention when polled. They have actively turned

away from the political system and are basically distributed throughout all social strata – the economically successful members of the upper social strata, who do ‘not need politics’ and are not interested in the commonwealth, as well as those who have a cumulative history of disappointment, alienation, and a conscious aversion to politics over years, even over generations. About 60% of these long-term non-voters come from the two lowest income fifths and 40% from the three highest.⁵ Alongside income, the level of formal education is an important indicator. People with low income and people with low- to middle-level formal education have a higher probability of not going to the polls than people with higher incomes and higher educational levels.⁶

This involves collective rather than individual decisions. Armin Schäfer’s studies show that an unemployed person who lives within a context of high voter participation will be much more likely to vote than would an unemployed or low-income person living in a neighbourhood with a low level of voter participation. The everyday living environment and the level of understanding of society, politics, the parties, and one’s own significance and position play a decisive role in this. The ‘social split within democracy’ is strongly coloured by social space, with participation in ‘precarious’ and ‘well-off’ neighbourhoods of a city differing by as much as 40%.

Along with the neighbours, family origin plays a role in shaping class electoral behaviour. The number of those who see the right to vote as a civic duty has been declining markedly amongst younger people for two generations now. If in 1983 82% of 21- to 25-year-olds still participated in the Bundestag election only 60% of them still did so in 2013. Of 60- to 70-year-olds eligible to vote 80% went to the polls in 2013 while almost 93% still did so in 1983. Some analyses see a declining interest in politics amongst the younger generation, others a diminishing overlap between the issues of interest to younger people and those of the political party establishments. Common to all, however, is the finding that non-voting amongst younger citizens with lower-level secondary school qualifications is twice as frequent as it is amongst those with higher-level secondary school qualifications and that there is a strong correlation with the experiences of their parents. Where parents do not vote the probability of their children doing likewise is very high.

A second group of ‘tactical’ voters draws a distinction between elections of the first-order and second- (and third-order) elections. Voter participation in Bundestag elections is by now 10 to 15% above participation in federal state parliament elections, and these in turn are usually higher than participation in municipal and European Parliament elections. A good sixth of eligible

voters feel it is worth voting only in Bundestag elections. These levels of participation are heavily influenced by collective experiences of how important specific institutional levels are for people's life worlds.⁷

In North Rhine-Westphalia the average participation (75%) in municipal elections from 1946 to 1966 was higher than in state parliament elections (73%) (while in Bundestag elections it was 86%). Starting in 1969 participation in municipal elections declined while participation in state parliament and Bundestag elections rose. From 1984 participation in municipal elections went down but only slightly, while participation in state parliament and Bundestag elections declined sharply. From 1999 a dramatic drop can be observed in municipal elections (53%) and state parliament elections (a bare 60% average) with a somewhat smaller drop in Bundestag elections (75%). Why did participation in municipal elections already decline when it was still rising in state parliament and Bundestag elections? Why does it decline differently at different institutional levels?

II

A possible answer is that participation reflects different class experiences. In the first 20 years of the Federal Republic policy fields important for dealing with everyday life were overwhelmingly located in the municipal area: residential housing undertakings, public utilities, the integration of immigrants ('displaced persons'), the construction of local infrastructure in the context of locally based large industry. In the second half of the 1960s, these tasks were largely fulfilled; other tasks, located at the federal state level, became more important (educational policy, school and university planning, countryside and space planning). A first wave of district and administrative reforms led to the withdrawal of democratic institutions from local everyday life, a series of tasks were de-municipalised. At the same time, the promise of national democratisation, realised for example with the law on co-determination in enterprises, the policy of welfare-state inclusion and the resultant opportunities for upward social mobility drew more eligible voters to the polls. Welfare state inclusion and social insurance underlined the role of democracy and politics.

In the 1980s the neoconservative counteroffensive gained traction. A new mass unemployment grew, public debt increased, and the social security contribution ratio was publically discussed as being not sustainable. There was much talk of the new international division of labour and the exodus of capital to low-wage countries. In the lost battle for the maintenance of the steel industry and of large-scale industry in the Ruhr in general a new experience came to a head in many places, for example in West Germany's

textile and shipyard industries. Regional and national policy cannot and does not want to arrest the closing of collieries and steel factories. The democratic and welfare-state institutions are not halting the devaluation of skill and downgrading of social position and income. Increasingly, the lower-level democratic institutions, municipalities, and states are declaring that they are powerless or are not the relevant authorities. It was during the 1980s that voter participation began to collapse as a first social stratum saw that politics cannot or does not want to offer protection against the negative market consequences of neoliberalism. At the same time, the triad liberalisation – deregulation – privatisation became widespread in political discourse: the primacy of the economy, a fundamental criticism of the state, and the image of man as homo oeconomicus created a strong bulwark against all demands for welfare-state protection. Politically, the Social Democrats then lost former big-city strongholds, while traditional voter milieus no longer went to the polls.

In the 1990s this deterioration was extended to eastern Europe. Education no longer led to good jobs and upward social mobility. Unemployment was reinterpreted from being a problem of social structure to being an individual problem. A growing segment of younger people experienced the de-industrialisation of the old world of skilled labour, as their parents had. The devalorisation of these years was addressed by a new Social Democratic promise of guaranteeing inclusion in the welfare state, for example through industrial and active labour-market policies. The red-green⁸ labour market policy of the early 2000s then struck welfare-state inclusion of all ‘employees’ out of the programme of the modernised SPD. It pointedly declared itself to no longer be responsible for it and reinforced the threat of welfare-state exclusion. This was followed in 2009 by the second deep drop in voter participation at the federal level.

The creeping withdrawal of democratic institutions from everyday social life, the growing shifting of political responsibility to distant institutions, or so-called ‘practical constraints’, as well as the declining real power to shape things, due to privatisation and debt, constitute the framework within which belief in the influence and importance of one’s own vote withers. Added to this is the fact that improvement of the material and socio-cultural situation is at the bottom of the agenda of those parties to which voters previously felt bound. Thus collective experiences arise that produce voter abstinence as class behaviour.

III

Up to about 1980, according to the Institut für Demoskopie Allensbach, the proportion of those who agreed that ‘everyone makes their own luck’ rose to more than 69% of those questioned. When the dismantling of welfare-state security began, the proportion of those who shared the view that some are on top and others on the bottom, and that under today’s conditions the latter cannot rise, increased from one quarter to 42% in 2013. With this, a sense of ‘class destiny’ took precedence for the first time in 60 years over the ‘performance/achievement principle’ (38%). This is ‘not a question of marginal but of massive changes in perception’.⁹ People’s growing sense of the imperviousness of society corresponds to their sense of having no democratic influence and of being neglected by politics and parties.

These collective experiences are unequally distributed socially, and this is also seen in the decline of participation. The higher the educational level, income, or social status, the more likely voter participation becomes. In the 2013 Bundestag election, 39% of non-voters came from the lowest income quintile with another 23% located in the fourth quintile, which means 62% from the lowest two income quintiles. On the other hand, only 19% of non-voters were located in the upper two income quintiles.¹⁰ In an investigation of 28 big cities in the last Bundestag election, Armin Schäfer and the Bertelsmann Stiftung have established a difference between the voting districts with the highest and the lowest electoral participation of almost 30 percentage points and concluded: the 2013 Bundestag election was ‘socially precarious’.¹¹

It is not the naked socio-economic data and situations that produce voter abstinence. Rather, in daily co-existence amongst unemployed and low-wage workers and immigrants and those who do not have the right to vote in city neighbourhoods with little public investment and neglected infrastructure, it arises from the way in which people in families, neighbourhoods, city areas, and milieus communicate with each other about these situations. The effect of co-habitation in such residential neighbourhoods doubles the social decoupling. Non-voting here is not individual behaviour but an at least implicitly collective activity. In addition, the electoral-campaign dynamic between parties and eligible voters is exacerbated in precarious neighbourhoods. Those who are hard to inspire to vote quickly fall to the margins of election campaigners’ attentions, and those whose interests would require another kind of income distribution policy threaten to become troublemakers instead of courted voter-citizens.¹²

IV

Those who explain growing voter abstention as constituting ‘parties’ or as ‘disenchantment with politics’ block what is essential from our view, that is, that social inequality grows into political inequality. What is decisive is not the level of voter participation but the unequal distribution among social classes, the disproportionately high degree of abstention in the lower social classes. It seems to be a kind of vicious circle: participation rests on the feeling of being an equal citizen. Historically, this consciousness grew because ‘social property’ (Robert Castels) was created in the form of guaranteed legal welfare-state entitlements (as the working-class counterpart to bourgeois ownership of land and assets). It formed a protective fence against direct economic dependency. As economic dependencies grew again, the basis for democratic participation disappeared. Defending welfare-state protections, however, would have required stronger voter participation, for only then could a majority be found for an alternative distribution policy. But when prospects for the latter seem hopeless there is still less motivation for participation because one’s own interests are the last to be addressed, if at all. Left majorities, left-reform or left-socialist politics can in the end only be based on the force of large numbers. A sustainable reform policy will have to set itself the task of inspiring a readiness for participation precisely amongst those for whom left reformism wants to effect an improvement in the name of social justice.

‘We might better understand “interest” as well as “disinterest” in politics’, Bourdieu wrote, ‘if we were in a position to recognise that the inclination to make use of a political “asset” (voting, “arguing politically”, or “pursuing politics”), is measured against the realisation of this asset, or, if you will, that apathy is just another expression for powerlessness.’¹³

This powerlessness has various facets: the feeling of not possessing sufficient expertise to be able to have a say; the feeling of not having the right to express one’s own opinion; or also the feeling of not having the requisite attributes of status in order to be able to act, decide, have a say, and vote in the political arena. Powerlessness is rooted, on the one hand, in the uneven distribution of specific political competences such as education, language, habitus, etc.; on the other hand, it is the result of a specific structure and quality of the political arena. The asset of having mastered a special, mostly academicised middle-class use of language; possessing a set of information and skills that enable one to judge and act politically, to have one’s say and make oneself understood; the asset of being able to deal with media intervention in the political arena as well as with the delegation of political decisions to alleged scientific experts and technocrats – these are just some of

the corner flags that define, limit, and segregate the political arena.

Added to this is the socially accepted and socially unequally distributed feeling of not being entitled to take part in the political process, for example among recipients of Hartz IV benefits. The expropriation of and alienation from the right to politics is at the same time rooted in feelings of powerlessness in the face of continual changes in one's own lifeworld, which through no fault of one's own occur in the name of higher powers such as 'international competitive position', 'growth', 'trust in the markets', or 'generational justice', all with the approval of politics. It is increasingly difficult to locate responsible authorities within democratic space, and consequently there is a lack of 'democratic resonance' (Hartmut Rosa).

A further aspect is the transformed self-conception and communication of parties. It is becoming continually clearer that they see themselves as vendors in a voter market, which is seen as something to research, in which voters become customers to which 'political-product' offers are made. In economic-democracy theory the customers make a purchase decision and pay with their vote. To the extent that politics is understood in this way by the voter-customers, disillusionment grows when the product is not delivered.

V

It will quickly become impossible to reverse what has grown as collective experience over two generations: the reciprocal reinforcement of social powerlessness, remaining silent politically, and the monopolisation of political discourse and action. In addition, a political actor has emerged in the form of right-wing populist parties in Europe, which are mobilising in the name of belonging to the people and the nation against the 'elites' and the 'party-cartel'. Up to now, the Alternative für Deutschland has not particularly counted as part of the group of notorious non-voters nor as part of the lower social strata, but it has begun to get above-average results amongst the working population with skills training – that is, in those social milieus that once stood at the centre of social democratic politics. Furthermore, opinion polls show that declared non-voters share anti-democratic, authoritarian, and xenophobic attitudes with the same high probability that supporters of right-wing populist parties do.¹⁴

Possible ends from which a left-democratic politics could untangle the knot are:

1. The struggle for a legitimate view of the social world, for its interpretation, and for the realisation of political conceptions in it: it makes a big difference if one looks at society and economy from the perspective of an owner of assets or that of a simple performer of services, a member of

the new much-prized ‘creative class’, or of the modern service proletariat; and the resultant notions of how a ‘good’ society would be shaped are consequently also very different. The distinguishability of legitimate world view must be won back. Only with common conceptions of the social division of the world can people take a side. Last year’s strikes in day-care centres and hospitals, at Amazon, and in the German postal service had strong features of a struggle for this ‘view of the social world’, for appreciation and recognition, for a sense of priorities in the social division of labour. They are waiting for an echo in political discourse and material and immaterial representation in the political arena.

2. Banish the economic model of politics from language and action! Progressive politics and parties develop projects that allow citizens to better shape their own life practices and appropriate social structures and institutions. This also involves, but is not limited to, questions of existential security, for only the ‘relief of pressure on life [allows] a restructuring of social space: the horizons are no longer restricted to the most immediate needs; space to move emerges’.¹⁵ Optimism and confidence in the possibilities of shaping one’s own life, not anxiety and pessimism, nourish the pleasure in change.

3. Strengthen local politics! In the end it is in local public spaces that the capacity and entitlement to be involved in politics is negotiated. This is where mutual recognition as being democratically equal has its basis in the interplay of social, public infrastructures, municipal economic enterprises, and locally present democratic institutions. Here it is possible to have experiences of ‘self-efficacy’. This is where the class-specific restrictions of the political arena can best be overcome, when it is really possible to ‘localise’ responsibilities and resources so that the confrontation over public affairs, over what is important for everyone, does not become a mock battle. ‘Political culture, without which there can be no long-term battle for the realisation of collective rights, is based on the recognition of reason and feeling, understanding and meaning in its practical context, and on coming up with concrete action for people in their everyday lives.’¹⁶

This road is long, difficult, and has uncertain prospects of success. It is difficult because the class character of voter abstention is completely expressed in terms of social space – neighbourhoods with a high abstention rate can be identified and described. Moreover, the difficulty is compounded by the great differences and boundaries between modern social underclasses, the only common element being the turn away from parties and the political system, and the experience of not being heard. There are exceptions everywhere where there are personalities in these geographic areas who are perceived as authentic and as entitled to articulate and represent experiences of the social

arena, and who have established their approachability and trustworthiness. But these personalities are continually becoming harder to find amongst the left.

NOTES

- 1 This article condenses the results of two bibliographic studies and frequently omits references, which can be located in these two studies: Horst Kahrs, *Abschied aus der Demokratie. Zum sozialen Klassencharakter der wachsenden Wahlenthaltung und der Preisgabe staatsbürgerlicher Rechte*, Berlin: Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung 2012, <<http://www.rosalux.de/publication/38897/abschied-aus-der-demokratie.html>> and Horst Kahrs, *Wahlenthaltung als Klassenwahlverhalten*, rls-paper, Berlin 2015, <<http://www.rosalux.de/publication/41620/wahlenthaltung-als-klassenwahlverhalten.html>>.
- 2 See various authors of the Bertelsmann-Stiftung in analyses since 2013 <www.wahlbeteiligung2013.de>.
- 3 See Armin Schäfer, *Der Verlust politischer Gleichheit. Warum die sinkende Wahlbeteiligung der Demokratie schadet*, Frankfurt/New York: Campus, 2015.
- 4 See Kahrs, *Wahlenthaltung als Klassenwahlverhalten*, pp. 12-13.
- 5 See Schäfer 2015.
- 6 Calculations for Germany and European countries can be found in Michael Kaeding/Stefan Haußner, *Gut bekannt und unerreich. Soziodemografisches Profil der Nichtwähler_innen*, Berlin: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2016.
- 7 There are exceptions, as in the most recent state parliament elections in 2016 in Germany. They were strongly informed by refugee policy, and the populist right-wing party Alternative für Deutschland highlighted them as a vote on Merkel's refugee policy.
- 8 Ed. note: red-green refers to social-democratic/Green governments.
- 9 Thomas Petersen, Dominik Hierlemann, Robert B. Vehrkamp, and Christopher Wratil, *Gespaltene Demokratie. Politische Partizipation und Demokratiezufriedenheit vor der Bundestagswahl 2013*, Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2013, p. 30.
- 10 See Schäfer 2015, p. 98.
- 11 Armin Schäfer, Robert Vehrkamp, and Jérémie Felix Gagné, *Prekäre Wahlen. Milieus und soziale Selektivität der Wahlbeteiligung bei der Bundestagswahl 2013*, Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2013, p. 10, <www.wahlbeteiligung2013.de>.
- 12 Schäfer 2015, p. 89
- 13 Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, Cambridge, MA : Harvard University Press, 1984 (quoted from German edition: *Die feinen Unterschiede. Kritik der gesellschaftlichen Urteilskraft*, Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1982, p. 632).
- 14 See Oliver Decker, Johannes Kiess, and Elmar Brähler, *Die enthemmte Mitte. Autoritäre und rechtsextreme Einstellung in Deutschland*, Gießen: Psychosozial Verlag, 2016.
- 15 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965; new translation 2012 (quoted from German edition: *Phänomenologie der Wahrnehmung*, Berlin: De Gruyter, 1966, p. 506).
- 16 Oskar Negt, *Der politische Mensch. Demokratie als Lebensform*, Göttingen: Steidl-Verlag, 2010, p. 357.

Non-Voting and Support for Left Parties in Poland

Gavin Rae

Introduction

For the first time since 1918, the Polish left has no representation in parliament. The country is now governed by a conservative nationalist party, which has managed to gain the support of sections of society that are amongst the most excluded and dissatisfied by the reality of capitalism in Poland. However, regularly around half of the electorate do not vote in parliamentary elections in Poland. The country has one of the lowest political participation rates in Europe, with an extremely low percentage of the population belonging to political parties. In order for the left to rebuild itself in Poland, it must examine how it can win the support of those who do not vote in elections and are not committed supporters of any of the right-wing parties. This article examines these issues through analysing the issue of non-voting in the context of other post-Communist countries inside the European Union and then looking in more depth at which sections of society do not vote and the possible reasons for their abstention from the democratic political process.

Importance of non-voters

The issue of why people do not vote can generally be divided into two main perspectives.

The first point of view is that people do not vote because of the structural changes that have occurred in society and politics. It is postulated that there has been a move towards a post-materialist society and economy, with values of individualism and autonomy surpassing material values such as scarcity and security.¹ On the left, this was encapsulated in the theory of the Third Way and the move of major social democratic parties (such as the British Labour Party and the German Social Democratic Party) towards the political centre during the 1990s.² Accordingly, it is postulated that the left should

therefore adapt itself to these socio-economic changes within the economy and society, accept the dictates of a free-market economy and express the post-materialist values of a supposedly expanding middle class. This first perspective has been brought into question by the global economic crisis, growing social inequalities, and the failure of the left to build itself when adopting liberal economic policies.

An alternative viewpoint assumes that non-voting primarily occurs due to growing social inequalities and exclusion. This creates an expanding section of society that feels dissatisfied with the political system and the belief that they are not represented by any political party. There is a feeling that voting will not bring about any positive change in their lives nor address society's inequalities. When people feel that they are not properly represented in this system then they will often decide not to vote or participate in politics. This tends to be the poorest and most excluded in society, which in turn increases these social disparities. As large parts of the left have moved towards the 'political centre', increasing sections of the electorate have lost their traditional representative in politics and have therefore looked towards supporting parties from the nationalist right or abstained from voting altogether.

Non-voting in Poland and the post-communist countries

The post-Communist transition in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) involved the dual creation of a capitalist economic system and representative democratic political systems. At the beginning of the 1990s all of the former communist countries underwent large economic contractions and a huge increase in unemployment and labour deactivation. The largest economic downturns occurred in the eastern countries of the region that belonged to the former Soviet Union. However, the economies in the west of the region also went through a huge contraction on a scale unprecedented in peacetime Europe. Poland has been considered to be one of the most successful economies in CEE, however even its level of GDP fell by almost one-quarter between 1989 and 1991 and unemployment rose from 1% to 16% from 1989 to 1993.³

It was in this context of economic and social decline, that the democratic political systems in CEE were formed from 1989. Table One displays the different rounds of parliamentary elections that have taken place since the fall of Communism in the CEE countries that belong to the European Union.⁴

Table One: Parliamentary Election Turnouts in
Central and Eastern Europe

	Bulgaria	Croatia	Czech Republic	Estonia	Hungary	Latvia	Lithuania	Poland	Romania	Slovakia	Slovenia	Average
Elections 8	51.05	51.05	59.48	64.23	61.84	58.8	52.93	50.92	41.76	59.82	51.73	54.87
Elections 7	52.49	52.49	62.6	63.53	64.38	59.49	48.59	48.92	39.2	59.11	65.6	56.03
Elections 6	60.64	60.64	64.47	61.91	67.57	64.72	46.04	53.88	58.51	58.84	63.1	60.02
Elections 5	55.76	55.76	57.95	58.24	70.52	60.98	58.18	40.57	65.31	54.67	60.64	58.05
Elections 4	66.63	66.63	74	57.43	57.01	71.17	52.92	46.18	76.01	70.07	70.36	64.40
Elections 3	58.87	58.87	76.29	68.91	68.92	71.9	75.22	47.93	76.29	84.25	73.67	69.19
Elections 2	75.23	75.23	84.68	67.84	65.1	71.9	71.72	52.08	79.69	75.41	85.9	73.16
Elections 1	83.87	83.87	96.33	78.2	-	89.88	-	-	-	84.68	-	86.13
Average	63.06	63.06	71.97	65.03	65.04	68.60	57.94	48.64	62.39	68.35	67.28	-

If we take the region as a whole, we can observe that at the beginning of the transition turnouts in parliamentary elections were generally high. Therefore, in the first round of parliamentary elections in CEE, turnout exceeded 86% and in the second round 73%. In countries such as the Czech Republic, Croatia, and Latvia the turnouts were particularly high in these elections, far exceeding those in Western Europe. Although it may have been expected that these turnouts would decline after the initial euphoria of the political transition, the scale of this drop has been alarming. Therefore, by the fifth round of parliamentary elections, the turnout in CEE averaged just 58% and in the seventh round it stood at less than 55%. Although there has been a steady decline in the turnout at elections in Western Europe, this has not been on the same scale as those in CEE. For example, in the most recent parliamentary elections, the turnout in Germany was 75%, Italy 80%, France 61% and the UK 63%.

The turnout in parliamentary elections in Poland has been consistently low, averaging just 48% (the lowest in the whole of CEE) and exceeding 50% just three times. At the beginning of the transition turnout in Poland was exceptionally low, standing at only 42.8%, the lowest of all the post-Communist countries under study.⁵ The trend in Poland has not followed most other CEE countries, as it has actually risen slightly over the past two and a half decades. However, in the last parliamentary elections turnout was only just above 50% and has averaged below 49% during this whole period. Simultaneously, we have seen other CEE countries converge with Poland's very low rate of participation in parliamentary elections, with Romania now even having a significantly lower turnout than Poland during the last parliamentary elections.

Therefore the post-Communist countries in the EU have an increasing democratic deficit. These are young democracies without strong political parties and a weak left. In order to understand the situation in Poland further, we shall look at the issue of (non-) voter stability.

Turnout stability in Poland

Voter turnout stability refers to the extent to which those who vote or do not vote are the same groups of people from election to election. Stability in voter turnout is important as it provides predictability and inhibits a breakdown in the democratic process. It also facilitates the establishment of a party political system that is embedded within society and indicates that at least a section of society feels connected to certain political parties. If, on the other hand, there is high voter turnout instability then this creates a sense of volatility and indicates that there is less connection between sections of

society and political parties.⁶

Voter stability is measured through post-election surveys that ask people about whether they voted or not. Comparative data on voter stability has been collected by the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems' project.⁷ They show that in Poland just 72.1% of the Polish electorate that voted in the last parliamentary election also voted in the one before, compared to an average of 78% in all the other countries studied. Poland has the second lowest level of voter stability amongst these post-Communist countries after the Czech Republic.

Part of the reason for this lack of voter stability in Poland is the weak connection between political parties and the electorate. Less than 1% of the Polish electorate is a member of any political party, which is the lowest number of any European Union country after Latvia (the European Union average is around 5%).⁸ This indicates how there is a void within the political system, in which people do not feel associated strongly with any political party and therefore lack loyalty to parties during elections. This situation has been heightened during the past decade as support for the left has sharply declined. Before looking at this issue in more detail we shall now consider which social groups are more or less likely to vote in parliamentary elections in Poland.

Social composition of non-voters in Poland

By understanding the social composition of non-voters, we are better able to comprehend which sections of the electorate the left would have to win over in order to expand its electoral base. The tables below display the turnouts for different social groups during parliamentary elections between 1997 and 2011. There is unfortunately no comparative data for the last parliamentary elections in Poland, which took place in 2015.⁹

Table Two displays the turnouts in parliamentary elections according to income, with the first quarter referring to the lowest income bracket and fourth quarter representing the highest. As we can see, in all of the elections represented in the table, those with a higher income are significantly more likely to vote in elections than those with a lower income, with turnout increasing as income rises.

Table Two: **Turnout in Parliamentary Elections in Poland According to Income**

	1999	2001	2005	2007	2011
First Quarter	48.4	56.7	43.3	53.3	56.2%
Second Quarter	55.9	58.4	50.4	63.4	59.8%
Third Quarter	60.9	58.2	57.3	70.6	64.0%
Fourth Quarter	70.8	71.1	58.3	80.2	71.5%

When we look at the how education affects turnout (Table Three), we can see that those with a higher education are much more likely to vote in a parliamentary election in Poland than those with a lower education. For example in the 2011 parliamentary elections the turnout of those with a basic education was over 20 percentage points less than those with a higher education.

Table Three: **Turnout in Parliamentary Elections in Poland According to Education**

	1997	2001	2005	2007	2011
Basic	48.4	52.1	39.7	51.3	48.6%
Technical	49.3	52.3	49.7	62.1	56.7%
Medium	67.1	62.6	58.8	75.5	65.6%
High	78.5	76.3	66.1	90.7	70.03%

The difference in turnout is lower when we consider gender (Table Four). Whilst in the previous four general elections more men than women voted in a parliamentary election, in 2011 slightly more women than men cast their vote.

Table Four: **Turnout in Parliamentary Elections in Poland According to Gender**

	1997	2001	2005	2007	2011
Women	54.2	58.3	49.7	63.8	61.6%
Men	60.7	59.2	54.2	70.1	59.0%

The differences are more marked with regards to age (Table Five). The general trend shows that there is a positive correlation between age and voter turnout. In all elections the age group that has voted the most are those aged between 56 and 65, with the lowest turnout being in the 18 to 25 and 26 to 35 age brackets. One noticeable change is that turnout has grown significantly for the youngest age group during these elections, although around a half of voters in this age group still tend to abstain from voting.

Table Five: **Turnout in Parliamentary Elections in Poland According to Age**

	1997	2001	2005	2007	2011
18-25	38.1	47.2	44.2	55.8	54.3%
26-35	51.7	46.9	39.9	62.5	51.9%
36-45	60.3	60.1	52.7	63.5	58.7%
56-55	64.6	67.3	61.2	73.9	61.1%
56-65	69.3	69.1	64.2	76.9	73.1%
66+	61.1	65.1	51.9	68.4	63.2%

Finally, we come to the issue of religiosity, measured by how often one attends church. Table Six shows how those who attend church regularly are much more likely to vote in an election than those who go less than once a week. This is important, as Poland is a relatively religious country, with over 90% of society defining themselves as Catholic. The rise of the conservative right in the country has brought politics and religion closer together, with sections of the Catholic Church playing a direct role in politics.¹⁰

Table Six: **Turnout in Parliamentary Elections in Poland According to Church Attendance**

	1997	2001	2005	2007	2011
Every Week or More Often	68.7	68.1	61.1	73.1	68.6%
Less Than Once a Week	46.3	49.3	43.1	61.7	53.9%

In summary, we can see that those who are better educated and earn more are more likely to vote in elections. This means that the more socially excluded and disadvantaged voters make up a greater share of non-voters. Simultaneously, elder voters are more likely to vote in an election, with young people abstaining heavily from the electoral process. Also more religious people are more likely to vote than those who practice religion

less. This is most likely to favour the parties of the conservative right, which are strongly connected to sections of the Catholic Church.

These figures on the social composition of voters reveal a couple of interesting points when we consider specific elections. Firstly, in 2007 the first conservative nationalist government (led by the Law and Justice Party – PiS) was defeated after winning the 2005 elections. Here we can see that the major change in voter turnout was a very large increase in participation by those with higher incomes, a higher education and those who attend Church less regularly. We can conclude that this section of society is more drawn to liberalism and secularism and voted negatively against the conservative government of PiS. Secondly, in 2001 the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD) won over 40% of the vote, but this declined to just 15% in 2005 (see below). The 2001 vote was primarily the result of an increase in votes by people with a lower income and education and those who attend Church less regularly, which then again fell significantly when the SLD was defeated in 2005. This shows how the left was able to mobilise the more socially disadvantaged sections of society along with those who are less religious and that their electoral decline was partly due to losing the support of these social groups.

We shall now examine some of these issues in more depth, by looking at voter turnout and support for the left.

The left and non-voting in Poland

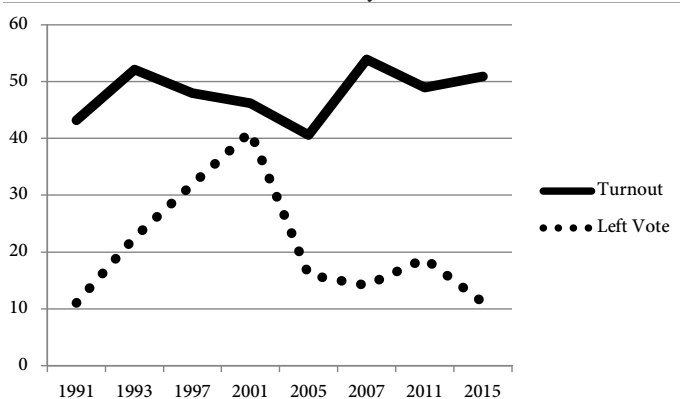
Following the collapse of Communism the left vote was extremely small, with left-wing ideas and organisations discredited. During the early 1990s the left began to reorganise itself with the main party of the left consolidating around the ‘post-Communist’ Democratic Left Alliance (SLD). Alongside the SLD some left-wing parties were formed that were organised around organisations and individuals connected to the former opposition movement, most prominently the Labour Union (UP). The combined vote of the left in 1991 was just above 10% (Figure One).¹¹ However, by 1993 this had grown to more than 22%, and the SLD was able to form a coalition government with the Polish Farmers Party (PSL). Although the SLD lost power in 1997, it actually expanded its support, with the left winning over 30% of the votes. Then in 2001, left parties scored their greatest electoral success, winning more than 41% of the votes, leading to the SLD forming a coalition government with UP and PSL.

This government implemented a series of neoliberal economic reforms, refrained from introducing any progressive social reforms (such as liberalising the abortion law), and supported the war in Iraq. This led to a sharp fall in support for the left, declining to just 15% in 2005. The left has not been

able to rebuild its support since this time and politics has been dominated by two parties of the right: Law and Justice (PiS) and Citizens' Platform (PO). Support for the left continued to decline until the 2011 elections in which the SLD was replaced as the main self-proclaimed party of the left by the liberal populist Palikot Movement. This new party had declined in support and been incorporated into an alliance with the SLD by the time of the 2015 elections, when support for the left fell to just 11%. These elections represented a historical defeat for the left as they were the first time since the Polish Republic was formed after the First World War in which the left had failed to enter parliament. The SLD had stood as part of an electoral coalition, failing to cross the 8% threshold needed for coalitions to enter parliament (for parties it is 5%). Meanwhile a new young left-wing party (Together) was created, winning more than 3% of the vote, meaning that, although it cannot enter parliament, it now has access to state funding.

We can see in Figure One that the rise in support for the left in the 1990s did not coincide with a growth in the turnout at elections. Also, the subsequent fall in the left vote after 2001, did not lead to any significant drop in the turnout rate. With turnout stability low in Poland, as we know, it thus seems that the left lost a large section of its electorate and that many of them may have become non-voters, while others chose to vote for other parties. Also, when the left gained its largest vote in 2001, it was able to mobilise people such as those on low incomes and with a basic education more than in any other election. However, in 2011 the proportion of those who voted in these social groups had almost returned to the higher level of 2001, showing that right-wing parties have been able to gain the support of this part of the electorate that had previously voted for the left.

Figure One: **Voter Turnout and Support for the Left in Parliamentary Elections**



As noted above the left vote collapsed in 2005 and it has never since come close to matching the more than 40% it had won in 2001. The instability within the Polish political system and the lack of party loyalty amongst left voters is evident when we look at how those who supported the SLD in 2001 voted in 2005. Only 30% of the 2001 SLD electorate voted for the party in 2005, with 19% voting for PO and 17% casting their votes for PiS. Also 37% of those who voted for the SLD in 2001 abstained from voting in 2005. We can further observe the disintegration of the SLD vote when we look at how those who voted for the SLD in 2005 voted in 2007. Here we can see that only 30% voted again for the SLD in 2007 and a staggering 45% actually switched to voting for PO. Those who define themselves as being left-wing are also less likely to vote in an election than those who say they are right-wing. Therefore, just 66% of left-wing voters say that they will vote in the next election, whilst 77% of right-wing voters declare that they will vote.

The decline of the left vote has therefore involved many of its former supporters both abstaining from the electoral process and/or shifting their support to other parties. In order to better understand how the left may appeal to non-voters we shall examine why it is that people do not vote in Poland.

Why people do not vote

So far we have seen that those who are more socially disadvantaged (according to income or education) are less likely to vote in a parliamentary election in Poland. This helps us to confirm that social inequalities and exclusion are major causes of non-voting in Poland and that the 'post-materialist' thesis that people abstain due to individual satisfaction with their lives can be rejected. In turn this means that a return to a Third Way strategy of seeking to expand into the political 'centre' would not attract new voters to the left. This conclusion is further strengthened when we analyse the reasons that people give for not voting in elections.¹²

A major reason for voting is that people wish to influence government policy and the activities of the state. Over 95% of those who declare that they will vote in the next elections in Poland agree with the statement that it is worth voting in order to influence the activities of the state. However, less than 60% of those who say that they will not vote agree with this statement. Also, only 9% of declared voters in a future election agree with the statement that it is not worth voting as it will not change anything; compared to 52% who state that they will not vote. Furthermore, an alarming 34% of those who say they will not vote agree with the statement that it is not worth

voting because elections in Poland are usually unfair, compared with just 6% of those who declare they will vote.

We can therefore observe a huge disconnect between a section of the electorate and the democratic process in Poland. These people tend to be the most socially disadvantaged and further believe that voting will not influence government policy, that it will not change anything and many also believe the election process is itself unfair.

Conclusion

The question of non-voting is a major issue in the post-Communist countries, particularly in Poland which has consistently had one of the lowest turnout rates in Europe. The left vote has also significantly contracted over the past decade, and evidence shows that left-wing voters are more likely to abstain from voting or to switch their vote to other parties. It is important that the left examines in more detail the issue of non-voting and gains an understanding of who these people are and why large sections of the electorate are not voting. As we have shown, voting behaviour in Poland is very unstable and the group of non-voters is changeable. In general those who are more socially disadvantaged are much more likely not to vote in elections, which should be a major focus of left parties in elections. Large parts of this group do not believe that they have any influence over the state or that voting would change things for the better. Therefore, in order to rebuild its base in society, the left has to develop a structure and programme that can appeal to these voters and convince them that a left vote is not wasted but can contribute to progressive social change.

NOTES

- 1 Ronald Inglehart, *The Silent Revolution*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977.
- 2 Anthony Blair and Gerhard Schroeder, *The Third Way*, Berlin, 1999; Anthony Giddens, *The Third Way. The Renewal of Social Democracy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998).
- 3 Gavin Rae, *Poland's Return to Capitalism. From the Socialist Bloc to the European Union*, London: Taurus, 201).
- 4 I have tried to group these rounds of elections as close as possible to those in Poland, although of course some countries have had more or less elections in this timescale.
- 5 In this article the first election I have included in Poland is the parliamentary election held in 1991. In 1989 a semi-free election was held, in which candidates from the Solidarity opposition movement won the vast majority of votes in those seats it was allowed to contest.
- 6 Mikołaj Cześniak, 'Voter Turnout Stability – Evidence from Poland', *Polish Sociological Review* 165 (2009), pp.107-122.
- 7 <<http://www.cses.org/>>
- 8 Ingrid van Biezen, 'The decline in party membership across Europe means that political

parties need to reconsider how they engage with the electorate.’ LSE European Politics and Polity <<http://bit.ly/YjotAq>>.

- 9 Data in this section is taken from the Polish National Election Study and Polish Centre for Public Opinion Research.
- 10 This has included for example some priests advising their congregations during Mass whom they should vote for in an election and conservative parties mobilising people through collecting signatures for candidates outside of Church.
- 11 I count the left vote as the sum vote for all parties that define themselves as left-wing. This self-definition conception of left wing is problematic. For example, in the 2011 elections the Palikot Movement defined itself as a left-wing party, although it was more of a centre liberal party. However, within the scope of this article, the self-definition concept provides the clearest way of calculating support for the left. The following parties have been included as left-wing parties: 1991: Democratic Left Alliance and Solidarity Labour; 1993: Democratic Left Alliance and Labour Union; 1997: Democratic Left Alliance and Labour Union; 2001: Democratic Left Alliance-Labour Union and Polish Socialist Party; 2005: Democratic Left Alliance, Social Democracy Poland, and the Polish Labour Party; 2007: Left and Democrats and Polish Labour Party; 2011: Democratic Left Alliance and Polish Labour Party; 2015: United Left and Together.
- 12 All statistics in this section are taken from the Polish Centre for Public Opinion Research.

State of the Left: Country Reports

The Corbyn Moment: A Dialectic of Defeats

Richard Seymour

I

Defeat is an under-rated experience in political life.

During the US Civil War, Charles Eliot Norton wrote on the ‘advantages of defeat’, noting that an early setback at Bull Run was not only deserved but needed: it corrected a bad strategy early enough for it to be rectified.

As Enzo Traverso’s upcoming book, *Left-Wing Melancholia*, points out, socialism is a politics of the vanquished, its history one of crushing rebuffs. Marxism is a science of defeat, and the secret resources that can be found in it. If we think about defeat in this way, then we are more likely to respond to it productively.

Corbyn is the leader of the Labour Party, against all odds. He leads, not on account of leftist strength, but in spite of the left’s weakness. He has risen to the top of a party whose mechanisms of self-reproduction are broken, a party in grave and potentially terminal crisis. And whereas New Labour represented an early attempt to deal with the incipient crisis of social democracy by mutating it into social liberalism, Corbynism represents the first attempt to deal with the crisis from the left.

Understanding this, and the stacked odds against his success, is vital if we are to respond to the inevitable setbacks with aplomb.

II

The origin of British social democracy itself lies in defeat. Out of the wreckage of 1848 and the eclipse of a ‘heroic era’ of the British proletariat, there emerged a labourist, cooperativist culture in the ruts and foxholes of working-class life. In the stabilised imperialist British capitalism of the latter half of the nineteenth century, the survival strategies of a politically defeated working class slowly incubated a new challenge.

A string of defeats for the trade unions, culminating in the anti-union Taff Vale judgment in 1901, and the inability of labour movement politicians to

gain any headway within the existing Liberal Party establishment led to the formation of the Labour Party. Labourism, in this phase, was an attempt to concentrate the forces of ‘the advanced wing of Liberalism’ (as Ramsay MacDonald called it) to influence the Liberals more efficiently.

Labour emerged embarrassed by its own social roots, abjuring with displays of civilised horror the very outbreaks of mass industrial action that strengthened it, and enthralled by the prospect of absorption into the British state. Although Labour was a class party, the ‘national community’ – as the perceived basis for ethical socialism – always took precedence. In practice, this meant the ‘national community’ as condensed in the British state in its extant form – crown and empire included.

Labour was decisively formed as a modern party by its participation in two world wars. The experience of the First World War, with the defeat of socialist internationalism signalling its onset, and the electrifying revolutionary wave announcing its conclusion, led to the formation of a parliamentary leadership integrated into the state. The party constitution of 1918, while committing the party to socialist objectives, also entrenched the structures that ensured it would never have to try to implement them. The dominance of the trade union block vote was used to ensure the unchallenged dominion of the parliamentary leadership in the party. The Second World War further consecrated this status quo, bringing about an alliance between Labour’s leaders and the more far-sighted, modernising wing of the civil service bureaucracy – many of whom brought a paternalistic ethic accumulated in the management of the British empire.

In class terms, social democracy has a mediating role. And in the UK context, that process has been structured and limited by unquestioning loyalty to the British *ancien régime*. Labourism has done more, through its statist quietism, to impede and undermine the initiative of its organisers and activists, than to develop and empower them.

III

The question, given this context, is not why Labourism has always been so conservative, but why we should expect it to be anything else. And the history of Labourism has far more often been one of failure than of success.

The failed governments of the 1920s were far more characteristic of Labour’s role in capitalism than the aberrant postwar period. In economic matters, the party tended toward orthodoxy. Chancellor Phillip Snowden sought the approbation of the rich for balanced budgets without ‘drastic impositions on their class’. In the face of a global recession, he protected the City’s matchless competence in the governing of ‘highly delicate and

intricate matters' of the financial system, against parliamentary oversight. In the sphere of foreign policy, Colonial Secretary J H Thomas ensured there was 'no mucking about with the British Empire' and proved his mettle by sending the RAF to bomb Iraq. In policy terms, New Labour was not so innovative.

Consistently, moreover, the party's parliamentary right has demonstrated that it would rather split than challenge the distribution of class power. The austere split of 1931 saw the leadership – with an attitude of martyrdom familiar in today's self-immolating centre-left politicians – line up with Conservatism to manage capitalist crisis. In the era of many 'grand coalitions' between social democratic and conservative parties, often to implement spending cuts, we see the logic of this up close. Social democracy's leaders are state managers before all else. They would rather destroy their electoral base than pursue any agenda that, from the point of view of parliamentary action, is hopelessly utopian.

Reformist socialism having failed, found wanting a strategy, the detour of capitalism's 'golden era' provided conditions for a new mutation. The lineaments of modern social democracy were decisively formed in the postwar boom. This was the one period in which sections of the capitalist class and state personnel were willing to agree that there was an alternative to 'the rigours of the market': a limited area of decommodification. It was also the one period in which corporate profitability was robust enough to sustain social spending and wage rises. Social democracy could hitch its wagon to ascendant capitalism, using the proceeds to pay off all 'interests'.

The gains of this era are far from negligible, even if they were contained within the broad purview of capitalist politics: universal healthcare, social housing, expanded education, nationalised utilities. But the class consensus was only as stable as capitalism itself proved to be. The warnings signs of decline in the late 1960s, the attempt by Ted Heath's Conservatives to tighten up market discipline and reduce incomes, and the global meltdown heralded by the OPEC crisis, indicated that social democracy would never have it so good again.

The turn to the left in the trade unions and Labour's constituency branches in response to this challenge was linked to a wave of strike action of a scale not seen since 1926. This broke the Conservative government. But such militancy, being tied to the Labour Party, whose left wing was never in any serious danger of gaining power, led to the desultory denouement of the 'social contract': a Labour government using its special relationship with the trade union bureaucracy to suppress wage claims at a time of soaring inflation. Real incomes rarely fell as fast as during the latter half of

the 1970s, eventually causing the social contract to collapse amid wild-cat strike action. Business, hitherto supportive of Labour, swung behind the Conservatives. The losses in popular support incurred by social democracy in this period redounded to the benefit of Thatcherite neoliberals, offering market discipline as an answer to an unavailing corporatism.

The right-wing split from Labour in March 1981, to form the Social Democratic Party (SDP), called into question the very essence of Labourism. It was not just a matter of policy, but of the very idea of having a party based in the organised working class. The splitters, leading figures in the crisis-ridden Wilson/Callaghan era, blamed the trade unions and left-wing militancy for destroying the post-war settlement. And they argued that a party beholden to one class for its support could not address the problem. By splitting, they sought a political realignment that would marginalise the hard left and trade union militants with the goal of securing a broad centre, but contributed to a long reign in office for a Conservative Party that had been colonised by middle-class reaction.

In the long run, Thatcher achieved what the SDP could not, destroying every major quarter of left-wing power, one after the other: the miners, the print workers, left-wing councils, and the Greater London Council. Redeploying the state along authoritarian 'free market' lines to transform class relations, they undermined the social basis of an already crisis-ridden Labourism.

Labour responded – under Neil Kinnock from the soft left, then Tony Blair from the hard right – by becoming what the SDP had always wanted: a party in which not only was the hard left marginalised, but the traditional role of the trade unions was diminished. In place of the mass bureaucratic party of *haut* social democracy came the electoral-professional party dominated by spin doctors, focus groups, and party managers. In place of extended public ownership, regulation, and redistribution, came Thatcherism with a dimension of moral reform to mitigate its worst effects.

The scale of the defeats inflicted on the left and labour movement in this era ensured that any incoming Labour government would govern much as their predecessors in the 1920s did. New Labour had distinguished itself by running against the traditions of Labourism, anchoring itself to the hard, pro-market, Atlanticist Right. And when it governed from this position, there would be no British version of Lafontaine, or Mélenchon.

Far from reversing Labour's long-term decline, however, New Labour exacerbated the crisis. The loss of three million mainly working-class voters in the first term alone, before the 'war on terror' or the credit crunch, indicated that the major response of voters was to withdraw from the electoral

system rather than seek alternative left-wing parties. These losses were, however, acceptable. In first-past-the-post electoral systems, the emphasis on shifting a few hundred thousand swing voters meant that losses among heartland voters could be shrugged off. A crisis in electoral participation, with turnout falling below 60% for the first time since the Second World War, was accompanied by a precipitous drop in party membership and identification. But a contraction of the working-class electorate, leaving the electoral system to the affluent, suited those on the Labour Right.

As long as they could keep control of the party.

IV

Ironically, the crushing defeats inflicted upon the Labour Left during the 1980s made Corbynism possible. Had the Left had the support, social depth, and confidence to organise a split from Blair, it would have had no chance of taking over the Labour Party.

Defeat played a productive role in other incidental ways. For example, it allowed Blairites to impose reforms of the party structure that while reducing the trade union role actually made the party more democratic in other ways. Without such reforms, the parliamentary leadership's traditional right to rule could never have been challenged by a left-moving membership.

This perspective is only possible in retrospect. No one, least of all Jeremy Corbyn, anticipated that he would even make it onto the leadership ballot, let alone that he would be able to lead the Left to victory.

The hard left has never been anything but marginal in the Labour Party, certainly never close to power. It has never held the support of a majority of constituency members, nor the trade union affiliates, let alone the union leadership. As I have already argued, the historical role of the trade union leadership has been to support the parliamentary leadership, usually on the right or centre of the party.

But the decay of social democracy created opportunities. Corbyn's campaign intelligently exploited a crisis of legitimacy and organisation for the traditional party management. This was a crisis born of disaffection with New Labour, the defeats of 2010 and 2015, and particularly the electoral wipe-out in Scotland following the independence referendum in 2014, in which the party leadership positioned itself to the right of the pro-independence Scottish National Party. Here, Labour went well beyond its traditional Unionism and commitment to British imperialism, to attack the SNP from the right on spending cuts. Scotland, formerly a heartland of Labour's old right, became its graveyard.

The crisis was also rooted in the secular decline of the trade unions. On

every index – membership, strike rates, industrial impact, and political clout – the trade unions had been in a steep fall for a long time. Their political exclusion in the New Labour era left them with little of their traditional clout for reversing the decline, and they increasingly had to take on a political role in themselves. At the grassroots, members increasingly moved to the left in response to attacks from a Labour government – supposedly their government. By 2015, the loyalty of union leaders had been tested to destruction, as even the supposedly union-friendly leadership of Ed Miliband had sponsored an attack on trade union clout in the party. They had been unable to do anything about austerity policies decimating their membership, unable to defend their role in Labour, and faced the prospect of Americanisation: reduced to clients of a rightward moving centre party. In this context, it made sense for them to take radical action, by supporting Corbyn's pro-union leadership.

One other factor that ironically contributed to Corbyn's victory was the left's ideological weakness, gauged by the standards of traditional media penetration. It was by means of a smart social media campaign putting pressure on Labour MPs that he was able to win the nomination to be on the leadership ballot. But to win, he had to attract new layers of people to the Labour Party. In both the 2015 and 2016 leadership elections, Labour's electorate was dominated by a coalition between a radicalising minority of young people whose prospects had been trashed by crisis and austerity, and long dormant leftists returning to activity. Neither group was inclined to look to print or broadcast media for guidance. If anything, the more they attacked Corbyn, the more popular he was among Labour's growing membership. In 2015, some 57 per cent of the members depended on social media rather than news for their campaign information, and Corbyn's campaign used this to contest media representations of him and amplify the values of a social left long excluded from the media spectrum.

In short, Labour's old guard relied on influence and networking within the state apparatuses, connections to the media, and support from lobbyists, think-tankers, and PR professionals, for their career advancement. Corbyn, having never enjoyed this kind of career success, was forced to the Left's alternative advantages: numbers, organisation, and a degree of ideological clarity that was singularly lacking in the blank soundbite-generators that constituted his opponents. But these alter-strengths saw him to victory, both in 2015 and against the attempted leadership coup in 2016.

V

Given its historical context, the left's revival must be adjudged very weak, and the odds against its long-term success reckoned very high.

The germinal nature of the revival, and the constrictive nature of the machinery through which it is being reconstituted, raise serious questions about the strategic orientations of Corbyn's base. Above all, can it transcend Labourism? If it is not to simply collapse into a left version of the same, in which the goal of electing a Labour government takes precedence over all else, it needs an alternative conception of political power.

On the terrain of conventional electoral politics, Corbyn is weak. He polls well among core Labour voters, alienated by Blairism. He communicates with a radicalised minority in British society, who have always inclined to the left. But he does poorly among that small strata of swing voters who decide electoral outcomes in a first-past-the-post system. And in addition to having the enmity of his backbenches, the opposition of the Conservative Party, the contumely of the entire media spectrum, and even the tetchy antagonism of the military establishment, Corbyn will struggle to persuade business of his agenda.

Even were Labour within reach of winning the 2020 general election, that is where Corbyn's problems would begin. Capitalism is not generating the revenues with which to fund a left-wing programme, even one as comparatively moderate as Corbyn's. Corbyn would need business, which is currently hoarding capital, to invest in new production. He would have to persuade businesses that his growth strategy for capitalism is better for them in the long run than a low tax regime. Even if shadow chancellor John McDonnell can persuade academics, journalists, civil servants, and voters of the viability of his strategy, British businesses are not known for their long-term, enlightened thinking.

Jeremy Corbyn's leadership campaign invoked, against electoralism, and as a supplement to traditional trade union-oriented class politics, the social movement. Indeed, he ran his campaign very much along the lines of 'movement' politics, relying on mass meetings and grassroots activism. But that, even if it resembles our reified concept of what a social movement is, is not a social movement. And one cannot summon movements into existence by a vote. These things take time and patience, more time than Corbyn has.

There is also the monumental challenge of the national question, through which almost all of the major issues of social spending, democracy, militarism and racism, are being refracted. Whether it takes the form of Scottish independence, or British exit from the European Union, these national solutions aim at reorganising class relations and politics in fundamental

ways. What strikes one about the Corbyn leadership in relation to both independence and Brexit is its aimlessness. One senses that, with everything else Labour has to fight for, they would prefer not to have to deal with this.

Unfortunately, this will seriously weaken Labour, as a coherent answer to the national question is no longer an optional extra. Labour may be able to equivocate on Brexit, but it can no longer simply default to Unionism. If it wishes to be a Unionist party, it has to develop a coherent rationale for it in terms of its programme, and it will have to explain how it can recoup its losses in Scotland, where constituency parties have neither the ability nor the desire to attract new layers of left-wing activists, most of whom gravitated to the SNP long ago.

Above all, Corbyn is caught between conflicting imperatives. He can rebuild Labour's core vote, but seemingly not without losing centre-ground voters. He can push the ideological agenda to the left, but not without constantly losing the battle over media coverage. He can work to empower activists within Labour, but not without having constant, damaging rows with the party establishment.

The question, given all this, is what do we do with defeat? If we live in denial, in a bubble of positive thinking such as is encouraged by much of the internet left, we will be blind-sided. If we are ready, we can respond creatively to setbacks. This, as always, is the challenge for the left.

Who Are In the Streets?

Reflections on Nuit Debout in Paris

Yann Le Lann

After the 31 March demonstration against the new proposed labour legislation (the '*loi travail*'), demonstrators decided not to go home; they re-assembled at Place de la République to keep vigil and debate the society they wanted to build, and the Nuit Debout movement was born. It is difficult to quantify its size in terms of number of participants, but we can say without hesitation that this occupation of Place de la République is eliciting deep support and stimulating numerous debates at the centre of French society. Nuit Debout is in many respects a new form of mobilisation that is shaking up political codes. Its image in society is very positive. Even if the polls have fluctuated, up to 60% of the French population have said they support it, and 47% of young people say they are ready to participate. However, the innovative nature of this new mode of activity, made up of activists coming from very different outlooks, has made it particularly difficult to identify the participants.

For the media universe it is as if the value of this action depended directly on the social positions of the people participating in the occupation of the square – without any media concerned to do anything resembling a serious investigation of the subject. A large section of journalists and of the political class have been content to issue hasty judgements.

Nuit Debout's opponents have invested heavily in the idea that this is a 'petit bourgeois' or 'bobo' movement to suggest disconnection from the economic and social reality of the working classes. The more right-wing the observers are the more the movement is seen as a utopian phenomenon carried by a handful of privileged people.

Those with a positive opinion of the movement have in a sense actually absorbed this 'labelling'. They see it as a youthful movement with cultural capital. It is, moreover, a self-analysis that is close to how the participants see themselves. For example, one of the initiators, François Ruffin, has put

forward the idea that Nuit Debout is a movement of the ‘intellectual petite bourgeoisie’.

This self-positioning as part of the superior intellectual classes led to many speeches within the general assemblies addressing the limit of Nuit Debout and the difficulty of being representative of the most ‘dominated’ populations. The supposed absence of people from the banlieue, of the precarious, or of workers are themes that have been present in almost all the discussions. For some Nuit Deboutists, this presumed absence made the movement’s claim to represent an emancipatory logic illegitimate.

Identifying who did and did not participate has thus been at the heart of a central polemic directly related to the capacity of this movement to be the bearer of popular aspirations. We would like to confront these different perspectives with the conclusions of the only quantitative study available on the protagonists of Nuit Debout.¹ Ever since the beginning of the movement the group of citizen researchers responsible for this study has tried to construct a census of the social characteristics of the Place de la République occupiers. This study contains many fascinating points, only some of which we can address here. We will concentrate on the results that sharply clash with the perceptions of observers and which the participants have of themselves. And we will show that the common imagery does not tally with the objectively observable social characteristics of the people in the square. We will then try to assess the different theories on the causes of the mobilisation in relation to the data provided by this study.

The data

From the study of Nuit Debout, for example, we learn that if its makeup is essentially male (about two-thirds), it is also not particularly made up of young people. During the time slot of 6:00 pm to 6:30 pm, for example, half of the nuit-deboutists are over 33 years old. In total, one in five participants is even older than 50. Contrary to common belief Nuit Debout is therefore not uniquely a ‘youth phenomenon’.

Nor is it strictly a ‘Parisian’ phenomenon. Although a majority of the participants do in fact come from Paris (more accurately from its less well-off eastern sections), 37 per cent of participants live in the banlieue. One in six participants does not live in the Paris area at all.

Another interesting element in understanding this phenomenon is the social profile of the nuit-deboutists. The majority of the participants have a higher long-cycle academic degree (61%), which is true of only one-quarter of the French population. But it is much more interesting to note that not only is the unemployment rate 20% among the participants, that is, double

the national rate, but also that 16% of the activists are workers – a percentage three times greater than that of the population of Paris and about equal to that of the Île-de-France as a whole.

Thus Nuit Debout, far from being a movement of preparatory school or university students seeking thrills, is above all a movement of skilled workers, graduates, and precarious workers.

Another major criticism that could be levelled at Nuit Debout – one alluded to above – is that it is a collection of ‘apolitical people’. Here again, it is easy to take apart this idea. More than a third of the people involved have taken part in a demonstration against the El Khomri labour law bill. The proportion of individuals interviewed who declared they were already members of a political party is remarkable even in the context of activist disaffection – 17%. And 22% have paid dues to a union. Citizen activism and association and charity involvements are likewise well represented amongst them – more than half of them have been involved in one or more of these activities (refugee aid, soup runs, parent-student associations, neighbourhood associations, environmental defence organisations, tutoring, festivals, community cafés, etc.).

Moreover, this mobilisation is not at all opposed to the activism of traditional organisations. Conversely, parties and unions have continued to mobilise against the *loi travail* and bridges have been built on several occasions – with Philippe Martinez coming to speak to the general assembly of Nuit Debout, an evening organised at the Labour Exchange (which at the time was located right next to Place de la République), or with the ‘political’ world when Yannis Varoufakis came to the general assembly to offer his support.

Theories of the movement’s rationale

The inquiry has thus produced very rich data on the social qualities of the participants. It helps in qualifying the discussions within the movement that have tried to indicate its social limitations. It also shows that the occupation was not a matter of a bourgeois class looking for a utopia. Taking this type of study seriously also invites us to rethink the causes and the goal of the struggle that has been taken up. Besides the immediate pleasure in participating in such a large collective action, the protagonists brought together seem to have points in common that the right, the benevolent critics, and even at times the movement itself have not analysed.

The hypothesis of a bourgeois movement and of generational conflict

Directly called into question by this study, the hypothesis of a heavily bourgeois character of Nuit Debout does not stand the test of statistics.

The arrondissements of central Paris (the most posh areas) are under-represented in the movement. And there is no presence of the employers or of a discourse favourable to them. Furthermore, the ideological anchorage of the movement has repeatedly made clear its 'anti-capitalism'. On the other hand, what makes it difficult to classify Nuit Debout is the high proportion of graduates among its participants. This social characteristic has left open the possibility of analysing the movement as the action of the children of middle-level managers who are downwardly mobile. A part of the commentators tend to make Nuit Debout into a movement of youth engaged in combating the degradation of their social condition in relation to that of their parents. In particular, the occupation would then be the sign of a revolt of the 'declassed' or of reduced possibilities of upward mobility. In this vein the sociologist Bruno Maresca insists that

It is no longer the popular or working classes who are going into the streets to win their rights and salary raises but the middle classes themselves, which have previously benefitted from access to education and employment. This sudden awakening of the 'soft underbelly' of society is at odds with the fear of declassing that is worrying it ever since the spreading of inequalities within the capitalist economies at the beginning of the 2000s.

In concentrating on these two interdependent questions, the protest against the financialisation of the economy and against governments that bolster the interests of the big corporations, on the one hand, and, on the other, a political class increasingly closed in on itself, the middle classes are trying to put a halt to a development that is making them pass from the dynamic of upward mobility from generation to generation to a spiral of declassing, a phenomenon that has been analysed in France for ten years now.²

The fragilisation of the social conditions of children born of parents with higher-education degrees is a social reality in France as in other countries. But two important elements appear to limit the interpretative power of this hypothesis. On the one hand, Nuit Debout is, strictly speaking, neither a generational movement nor a youth movement. From the beginning, the movement has had structures to accommodate children and play facilities for them so that their parents could occupy the square. The best represented class is that of people in their thirties occupying high positions. If some have experienced declassing these are nevertheless a minority. There is therefore scant possibility that the driving force of the movement can be found in the loss of a position amongst higher paid salaried workers.

The hypothesis of the struggle against neoliberalism's work conventions

To this day the most convincing explanatory theory of the movement seems to be the one connected to the sequence of events initiated by the *loi travail*. The political debate in France in 2016 opened around the big offensive by Medef (the French employers' association) and the Hollande government to liberalise the labour market by weakening sector-wide collective bargaining and controls on firing. This draft law provoked a major mobilisation with very broad and lasting support from February to June.

From this angle, Nuit Debout can in part be seen as a prolongation of the conflict over the *loi travail*, which seized the opportunity of the social movement to extend mobilisation to sectors not directly touched by the draft law but which are structurally hit by neoliberalism. Two sectors had massive presence in the mobilisation: public services, which Bourdieu dubbed 'the left hand of the state' (education and research, healthcare, and social work), and entertainment workers – artists and actors. These activity areas were not directly affected by or mainly concerned with a *loi travail* centred on the reform of the regulations protecting workers from unjust firing or on collective bargaining in the private sector. Nevertheless, these workers were at the centre of the mobilisation because they recognised an occasion to take action to defend a vision – the valuation of labour representing an alternative to the ideas transmitted by the majority of France's political class for 40 years: notably 'activation', that is, the raising of the pensionable age with diminished pensions for those not looking for work; wage stringency; and flexibility. Discussions have been very rich and diverse in the general assemblies, but the question of the Workers Statute remained central in this period. This was not simply a matter of external context but a central concern shared by the demonstrators and occupiers. Finally, the history of Nuit Debout is perhaps above all the history of a combination of several sectors in struggle. From the arrival of the precarious entertainment workers in the square to the multiplication of occupations of hospitals conducted on the initiative of healthcare personnel, up to the creation of 'Taxi Debout' to resist UBER, each factor in the development of the occupation was marked by discussions around projects of working-class emancipation.

The question of the valuation of labour was thus at the centre of the occupation dynamic, and it reframed the question of convergence. The difficulty of extending Nuit Debout beyond itself is one recognised by the participants in, and commentators on, the movement.

During an interview in *l'Express*, the sociologist Olivier Galand accurately observed that 'the slogan of Nuit Debout, the convergence of struggles, remains theoretical for now'.³ Even if this observation needs to be modified

in relation to the data presented by the above-cited study showing the participation of the immediate banlieue in the occupation, it is clear that the popularisation of the struggle has been in part limited. However, the question of convergence has often been posed as arising from problems of the forms of mobilisation (interminable general assemblies, debates on too theoretical a level, etc.). At a deeper level perhaps the question has to do with the image of work projected by Nuit Debout. The defence of public-sector workers or of cultural workers is probably different from the kind of defence required for other fringes of wage labour. The capacity to bring together the entirety of wage labour depends in part on the construction of a project of labour reform capable of speaking to the supporters of the movement, who are very numerous among the popular classes but who remained at the edge of the square.

NOTES

- 1 The study was conducted by Stéphane Baciocchi (EHESS), Alexandra Bidet (CNRS), Pierre Blavier (EHESS), Manuel Boutet (Université de Nice), Lucie Champenois (ENS Cachan), Carole Gayet-Viaud (CNRS), and Erwan Le Méner (EHESS). The first results were published in *Le Monde*; <http://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2016/05/17/nuit-debout-est-un-rassemblement-plus-diversifie-qu-on-ne-le-dit_4920514_3232.html>.
- 2 Bruno Maresca, 'Vers quel nouveau monde nous emmène Nuit Debout?', *Huffington Post*, 20 April 2016 < http://www.huffingtonpost.fr/bruno-maresca/vers-quel-nouveau-monde-nous-emmene-nuit-debout/?utm_hp_ref=fr->.
- 3 Olivier Galand, 19April 2016, <http://www.lexpress.fr/actualite/societe/nuit-debout-de-quelle-jeunesse-parlons-nous_1784169.html >.

New Municipalism in Barcelona: A First Attempt at a Balance Sheet

Pablo Sánchez Centellas

To undertake a full appraisal of a government one needs more time than just a third of a mandate, but given the speed of political events in Spain since 2008, it is worth having a first look at the experience of the municipal government in Barcelona in the first third of its term.

The relevance of Barcelona is due not just to its being the second city of the Spanish state but also to its revolutionary and rebellious traditions and the international resonance of its new municipal government. The aim of this article is to identify elements for discussion and offer a first balance sheet.

General context

The municipal elections of 2015 were without a doubt the most important local contest since the first municipal elections of the democratic restoration in 1981. For the first time, local governments were contested by a plethora of municipal slates that were to break the grip of the two-party system. The two main parties, the Popular Party (PP) and the Socialist Party (PSOE) did not achieve a combined vote of 50%.

The eruption of Podemos in the European elections of 2014 and the electoral decline of the United Left (IU) opened up a debate about the need for a unity list amongst activists and the two parties for the local elections. These confluences had to be the mechanism for merging social movements that had been very active fighting the austerity policies of the PSOE and the PP governments.

Podemos left its members free to run on municipal slates as it was in the midst of organising for regional and the future general elections. That left the process of unity up to those members of the organisation with a more open view to building broad alliances and those who had been linked to the grassroots struggles of recent years.

IU had been in local governments in many cities and had around 2000

elected councillors; this was the best level on which to ensure IU's claim to be the third party. The situation created a dilemma that could wither away the party's identity: to join forces with a brand new political organisation that was seen as a competitor as well as with social movements that were often very critical of the organisation – or to stand alone and miss a historical opportunity to break the grip of the two-party system. There was no national homogenous decision, and no national solution. There were unity slates in many cities but in some cases there were two unity slates (or even three!). In those regions where there were regional elections at the same time the situation was even more complicated as Podemos refused unity proposals at regional levels, even where they were happening at the municipal level.

The result in Spain

Although it is not the objective of this article to offer an in-depth analysis of the elections, it is necessary to understand the expectations that the result created across the country to assess the elected government.

The new municipal alternatives in many cases overcame the PSOE and became the official left-wing opposition locally; such was the case in Madrid, Zaragoza, Valencia, and Santiago. That created an opportunity for alternative left municipal governments to be formed. Only in Zamora did IU manage to become the most voted force on the left.¹ The result was uneven as the PP maintained strong electoral support in many towns and villages — its overall vote was down 28% but it maintained more than six million votes. The PSOE lost half a million, which is 10% of their vote. Overall, the most surprising result was in Barcelona where the newly created unity list was the most voted list. It was the only major city that was not won by a traditional party.² These elections were the first major break, electorally speaking, for the political forces that are seen as inheritors of political change and of a new politics.

The result in Barcelona

The situation in the city of Barcelona has several elements that make the outcome slightly different from elsewhere. It had experienced a wave of mass mobilisations in favour of the right to self-determination. The national government of the PP has been repressing the movement that exists in Catalonia for an independence referendum.

The process of building the municipal slate started with several political parties and many social organisations that had been working for years against the effects of the economic crisis.³

Although an important organisation of the pro-independence far left decided not to join the slate, *Barcelona en comú* (BCNcomú) received 176,612

votes (25%). The CUP (Candidature of Popular Unity) stood together with a small group of far left organisations (*CUP-capgirem Barcelona*). Initially, the CUP negotiated with BCNcomú but they voted ICV⁴ and to a certain extent EUiA.⁵ They pointed out that ICV, a green party originating in the PSUC, was part of the establishment and had been in previous governments in the city and Catalonia. The CUP therefore did not join BCNcomú, and won 51,945 votes (7.5%). The electoral coalition ICV-EUiA had gotten a mere 10% in the previous mayoral elections of 2011.

That result gave almost 33% to political forces to the left of social democracy. In a city that had been governed by the local PSOE in all but four years of modern history, it represented a major setback for the centre-left.

But the new emerging political force was not a simple coalition of parties; it was built as a new type of organisation with the principle of one-person-one-vote independently of the political party or organisation of origin, if any, and the wish to be anchored at grassroots level. The local PSOE obtained the worst result since the first democratic elections with 9.6% of the votes (67,475 ballots); in the mid-1990s it was able to poll over 300,000 votes, with 4 councillors, while in the previous mandate they had 11. The incumbent mayor of the right-wing nationalist party CDC got 159,222 votes and 10 councillors, a net loss 15,000 votes. The left Republicans (ERC)⁶ scored 77,081 votes and 5 elected representatives. *Ciudadanos* had its best result ever with 77,484 votes and 5 councillors, and the Popular Party was reduced to a mere 60,966 votes and 3 representatives. It is extremely unusual, given the Spanish electoral system, to have 7 political groups in a representative body; but this, again, is proof of the crisis of the political system.⁷ It has to be said that the turnout increased more than 5%.

The result gave a majority to the left, 23 out of 41 elected representatives. But forming a coalition was impossible since the different left-leaning organisations would not agree on forming a common government. The mood in the city due to social struggle and the general mobilisation was such that social organisations ensured that all left-leaning forces would vote to allow the most voted list to get the mayoralty. Thus on 13 June 2015 Ada Colau was named mayor of Barcelona; for the first time the city had a woman as mayor.

In that sense, it was not just a coalition voted in to create a left in municipal government but the capacity of the forces supporting them to put pressure on the other groups in the municipal legislature that was the key for BCNcomú to take office. On the right side of the spectrum, *Ciudadanos* was not ready to support a Catalan nationalist mayor of CiU. So the government

was formed with the eleven elected representatives of BCNcomú alone – a real challenge because only one of the eleven had previous experience in office.

Previous governments

Historically Barcelona had been governed by the socialists in regular coalition with the communist party (PSUC), then with the ICV-EUiA and also with ERC. Despite a certain municipal vision and positioning of Barcelona (locally known as *Maragallism* from the name of the mayor that governed from 1982 to 1997), the city did not oppose the general political trends of the country, on the contrary.

The so-called ‘Barcelona model’ has been seen, for years, as a success story of urban development, but it went hand in hand with urban speculation and gentrification. Barcelona had been a highly industrial city, by Spanish standards, with major international firms within the city and many important national ones. The country’s deindustrialisation process was heavily felt in the city, as all major industries were closed down or downsized.

The response to this process was the attempt by the first democratic municipality after Francoism to transform the city into an international hub of logistics and finances that would create wealth and substitute the old sectors. This required major urban modifications that took place before and around the summer Olympic Games of 1992. Barcelona had a history of major urban developments around international events. The 1990s were the years in which the ‘Barcelona brand’ was created. During the 2000s other international events continued the trend, with the city now heavily in debt.

That process transformed the former industrial hub into a multicultural metropolis based on tourism, foreign investment, and banking, with some high added-value industrial sectors but creating few jobs. In this regard, Barcelona became a two-speed city where some neighbourhoods enjoyed the new model while the ‘other’ Barcelona was left behind. For years the socialist municipal governments had attempted to create some sort of redistributive elements but they could not counteract the general economic tendency.

For thirty years they de-facto privatised waste management; they happily handed over the water agency to a French multinational, and they created a tangle of private companies around the metropolitan transport agency, which began to behave like a private multinational.

They never went beyond a redistribution of the crumbs of the meagre tax revenues that cities receive. The criticism of many was that the left in government made no attempt to fundamentally change the structures

of power within the city. The socialist reign ended ingloriously passing the municipality on to the Catalan nationalists who continued the same processes.

The challenge

The new government was built with the idea of tackling social emergencies. The figures from the 2008–2015 period were astonishing. There were around 3,000 evictions per year within the city.⁸ Around 90% of dwellings were rented. In 2011 around 25,000 families could not pay their water bills; in 2012 the figure grew to 70,000 families within the metropolitan area of Barcelona.⁹ During the current local administration the number of evictions has diminished, but they continue to occur.

All but one of the councillors who formed the first government of BCNcomú were social activists in one field or another (housing, water, etc.) who generated expectations of change. Many citizens perceived Barcelona as having been adrift, and for them a brand new team might not have experience but it would at least not be linked to the traditional elite.

The programme of BCNcomú was constructed around an emergency plan to tackle the social emergency, a plan that had to be applied ‘within the first months of government’. In parallel to this emergency plan, BCNcomú spent months working on its broader programme with the participation of the citizens of Barcelona.¹⁰

The first policy was to invest 160 million euros during the first year of the mandate on social issues. With Barcelona being a relatively rich city with relatively good macroeconomic figures, a self-proposed objective was to develop a ‘programme to create 2,500 jobs in the short term. This will require an investment of approximately 50 million euros.’¹¹ While there have been many initiatives organised by the municipal employment agency, the figures are as follows:

The total number of registered unemployed is 80,000 people, exactly the same as in 2009 and slightly fewer than several years ago, but the tendency started to improve with the CiU government. The over-45 age group continues to be heavily affected, and there is no change in the tendency since the arrival of the new government. The general precarious situation of employment has not been modified with the new government or the announced economic recovery.

Many standards for tackling precarious work were announced, but the capacities of the already stretched 12,000 civil servants are very limited. Priority has been given to tackling the abuses in the tourist sector.

The programme states ‘We have to take back public and cooperative

control of the economy. Public institutions should exert their authority over private companies that provide services affecting the public interest', but no concrete measures have been taken to regain control of the key companies that have been given over to private hands through long-term concessions.

It is clear that any alternative municipal government will run into major problems over issues such as IT contracts or telephone provisions. There are no 'nice' or 'alternative' major providers for many of the city's needs. The challenge is then to develop and construct elements of alternative economic structure that can provide a real alternative to the few multinationals that control a determined sector.

Public procurement is seen as the main weapon a city has to resist the main tendencies of capitalism. But it has to be used effectively. The petrol provider, the energy provider, and the IT provider should be chosen to develop an alternative economy. This has historically been the role of municipalism and cooperativism. Here the process of remunicipalisations that the leaders of BCNcomú have defended in public is the proof of the pudding. So far only two kindergartens¹² and the service providing assistance to abused women have been taken back into public control¹³ – a grand total of 80 workers, while a music school has been outsourced losing about 20 workers.¹⁴ The overall balance sheet is not very positive, although the stated aim is to take back a good third of the outsourced employment. Either we will see a huge move towards re-municipalisation or this is going to be a broken promise.¹⁵

Sometimes it is necessary to accept a certain level of compromise when there is no other alternative, but the structures around the public entities have to be fundamentally replaced in order to avoid the continuous pressure that the elite puts on governments (especially when the government is hostile to these interests). Locally, Spanish and foreign multinationals still have most of their multi-million euro contracts. One could say that closing down all of them would be expensive and sometimes there was no alternative to retaining them, but the expectation was that those types of relations would be squashed. It is not just a question of 'punishing' these huge multinationals, but of using this public funding to develop new types of companies, which is a fundamental part of the mandate that the citizens of Barcelona gave the elected government, as is also combating an economic model which keeps fueling the economy of the city through mass tourism and housing speculation.

Again, there is a difficult thin line between compromising principles and being realistic. The city announced a plan to cut ties with all companies that could be accused of tax fraud or tax evasion.¹⁶ The problem with such

a positive move is that unless there are real alternative providers or an in-house capacity, one can be trapped in an unsolvable situation.¹⁷

Many things were done in the first months of government, and a new style came to the institution. But the first good steps in recovering empty flats from the 'bad banks' to be put to social use have to keep pace with the decaying economic situation. As evictions continue, unless there is a clear structural policy on housing the city council will not be able to counteract the capacity of the market to expel people and keep increasing the rents. There was also a moratorium on hotel building in order to study the expansion of the tourist sector, which is detrimental to the cost of living of many residents. Both the structural housing policy and the moratorium demand a major confrontation with other public administrations governed by the right-wing. Whether Catalan or Spanish, Barcelona has the choice of compromising with those levels of government or mobilising its engaged citizenship to advance radical policy alternatives. So far it has favoured the first option.

A very successful part of the programme has been the different subsidies to low-income families in the form of food aid to school children and other type of grants for children. This type of initiative, however, runs the risk of not tackling the root causes of the increasing inequality that the leaders of BCNcomú have set as a target to reduce. This positive policy can turn into its opposite if it is not combined with a more aggressive re-appropriation of wealth from the elite. So far, that aspect represents the weak link in Barcelona. The same can be said of the subsidy given to poor families not to pay property tax.

Another good development has been the fines to dodgy touristic operators, like Airbnb, and undeclared tourist flats, but still the scope of such fines is very small. Closing down 600 touristic flats was a more efficient decision, but these kinds of flats are so much more profitable for the owners than normal rent that this will not stop the use and abuse of such platforms without more effort.

Another important issue for the city council is the fight against corruption and for opening up the institutions to the public. For that reason, there has been a battery of initiatives to increase participation, publish every single invoice as well as contracts, and involve citizens in the strategic plan. This is accompanied by public consultations in the neighbourhoods around important matters such as tourism or mobility. Another key element is to reclaim the streets for pedestrians and reduce car use. So far, the superblocks¹⁸ plan has attracted a lot of attention, and it is a clear alternative to mainstream urbanism, but at this initial stage it needs more propaganda and pedagogy

to support it. In the first third of the mandate mobility has been the most difficult element, not because it was decided to have one day a week without cars but because one of the established economic powers, the Metropolitan Transportation Agency (TMB), is under city council control but does not respond to the council as one might expect.

The TMB is a huge employer in the city with almost 8,000 direct jobs and several thousand indirect ones. It is a publicly-owned company, which before BCNcomú got into office was bidding for the contract to privatise the underground system of Porto. Fortunately, that bid was cancelled. TMB managers are clearly overpaid and refuse to admit it,¹⁹ and it has been confronted with a six-month long strike by the metro drivers over the collective agreement and wages, with whom these managers have dealt with considerable arrogance.

This has been one of the worst experiences of the new government – the impossibility of adequately managing an industrial conflict and the siding of the municipal team with the management of the company.

In fact, the conflict of the metro workers brought to the fore the contradictions of the stated programme of fighting against precarious work and improving working conditions. We have gone from saying that a city-provided allowance (a sort of pay weighting for the high cost of living in the city) was planned to claiming that metro drivers were earning too much and should not strike. This has shown itself to be a dangerous trend that if not corrected soon can degenerate into a clash with the local trade unions.

In September 2015, only a few months after having taken office, Ada Colau posted on Facebook a strong criticism of European asylum policy and a denunciation of the so-called refugee crisis, thus launching the Refugee City Project and appealing to other cities to follow suit. The argument is in line with the concept of new municipalism and the rejuvenation of government close to the citizen. She also successfully attempted to change the line of the Spanish government within the European Council so that Mariano Rajoy, Spain's prime minister, had to accept a higher quota. Despite this political success very few refugees have arrived and no other successful attempt has been made to unblock the situation. So Barcelona has become a refugee city without refugees but plenty of undocumented immigrants.

This public discourse so favourable to hosting clashed with the local police campaign to chase street vendors, mostly of sub-Saharan origin, from tourist hotspots. Fuelled by the local press, which has used the issue to blast the left government and the opposition, BCNcomú found it very difficult to justify its position of trying to use police methods against the street vendors combined with public consciousness-raising campaigns. Here we clearly

discover a contradiction between the new municipalism and the need to change national legislation in order to be able to work for the integration of the people who do not enjoy full citizenship.

Some lessons

The first year of a new government is considered crucial, as most issues appear in the first months even if the politicians are brand new and without experience. The case of Barcelona is no different. The first twelve months had an uneven balance sheet of a government that was learning as it went along. This is a government that has generated huge expectations in Spain and abroad.

Yet, about a year after having won the elections, the leadership of BCNcomú decided to invite the Socialist Party (PSC) to be part of the municipal government, contradicting its claim of being a new political force untainted by the political establishment. As the four new city councillors from the PSC joined the 11 from BCNcomú, the remaining 9 leftists (from the CUP and ERC) declared war on the municipal government, announcing that they would not make it easy to pass the budget as they saw the move as politicking. The argument given to the BCNcomú rank and file for inviting the PSC was that the government could not last long with only 11 members and that the workloads were too heavy.

That decision creates a watershed in the history of Barcelona's new municipal government. After little more than one year in office BCNcomú decided to bring back 'old politics'. The fact that the very political force that had created the model against which BCNcomú had fought is now part of the government was not seen as a worrisome element. The first year of government was a difficult period with ups and downs, but the decision to invite the Socialists has had the effect of demobilising the social forces that were the root of the victory. This will have a long-term impact on the initiative and the capacity to really challenge the established powers of the city, which is the stated aim of this government. The struggle was always going to be uphill, but the leadership of BCNcomú has decided to fill their pockets with stones; only time will tell if these stones prove too heavy.

NOTES

- 1 <<http://resultados.elpais.com/elecciones/2015/municipales/08/49/275.html>>.
- 2 The traditional parties include the PP, PSOE, and the Catalan and Basque nationalists (CiU and PNV). The only exception was Gijón, which was won by a former split of the PP, but this party joined the PP in the national elections.
- 3 The best-known is the PAH (Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca), which was active against evictions, but there were others like Agua és vida (water is life), a

movement against water cuts, or L'aliança contra la pobresa energètica (alliance against energy poverty).

- 4 Iniciativa per Catalunya-Verts (ICV) had the virtue of providing legal access to the local mass media during the campaign as they were an existing political force with representation, though most activists did not want to exclude them.
- 5 EuiA is the Catalan federation of Izquierda Unida.
- 6 A left nationalist force that has a Member of the European Parliament in the Green-EFA group.
- 7 <<http://resultados.elpais.com/elecciones/2015/municipales/09/08.html>>.
- 8 <<http://www.elperiodico.com/es/noticias/barcelona/deshucios-ciudad-barcelona-son-impago-del-alquiler-vivienda-locales-4988760>>.
- 9 <http://www.elcritic.cat/blogs/benscomuns/2016/06/16/sis-anys-de-saqueig-de-laigua-a-barcelona/>
- 10 <https://barcelonaencomu.cat/sites/default/files/pla-xoc_eng.pdf>.
- 11 <https://barcelonaencomu.cat/sites/default/files/pla-xoc_eng.pdf>.
- 12 <<https://pla-de-xoc-bcomu.silk.co/page/Remunicipalitzaci%C3%B3-d'escoles-bressol>>.
- 13 <http://www.eldiario.es/catalunyaplural/barcelona/Barcelona-municipalitzadatenacio-nassumeix-treballadores_0_557144751.html >.
- 14 <http://cat.elpais.com/cat/2016/09/09/catalunya/1473419267_621122.html>.
- 15 <<http://municipalitzem.barcelona/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Peticio-MG-Municipalitzem.pdf>>.
- 16 <http://caa.elpais.com/caa/2016/05/20/catalunya/1463738697_751252.html>.
- 17 <http://www.eldiario.es/catalunyaplural/barcelona/Barcelona-Damm-malgrat-levasio-directius_0_562044135.html>.
- 18 A term referring to blocks of buildings that are liberated from cars. <<https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2016/may/17/superblocks-rescue-barcelona-spain-plan-give-streets-back-residents>>.
- 19 <http://www.eldiario.es/catalunya/barcelona/directivos-recurrido-resolucion-transparencia-TMB_0_577792723.html>.

Towards the League of the Balkan Left

Anej Korsika

The Balkan Peninsula has played a special role in Europe's political imagination. For the greater part of contemporary history this region figured as a kind of barbaric wasteland. Barbaric in the original sense of the word, that is, of people speaking incomprehensible languages. Beyond this linguistic sense, barbarity was usually, and more importantly, attached to the level (or lack) of civilisational development – cultural, political, and economic. In all of these aspects, the Balkans were, and more or less still are, seen as the backward region of Europe. This also generates the more common imagery of the barbarian, the crude, primitive, aggressive, chaotic, unorderedly, etc. If the United States had the Wild West, Europe had the Wild Southeast. The collective political imaginary of Europe has been quick to point its finger at the Balkans as a kettle always brewing with potential conflicts and always threatening to spill over into more civilised European nations. As Bismarck remarked in 1888: 'One day the great European War will come out of some damned foolish thing in the Balkans.'

The Second World War

In order to fully comprehend the contemporary situation in the former Yugoslavia, we need to glance at the Second World War. Besides the partisans led by Josip Broz Tito, general secretary of the Yugoslav Communist Party, at the time still a staunch supporter of Stalin and a member of Comintern, there were other forces at work whose political ancestors played a marginalised role during the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia but gained a political voice and social following after the breakup.

Specifically, these were forces that openly collaborated with either Nazi Germany or fascist Italy and had to various degrees gotten support from them combined with some autonomy. This was first and foremost the case with the Independent State of Croatia, led by Ante Pavelić and his fascist Ustaše regime. The Ustaše were notorious for their brutality and

bloodthirstiness, which in many cases surpassed and even disgusted the Nazis. A case in point was the Jasenovac concentration camp where more than one hundred thousand Jews, Roma, communists, homosexuals, Muslims, Serbs, and others met their tragic fate. The Serbs were victims of a special level of ferocity and brutality; a special kind of claw-like knife attached to the wrist was invented, named 'the Serb cutter', to make the slaughtering of prisoners even quicker.

Other regions did not enjoy the kind of autonomy that the independent state of Croatia did (which included all of contemporary Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as parts of modern Serbia). In other cases, the territories were either integrated, as with Slovenia – where territory was annexed by Germany, Italy, and Hungary – or puppet governments were installed (as in Serbia). In these instances, some political forces also collaborated with the fascists. In Serbia there were Chetniks under the command of general Draže Mihajlević, who were loyal to the former king of Yugoslavia (then in exile in London), and which at first even participated to some extent in the common anti-fascist struggle in an ad hoc coalition with Tito's partisans, only later to collaborate with the Nazis. Lastly, in Slovenia, there were the Domobranci, who swore allegiance to Hitler; they were backed by some sections of the Catholic church and represented themselves as a kind of defence against the harassment of the civil population on the part of partisans and against the prospect of the Communist Party gaining sole political hegemony. What happened at the end of the War, and also after it, is likewise crucial to understanding contemporary antagonisms.

The post-war period

The Germans, Ustaše, the Domobranci, and others tried to reach Austria and surrender to the allies there, which seemed more promising than facing the wrath of the local population. Despite the capitulation of Germany and the signing of the Armistice, these units had not laid down their arms and had retreated in military formation. Up to two weeks after the official end of the war armed struggles between them and the partisans continued. When they finally reached southern Austria, an area under British supervision, the British refused to take them in and even sent them back to Yugoslavia, though leading them to believe they were going to Italy. The agreement between the allies was that each country would deal with its own people. It goes without saying that in being extradited to Yugoslavia many of these people were liquidated without a trial, in dubious circumstances or under false pretence.

As brutal as these extrajudicial killings appear from today's vantage point,

they cannot be understood outside the circumstances in which they took place. To a somewhat lesser extent similar post-war killings were perpetrated throughout Europe. Nevertheless, the fact is that their magnitude was much greater in a specific region, north-eastern Slovenia, where fighting continued for two whole weeks after the peace treaty was signed. Because of the greater concentration of population and armed soldiers, the percentage of killings and the absolute figure was also much higher there. As Yugoslavia and its Communist leadership turned out to be on the right side of history, had practically achieved total self-liberation, and later even dared to challenge Stalin, the Yugoslav League of Communists emerged from the War as a great political and moral victor. At the same time, collaborators were of course prosecuted and unanimously seen as traitors for helping the very forces that had openly declared their plans to enslave or exterminate the races they considered inferior.

Yugoslavia, it is true, contributed many genuinely new ideas to the world socialist movement, from the idea of socialist self-management, as opposed to the Soviet planned economy, to the non-aligned movement that challenged the bipolar constitution of the world and became a decisive force in the United Nations. However, in many respects the post-war renewal came to a clear halt at the beginning of 1970s, that is, the period from which the onset of neoliberalism in western societies is usually dated. That very similar processes took place in the East Bloc, as well as Yugoslavia for that matter, is generally overlooked. The world in general has enjoyed steady economic growth since the Second World War, but economic stagflation set in by the 1970s. We should not be deceived by appearances; although Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union were not governed by Reaganomics, this does not mean that serious attempts at liberalising the markets were not made, and to a lesser extent implemented.

In almost all of its constituent republics, there were liberal currents inside the parties making up the Yugoslav League of Communists, which wanted to liberalise and deregulate the economy. As this was an inner party struggle, and the liberal current was in a minority, the more hard-line, orthodox majority, headed by Tito himself, eventually prevailed. Though this attempt at liberalisation was averted and unity and the central role of party were maintained, it was, as could be seen later, only a temporary victory. On the one hand, despite their defeat, the ghost of liberal ideas was out of the bottle. In the 1980s when, for example in Slovenia, civil society was increasingly critical of the federal authorities and to a lesser extent, of the national authorities as well, there was an explicit referral to the liberalism that had been defeated a decade earlier. Liberalism in the political sense, that

is, autonomy and independence of civil society, respect for human rights, a multi-party system, as well as economic liberalism, now had returned in a comeback the system was not able to block. One of the reasons for its success was the above-mentioned global turn to neoliberalism; although these currents had been suppressed in the East Bloc, they were, with the cabinet of Margaret Thatcher and administration of Ronald Reagan, becoming the official doctrine of the West. A kind of post-war cohabitation was ending, and a renewed power struggle initiated by policies such as Reagan's 'Star Wars' was to be the final challenge to actually existing socialism, which it was not able to withstand.

This global political pressure was combined with economic pressure, as in the case of Yugoslavia, which, in order to receive new loans or loan extensions from the International Monetary Fund, had to increasingly change, that is, liberalise and deregulate its economy. The liberal current was thus both internal and external and ultimately succeeded in toppling the socialist state structure.

But it is not only liberalism that accounts for the breakup of Yugoslavia. An almost equally potent force, which had to be continually held at bay, and conceded to, was of course nationalism. Yugoslavia's constantly repeated central slogan was 'Brotherhood and Unity'. The weight and importance that national unity and the brotherhood of nations had for the Yugoslav League of Communists is obvious as it was essential for building a state and society on the ruins of the Second World War, a war almost exclusively characterised by extreme nationalism, ethnic cleansing, and even genocide. That being said, the issue of nations and nationalities was a very complex one and was defined by a much more complex attitude than the quite general dismissal of liberalism on the part of the party leadership. On the one hand, the League had to maintain a stable balance between the nation and nationalities, even build on national solidarities and unity. In a more positive perspective, there was an attempt at developing some initial elements of a Yugoslav identity, but this had to be done very cautiously as too aggressive measures would quickly destabilise the balance of nations. Despite all languages having equal rights, Serbo-Croatian was the *de facto* lingua franca of Yugoslavia.

It is quite interesting to look at today's linguistic situation in the former Yugoslavia; where Serbo-Croatian once had primacy, the acronym BHS (Bosnian, Croatian, Serbian) is now seen, and recently even Montenegrin has begun to be developed as Montenegro's language. As these languages have much more in common than they have differences between them, the grammatical differences having been, throughout the 1990s, artificially produced and exaggerated. While in Yugoslavia all students were obliged to

take classes in Serbo-Croatian, these classes were immediately abolished after gaining independence, for example in Slovenia. One of the sad outcomes was that the youth, especially those with little to no connection to the cultural space of ex-Yugoslavia, have almost no knowledge of Serbo-Croatian and now usually communicate in English.

Transition

The post-war period was arguably the most economically successful. Indeed a number of countries in the region still fall short of the levels of development that existed before the breakup of Yugoslavia and the fall of actually existing socialism. The programme of aggressive market liberalisation and deregulation, as well as the privatisation of public infrastructure (energy, health, education, etc.), have been the major characteristics of the regional transition to market capitalism. Along with deindustrialisation, processes of political subjugation have also taken place. Despite the broad political consensus in the region that joining the European Union and NATO was desirable and inevitable, the fact is that doing so has dealt further blows to the economic and political sovereignty of these countries. Rethinking industrial policy in the Balkan region, therefore, must take into account this rather limited sovereignty that constrains radical industrial-policy proposals. In some countries, monetary policy is impossible (Slovenia joined the EMU in 2007), while others (Kosovo and Montenegro) are using the euro as their de facto domestic currency. In still other cases, savings accounts are tied to a foreign currency (in Croatia to the Swiss franc). Be that as it may, most of the Balkan region still has its own currency and thus could manipulate it to its benefit and for greater industrial output (notwithstanding that such a move would probably bring a negative response from the EU).

A bedrock of any meaningful reindustrialisation includes the nationalisation of some of the previously privatised infrastructure that is of major economic and strategic importance. In many cases, and especially in Slovenia, there already was de facto nationalisation of a great deal of nonperforming companies, which were bailed out through state-backed and guaranteed loans and are now once again slated to be privatised. In such cases, (re-) nationalisation could be much swifter but then again it would inevitably have to face EU discontent with such policies. This brings us to the basic truth that this region has to face, which is that divided it simply does not stand a chance and is destined to remain a long-term periphery of the European core countries.

The liberal and conservative bloc

We have tried to indicate the contemporary political situation faced by progressive forces in the region, which required a quick and very general overview of the last couple of decades. We did this to show that incumbent political players all have roots in that past. Liberal democratic forces usually claim connection to attempts at liberalisation in the 1970s and its protagonists as well as parts of the civil-society movements of the 1980s. Nationalist, conservative, and religious political groups have recently been aggressively pushing a revisionist historical and political agenda. In Slovenia this means the rehabilitation of the collaborationist forces of the Second World War – the Domobranci – mostly on the part of the SDS (Slovenian Democratic Party) and the NSi (Christian Democratic Party). In Croatia such rehabilitation refers to the Ustaše regime, and in Serbia, the Chetniks are being politically rehabilitated as well. Apart from the liberal and conservative bloc, there is, at least officially, a social democratic bloc, but upon closer examination it is clear that it does not belong in a separate category.

After the breakup of Yugoslavia, there were different scenarios involving the newly established socialist, social democratic, even communist parties, which all claimed to be the true heir to the Yugoslav League of Communists. In some cases, as in Slovenia and Croatia, these became the typical Western social democratic parties; in others, as in Serbia under Milošević, they were even a ruling force for many years to come. Despite confusing some Western intellectuals (even Noam Chomsky), Milošević and his Socialist Party represented something completely different from the Yugoslav League of Communists, as events throughout the 1990s made abundantly clear. In other cases, the inflation of these parties and lack of any real political power made them marginal and without any meaningful impact on political life. Ultimately, where the social democratic camp did function, it acted like the currently typical western type of social democratic party. In other words, it ultimately pursued a neoliberal agenda.

Furthermore, even the two political camps that ultimately remain in the region, that is the liberals and conservatives, are not all that different from each other, at least in their economic policy. We could say that the conservatives are advocating an ‘honest’ and proper neoliberalism, while the liberals are trying to present it as ‘neoliberalism with a human face’. Incidentally, the results are, from the standpoint of capital, usually even more favourable when the liberals are in government. Those differences that ultimately do exist regard issues such as the right to abortion, the separation of state and church, LGBTQ rights, etc. This shows that despite multiparty systems, which each of the former Yugoslav republics nominally has, there

in each instance is a de facto two-party system. There is a liberal group of parties (including the social democrats), and there is the conservative group of parties (including nationalists). In other words, the evolution of the political scene involves two factions of capital with more or less the same basic interests and economic policies continuously trying to take power. They have some meagre cultural differences which they (especially the liberals) are willing to concede if they get in the way of their economic interests, which is almost always the case.

The progressive left forces in the region

Thus progressive left forces in the region faced a manifold task in trying to constitute themselves. On the one hand, there were the liberal and conservative forces that have hegemonised the political space. These were their opponents in various civil-society struggles as well as student struggles in the region such as the occupation of the Faculty of Arts in Belgrade and Zagreb and then later in Ljubljana as well, all within only a couple of years. And there were the campaigns for the rights of the LGBTQ people who still do not have universal and equal rights in any of the region's countries. Criticism of the NATO accession process was a huge mobilising factor, especially in Slovenia, and really unified broad strata of civil society, as did the protests against the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Recently, anti-austerity protests have been occurring in the region against the policies of the European Commission, although many of these measures have already been extensively implemented in the transition to market capitalism. In general, Eastern Europe had experienced a decade earlier much of what the financial crisis brought about in the West.

These actions and experiences were formative for a whole generation, which received its political education from them and who were then able to critically reflect on the ever persistent question: what is to be done? In almost all instances, the answer tended towards more intense political articulation of the whole project, specifically, moving it beyond the narrow constraints of university struggles and making it a truly universal struggle. This, of course, brought the dilemma of what kind of organisational form is needed to best enter such broader political struggles.

In the case of Slovenia, this led to the establishment of the United Left coalition that now has 6 out of 90 MPs in the Slovenian National Assembly. Other parties have been founded, like Radnička Front (Workers Front) in Croatia or Leica (The Left) in Macedonia. In Croatia, many progressive media initiatives were successfully implemented, first and foremost the regional web portal Bilten, which covers the news in the whole Balkan

region from a critical left perspective. Another very important organisation, also from Croatia, BRID (platform for workers initiative and democracy), which specialises in cooperation with trade unions, has gained a lot of concrete experience with day-to-day labour struggles.

The League of the Balkan Left

Another step forward in reanimating the efforts of progressive forces in the region was the establishment of the League of the Balkan Left, which aims to connect progressive movements, civil-society initiatives, and political parties across the Balkans. Its short-term objective is to build a communication platform that will serve as a medium for information exchange. The League of the Balkan Left has only just come into existence and has a very short history. The idea was first put forward at the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation regional summer school in Baška, Krk (Croatia) in October 2015, specifically at a workshop devoted to the issue of regional cooperation. At that time the idea that a kind of delegate system for continuous communication needed be established gained general support. The follow-up meeting on a smaller (delegate) scale was held in February 2016 in Brežice, Slovenia. This meeting was devoted to concretising the general ideas adopted in Baška and also served as a team-building event for the first assembly of the participating delegates.

Currently, there are around 16 different organisations involved in the process of building this Balkan network. Each organisation is represented by at least one delegate. These represent a wide array of organisations. Some are student organisations such as Iskra (Slovenia), Mugra (Macedonia), while others primarily focus on media work, such as Bilten (Croatia). There was also a representative of Brid (Croatia), which is predominantly working with trade unions and workers on the shop floor. In addition, Left Summit from Serbia is a broad coalition of many different organisations, while Initiative for Democratic Socialism (Slovenia) is a political party, a member of the United Left coalition and has representatives in the Slovenian parliament. And then there were representatives of more theoretically oriented projects, along with representatives from Bulgaria, Romania, Kosovo, Albania, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. In all, the organisations, their focus, and their state of development reflect the broader development of left forces in the region. As such, they provide a realistic starting ground for stronger regional cooperation and exchange of ideas and experience.

When continuous and reliable communication is established, the next, mid-term objective is to begin work on common projects. Coordination of the regional activities, such as the anti-privatisation struggle, exchange

of experiences in field work, policy-making, campaign coordination, etc. are among the many activities that may be promoted through the Balkan network sometime in the next six to twelve months. Despite its short history the League of the Balkan Left does have a longer past, its aspirations coming out of various conferences (of a more academic or political nature) that took place in the region in the last three to four years. To mention but a few: the Subversive Film Festival (Zagreb, Croatia), the May Day School (Ljubljana, Slovenia), conferences by the Centre for Political Emancipation (Belgrade, Serbia), etc. We see the League of the Balkan Left as a qualitative step for furthering these efforts and bringing them to a new level.

transform! europe 2016 at a Glance

Edited by Maxime Benatouil

For over fifteen years, transform! has been working as a horizontal network with alternative thinking and political dialogue at its core – always in relation to social and labour movements, as well as in close cooperation with critical researchers. We now are a network of 29 European organisations from 20 countries, active in the field of political education and critical scientific analysis, and are recognised as the political foundation that corresponds to the Party of the European Left (EL).

The facilitating team of transform!, in charge of implementing the programmes and projects in compliance with the decisions collectively made at the General Assembly, drafted this activity report focusing on the highlights of 2016. It does not claim to be exhaustive, but rather to provide readers with concrete information regarding the activities carried out by our network over the year, the research questions we tried to tackle, as well as on the partnerships we established to this end.

European Integration and the Strategic Perspectives of the Radical Left

Angelina Giannopoulou

In 2016 the research programme ‘European Integration and the Strategic Perspectives of the Radical Left’ developed the following focuses:

- the so-called ‘EU coup’ against the first Syriza government in July 2015;
- the effects of the worst refugee crisis since the Second World War;
- the continuing crisis of the eurozone and the EU as well as the proposals for the future coming from various sides; the new economic governance strategy as well as the left alternatives;
- the development of different political trends in various parts of Europe (the rise of the extreme and populist right in Central, Eastern and Northern Europe and hopeful signs of progressive changes in Southern Europe);

- the current state of the traditional political actors in Europe; the state of the social democrats and their interrelation with the radical left.

The activities carried out involved a significant number of people from a broad spectrum of political views and from various national contexts. We all had the opportunity, through transform! europe's events, to discuss the crucial issues the European left is facing. Many people who became involved for the first time in transform!'s activities wanted to contribute to an alternative plan and strategy for Europe, against the neoliberal doctrine implemented by the European elites. transform! europe organised or co-organised the following events:

1) *Structure and Strategy Workshop*, March 3–4, in Vienna, organised by transform!, Rosa Luxemburg Foundation (RLF), and Der Wandel. In this event organisational and structural coordinators from various left and progressive parties in Europe had occasion to reflect on the practices of their individual organisations and learn from the experience of others. The programme combined plenary presentations, spotlight sessions, peer2peer discussions, and extended strategy workshops. The invited organisations were KPÖ and Der Wandel from Austria, Die LINKE from Germany, Izquierda Unida and Podemos from Spain, Syriza from Greece, Bloco de Esquerda from Portugal, HDP from Turkey, Združena Levica from Slovenia, and Razem from Poland. There were c. 30 to 40 participants during the two days, while in the public event at the end of the second day the audience included about 200 people.

2) *The 'Building Alliances to Fight Austerity and Reclaim Democracy in Europe' Conference*, March 18–20 in Athens, organised by transform!, Syriza, the Party of the European Left, and the Nicos Poulantzas Institute. The conference aimed, on the one hand, at analysing some of the major problems the EU and its Member States are facing today and, on the other, to contribute to establishing broad political and social alliances to confront these problems in the interest of democracy and of the European peoples and dominated classes. The debates were organised around six thematic axes and two public events where 67 speakers (moderators included) – coming from a broad spectrum of political and social forces – presented talks and interventions. Approximately 200 people attended the various sessions, and Saturday's public event took place in a crowded hall with more than 600 people. Furthermore, 43,500 individuals watched the conference through live online streaming, with 36,000 watching Saturday's public event, where Alexis Tsipras, Pierre Laurent, Declan Kearney, Ska Keller, Marisa Matias, and Tania González addressed the attendees.¹

3) *The Berlin Seminar 'State of Affairs in Europe'*, July 7-9, in Berlin, organised by transform! europe and the RLF. The seminar aimed to trace the possibilities for common perspectives and action of the left in Europe by bringing together intellectuals, experts, and activists to debate the recent developments in Europe that raised many questions and arguments in Europe's left. The main points addressed through this event were focused on the state of the EU, the state of the movements, and the state of politics. The discussion was organised in 12 sessions presented by 26 speakers. The organisers intend to publish an electronic or printed edition of the seminar's contributions.

4) *The 'New Economic Governance' Project*, April 2016 – January 2017 in Brussels, organised by transform! europe and the economic governance working group based in Brussels. The project intends to collect the diverse left and progressive analyses of the EU's economic governance with a view to producing a fruitful synthesis. At the same time, the main political goal is to develop ideas and concrete proposals from a radical left perspective in opposition to economic governance. The project, developed through an interdisciplinary team, has two main stages. Firstly, a two-day workshop took place in Brussels in the European Parliament on 13-14 October in which 20 participants presented their contributions. The workshop was co-organised by the delegation of Izquierda Unida in the GUE/NGL. Secondly, a joint written report will be published in January 2017. The report will comprise the outcome of the workshop as well as a comprehensive introduction and a conclusion that will bring together the various aspects.

5) *'Analysing European Social Democracy: The Stance of the Left' workshop*, November 14-15 in Helsinki, co-organised by transform! europe, RLF, the Left Forum, and the editors of *Sozialismus*. European social democracy is currently undergoing the most serious crisis of the postwar era, which is acknowledged by both politicians and political scientists. In this particular context, the radical left appears in many European countries to be the only credible candidate to possibly replace the social democrats and attract their traditional social allies. The significant electoral growth of the radical left in different countries has sparked the debate about the relations between the radical left and social democracy. With a view to inaugurating this dialogue, the event brought together 22 participants who analysed the phenomenon of social democracy, also in the context of the radical left, in order to determine the degree of rivalry or proximity of the two political actors (or trends). In 2017 research on the question of social democracy will continue to be a major component, and a publication is also planned on this topic.

6) *Survey of delegates of the Party of the European Left*: In the framework of the Third EL Congress, held in December 2010 in Paris, the first extensive survey was conducted of the demographic makeup and political profile of the EL's Congress delegates. The survey was repeated in December 2013 in Madrid, which made it possible to draw comparisons and highlight possible shifts such as the degree of renewal of the Congress's components as well as the level and type of impact the economic and financial crisis has had on the parties. The survey was repeated in the last EL Congress of 16–18 December 2016 in Berlin. It was conducted by transform! europe in cooperation with the Nicos Poulantzas Institute, which were the organisations responsible for the implementation and reporting of both previous surveys.²

Europe's Productive Transformation – Towards a New Model of Development

Maxime Benatouil

Genuine cooperation between progressive social and political forces in Europe is more needed than ever to efficiently meet the challenges we are confronted with. To name but a few: opposing precarious forms of employment, growing social insecurity that puts too many lives at risk, and social dumping between and within EU countries; tackling climate change and making sure that the inevitable energy transition will be socially just vis-à-vis workers; not leaving the field to right-wing populists capitalising on the persistence of the crisis and the legitimate anxiety caused by its management; and giving Europe a chance to overcome for everyone's sake the so-called core/periphery asymmetries undermining the EU from within.

We need to find global solutions for a better, fairer Europe. And to do so, an EU-wide industrial strategy, as well as a re-definition of labour rights standards, matter. The very concept of productive transformation not only implies the reconstruction of European productive capacities but also the establishment of a new model of development that meets social needs and ecological imperatives, with economic democracy as a compass.

This is quite ambitious, but we have no choice but to attempt it. We firmly believe that the work we have undertaken on the alternatives that can be opposed to austerity policies must be deepened and made widely known. It is to be seen as a modest contribution to the struggle against growing right-wing populism, prospering on the ashes of the crisis. transform! europe has underscored its commitment by making the programme on Productive Transformation one of its two pillars. The programme is made up of three autonomous working groups bringing together unionists, academics, movement activists, and political actors from across Europe in order to

tackle the following three specific issues: (1) a progressive industrial strategy for Europe; (2) a socially fair energy transition for Europe; and (3) labour and social rights under attack.

transform! europe Working Group on Industrial Policy

We initiated the 2016 programme with a workshop in close cooperation with the Nicos Poulantzas Institute in Athens on 17 March. It was the occasion to kick off our work for bringing political and economic solutions to the growing division between the so-called core and periphery of the EU. The key question that framed the discussion was: how can we take advantage of the potentials and complementarities of national and regional productive structures – avoiding, in particular, the imbalances related to the terms of trade and the effects of polarisation – through a left industrial policy? It has raised the question of the very nature of the planning of an EU-wide European industrial strategy, which from a progressive perspective can only be inclusive (multi-level political actors and institutions, trade unions, consumers' associations).

The issues of the digitisation of the economy and of Industry 4.0 from a labour perspective were then tackled in Milan on 24 June in a workshop co-organised with Punto Rosso and the Brussels office of the RLF. It allowed for a comprehensive overview of the transformations resulting from digitisation in the Italian productive fabric. Numerous trade union voices shared their experience from the workplaces affected by these processes, warned of the risks for the working classes, and proposed solutions – such as a public investment plan for education and continuous training – to prevent further polarisation between highly skilled and low-skilled workers who always are the first victims of technological changes of such a scope.

Together with the Brussels office of the RLF, we felt the need to explore the possibility of implementing a progressive European industrial strategy within the current institutional framework of the EU. The discussion held in Paris on 6 and 7 June was based on the study 'What is to be produced? The making of a new industrial policy in Europe', edited by Mario Pianta, and brought together progressive economists to discuss with him his key findings: What room for manoeuvre is there for a progressive industrial policy in Europe? How can it be funded, bearing in mind the weaknesses of the Juncker Plan? Can we use the Services of General Interests to protect key sectors of the different national industrial fabrics? The two-day workshop made it clear that there is a wish to go further with partners from other sectors of progressive forces, which then materialised in late October in Brussels.

For the very first time, we invited representatives from the European Green Party and its corresponding foundation, from the Party of the European Left, as well as from the European Trade Union Confederation, along with national trade unions and heterodox economists to come together and take action for a better, fairer Europe. The two-day workshop ‘Europe deserves better’ held in Brussels on 25 and 26 October was divided into two sessions of equal strategic importance. Time was first needed to openly discuss issues such as an investment package for Europe, the articulation of an ecological, industrial, and energy transition – in a manner respecting the participants’ different political backgrounds. The second session was more political in the sense that we took time to agree on a common set of demands for a progressive model of development for the EU. This work will serve as a basis for a large European Conference to be held in Spring 2017 in Brussels. The politics of European integration is at stake. And it might very well collapse if progressive political and social forces do not come closer together to promote a progressive EU-wide industrial policy. Given the current state of the balance of power in Europe, we cannot afford not to try.

transform! europe Working Group on Energy

Under the auspices of MEP Cornelia Ernst (GUE/NGL), the transform! europe Working Group on Energy presented its e-Dossier ‘A New Energy to Change Europe’³ to representatives of European progressive civil society and members of the European Parliament Committee on Industry, Research, and Energy (ITRE). Deployment of the energy transition towards a new model of development, energy democracy, citizens’ initiatives, and the crucial role of public research – these issues were at the heart of the discussions held on 14 June.

It should be noted that our cooperation with MEP Cornelia Ernst (GUE/NGL) and the Brussels office of the RLF has been strengthened over the year. The most significant outcome of this was the European Conference on Just Transition held in Brussels on 5 December through which we created a unique space where trade unionists and representatives of left and green parties from across Europe exchanged their views on an energy transition that is socially fair to workers with elected officials from European regions undertaking a phasing out of coal and/or nuclear energy. This conference is to be seen as the first step of a collective effort to be carried out throughout 2017.

transform! europe Working Group on Labour

The dismantling of labour and social rights within the EU's political agenda has been intensified ever since the outbreak of the crisis. This phenomenon, if more acute in the so-called EU periphery countries, is nevertheless visible everywhere in Europe – examples of its acceleration are the recent structural reforms in the labour market in France and in Belgium. We therefore felt the need to establish a working group bringing together social researchers and activists from the labour movement in order to undertake an in-depth study of the neoliberal reforms and the challenges trade unions have to deal with.

The group first gathered in Vienna in May, at the peak of the mobilisation against the so-called Labour Law (*loi travail*) in France. The workshop 'European Labour Rights at a Crossroads' brought together a wide range of researchers, trade unionists, and social activists from across Europe to discuss the then growing opposition to EU-inspired reforms of labour markets, trade-union strategies and alternative proposals, cases of transnational cooperation – with the emblematic example of the Amazon workers' struggle in Poland gaining support from the German trade union Ver.di –, as well as existing convergences between trade unions and social movements. Increasingly more of these social movements, composed of young people whose only horizon has been precariousness, are focusing on labour-oriented issues, especially in Southern Europe. A paper compiling the outcome of the workshop was published at the end of 2016.

Cooperation with the Party of the European Left

Roberto Morea

The increasingly close relationship between investigating the forms through which the multi-level crisis is passing and working out a path for an economic and social alternative remains central to the work being promoted for the near future by transform! europe.

All of this work is fully in sync with the Party of the European Left (EL) and is being carried out in cooperation with it. There have been many forms of collaboration underway for several years now – such as participation in the international social forums, to which this year in Montreal we contributed topics for discussion, or the co-promotion of the Summer University, which attracted many participants and was rich in material for a constructive debate amongst different analyses and positions. In addition, there is now the Forum of Alternatives, which the EL has decided to maintain as a permanent space of dialogue between the continent's political and social forces and which

will certainly see our involvement, strengthening an interactive relationship that has clearly been positive for both entities.

The same can be said of our work in the Alter Summit network, where we are deeply involved in facilitating a structural relationship between the social movements and the trade unions for defining strategies and activism around specific issues, and also in the Blockupy network, which after the battle against the role of the European Central Bank, an action that brought tens of thousands of people from all parts of Europe to protest the inauguration of the ECB's new headquarters in Frankfurt, is mobilising to bring the voice of protests against neoliberal globalisation back into centre-stage.

The work done by task forces, which we as transform! europe have promoted, such as those around productive transformation, or the commons, as well as the energy and the 'Change4All' groups, will involve our interaction with the European Parliament members from the EL around the work of proposing intervention in the EP on issues crucial for European economic and social policies.

Of particular interest will be the work we are promoting, through our respective working group, on the EU's role in international conflicts and its relations with neighbouring countries. The discussion about the EU and left strategies for dealing with the profound crisis which this institution's architecture is going through remains one of the cornerstones of our commitments. For this, transform! europe will continue to keep open for everyone's benefit all possible spaces for discussion with all the movements that, like us, articulate a radical critique of how a European Union that is continually more removed from the interests and needs of its own citizens could be changed. Through these efforts we hope to contribute to the concretisation of the idea of a re-founded EU, so as not to leave this critique only to the nationalist right organisations.

Commons

Roberto Morea

For many years there has been a redefinition of the battle against the policies of privatisation and dismantling of the public system that ranges from water management, transportation, education and training, as well as energy, and against the attack on the environment with the devastation of the territories. It is a battle that has arisen from the ability to shed light on the depredations of neoliberalism and its capacity to erase all that has been collectively built and defended up to now as part of the public interest in our countries.

Beyond its historical definition and its recognition in pre-modern law,

the term ‘commons’ nowadays has a significance which serves to redefine the terrain of political battle that must be considered for a democratic transformation and for the recognition of the subjects, the actors of this transformation. Globalised capitalism goes hand in hand with the dismantling of state control. Democratic control and in fact a defence of some aspects of the collective interest found, in this battle for the common good, a valuable tool for analysis and reconfiguration of these interests.

We as transform! europe have been following this path from its beginnings and have been present in this discussion in which it has been difficult to harmonise certain disparate views within the left.

There are many single-issue movements that have been developed at the national and international levels, but it has proven difficult to interpret them as parts of a unified movement, and their many small and big battles are often tied to their local- or single-issue dimensions.

In this regard we have begun to explore a path that could weave issues and proposals together that can be translated into effective practical activism.

After the first meeting in Paris of the Working Group on Commons in 2014 we tackled, in Rome in 2016, the issue of the worker-appropriated factories and the social re-appropriation process that has also been evolving in the area of labour in countries affected by de-localisation and the dismantling of productive plants.⁴

The proposal for 2017 is to take up this thread that we have laid out in previous seminars and broaden the discussion both geographically and in terms of areas of interest. That is why at the upcoming events in March in Copenhagen and in Barcelona in June, we will collect experiences and specific struggles and will work together so that we can connect with individual strands of analysis that exist in the various networks and together with them develop specific areas of research, which includes strengthening our discussion of the commons with partners such as labour and trade union representatives. We also believe it is necessary to develop and deepen the work in this field with the political representatives as well as to define a strategy involving both the GUE/NGL parliamentary group and the European Parliament Intergroup on the Commons, leading to a meeting in Brussels at the end of 2017.

Feminism-Marxism – A Step Forward

Heidi Ambrosch

‘The Left is feminist or it is not left’ is a slogan of the women’s movement, which caused us to reflect on our own flaws. transform! europe has had too

many blind spots in feminist theory and therefore made the preparation of the Second International Conference on Marxism–Feminism in 2016 one of its core activities. It is not only feminist but also Marxist theories – and their combination – that need to be put back on the table of progressive research.

The conference ‘Building Bridges – Shifting and Strengthening Visions – Exploring Alternatives’ was held in October 2016 in Vienna and brought together over 500 participants – left theorists and activists from 29 countries of all continents. In contrast to the first conference, this time it was possible to also have significant participation from Central and Eastern European Countries and also from southern Europe.

The event was jointly planned and hosted by a broad alliance of feminist and progressive organisations together with transform! europe, which assumed most of the responsibility for providing the technical conditions.

The densely packed conference programme was divided into two streams, Marxist-Feminist Theory on the one hand, and organisation on the other. In the streams running parallel to each other, researchers and activists from Europe but also from Argentina, Brazil, the USA, South Africa, and Australia presented their analyses, among them renowned intellectuals such as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, theorist of post-colonialism and professor at Columbia University in New York, and Nira Yuval-Davis, professor at the University of East London.

The concepts of labour and care-work, questions of intersectionality, new materialism, and ecofeminism were the subjects of debate at the conference as were Marxist-feminist analyses of motherhood, anti-fundamentalism and anti-racism, illegality, education, and sexist Islamophobia. In the stream ‘Feminist Organising Beyond Europe’ in particular, in which activists reported on the feminist struggles in Turkey and women organising in trade unions in Brazil, there was little time to look for cross-national commonalities. Feride Eralp from the Istanbul Feminist Collective, a volunteer in the border town of Suruç during the siege of Kobanê, raised the questions in her talk of how war and masculinities were shaping each other and what women’s resistance could look like in a society marked by an all-pervading ‘cross-border politics of hatred’.

A manifesto, thoroughly discussed at the Vienna conference, is to be the basis of future co-operation and understanding.

transform! europe will also further help strengthen this cooperation and will try to bring the feminist viewpoint to bear in all its areas of work.

Far Right

Walter Baier

In 2016 transform! europe's work on the populist, radical right parties was focused on lecturing and publishing. Events took place in New York at the Left Forum, in Berlin in cooperation with the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, in Hamburg (in cooperation with the journal *Sozialismus*), in Klagenfurt, Vienna (in cooperation with transform-at), in Volterra (in an RLF-organised seminar), and Warsaw (together with the newly established foundation Naprzód). Alongside continuous publications in transform!'s media, articles appeared in the US (*New Labor Forum*), Germany (*Luxemburg*, *Z*, and *Sozialismus*), in the Czech Republic, and in Austria.

We have focused on those parties of the radical right which by virtue of their ability to modernise to fit in with the political and cultural mainstream are reaching out to constituencies of 25% and even more of the population in particular cases.

Of the inroads of right-wing radical parties into proletarian, formerly social democratic electorates there is much evidence. However, the data in most of the cases ignore the vote shares for the radical right in other segments of the electorate and thus remain prejudiced and ideologically biased.

As 'Eurobarometer' data has demonstrated for Europe, people in general feel increasingly uncomfortable about their democracies. According to a survey last year, 62% of Europeans believe things are going in the wrong direction; 48% declare that they no longer have trust in their governments, and 43% say that they are dissatisfied with their democracies.

The causes of this are complex. Alongside crisis, precariousness, and the middle strata's fear of downward social mobility, there is the decline of social democratic parties; and the disillusionment over this when not compensated by the left with a credible radical alternative all too easily delivers people into the hands of the radical right.

According to a broadly shared definition, the ideological core of populist right radicalism combines authoritarianism, ethnic nationalism (that is, xenophobia, racism, and anti-Europeanism) with a strong social chauvinism and 'populism' that addresses the anti-establishment feeling of large layers of the society.

The success of this combination should not be regarded as the spontaneous reflection of the crisis. On the contrary, it has been incited and promoted by corporate media outlets and the culture industry.

Three strategic conclusions can be drawn:

1. We ought to shift the emphasis in confronting right-wing radical populism from moral condemnation to political struggle. This requires in

the first place acknowledging the validity of the social concerns, complaints, and criticisms of people. The decisive battle ground with the far right is the overcoming of mass unemployment and youth unemployment, as well as the new and old discrimination against women.

2. The claim of populist right organisations to be an ‘anti-systemic’ force is false. Instead, the function of the radical right consists in preventing change from happening. However, the attack against democracy by the radical right cannot be countered in alliance with the ruling forces but in opposition to them.

3. Defending democracy on the national level is not identical with nationalism. While defending the former the left must not compromise with the latter. The left must design a programme that integrates the establishment of democracy on the European level with respect for democratic self-determination of its national components. The fight against the radical right must also embrace the field of culture and ethics. Without overcoming racism and eurocentrism within the common sense of broad layers of the society neither democratic nor cultural progress will be possible, nor can we avert the looming atavistic regression that is precisely the aim of far-right parties.

transform!’s Strategy Towards the Central and Eastern European Region

Dagmar Švendová and Jiří Málek

Generally speaking, we see that there is now a greater awareness in Europe of the role of the Central and Eastern European region (CEE) and its impact on European affairs than in the past.

Brexit will further increase the CEE countries’ importance as a result of the growth in its relative weight. Currently, the countries of the CEE region comprise 21% of the EU population and account for 26.5% of seats in the EU Parliament. When the United Kingdom leaves, the CEE countries’ share of population will reach 23%, with Poland becoming the fifth most populous country in the EU. Nor should the region’s increasing geostrategic role be overlooked. In today’s world, practically all countries of the CEE are located on the frontline of growing political, and in some cases, military, tensions, while also being members of NATO.

All these countries went through a so-called transformation that was based on the principles of the Washington Consensus,⁵ and all of them have remained at the European semi-periphery with minimal chances of moving closer to EU averages within a reasonable timeframe. The history of the region is replete with attempts to find political arrangements.

Some of the consequences of the region's societies' transformation processes have been: the loss of relevant representation of the radical left in politics, significant suppression of left views at all levels, and the loss of popular support from the left. In the CEE region, right-wing governments have been elected in countries such as Hungary and Poland. There is no left party in CEE elected to a national government with the exceptions of the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSCM) in the Czech Republic and the United Left (Združena Levica) in Slovenia, which could counterbalance these negative tendencies. It is therefore crucial that we concentrate our efforts in this region.

The year 2016 was important for further elaborating and implementing transform! europe's strategy for CEE. We have managed not only to expand our contacts, improve cooperation with the other entities operating in the region, and intensify our presence there but also to enlarge the number of our observer organisations by accepting in our family the new left-wing think-tank Naprzód from Poland. Additionally, we have significantly enlarged the amount of information, analyses, and critical evaluation on CEE affairs available in transform! europe publications and web pages. Finally, a new strategic long-term project of transform! europe focused on mapping the left in CEE has been launched.

These activities have revealed the will to share information, different experiences, best practices, as well as other aspects of politics amongst left-wing players throughout CEE. We believe that by strengthening the interregional dialogue within CEE and across Europe it should be possible to create good conditions for closer cooperation among left forces in Europe – and through this facilitate a process leading to the formulation of common strategies, for example, in combating right-wing populism, precarious labour conditions, etc.

Marxist-Christian Dialogue

Walter Baier

An ongoing and structured dialogue between the Vatican and the left in Europe is gathering momentum.

In 2014, during a private audience between Alexis Tsipras (then the leader of the opposition in the Greek Parliament), Franz Kronreif (of the international Focolare movement), and Walter Baier with Pope Francis, the intention was voiced to remain 'in contact' and, furthermore, to establish an informal dialogue between the Apostolic See, the left in Europe, and the Focolare movement.

As a result, a symposium took place on 31 March and 1 April 2016 at the

Sophia University Institute near Florence. Entitled ‘Shared Challenges in Europe’, the symposium brought together experts from transform! europe, the Apostolic See, the Focolare movement, and the Pontifical University itself. The steering committee triad (Walter Baier, Franz Kronreif, and Bishop Zani) was joined at the round table by 14 reporting experts from Argentina, Austria, Belgium, Germany, France, Ireland, Italy, and the Vatican.

One of the most distinguished experts was the renowned French-Brazilian philosopher and sociologist Michael Löwy, Emeritus Research Director at the National Centre of Scientific Research (CNRS), Paris, who has Viennese roots.

The election of Pope Francis has created new opportunities and prerequisites for the relationships between the Church and the European left wing. The key themes discussed include the environmental and economic crises, social justice, immigration, and human rights.

Thanks to the high quality of the exchange and the friendliness and respect shown in interpersonal relationships, the symposium was remarkably successful. Existing differences in the views, notions, emphases, and proposed solutions were discussed openly and with the genuine aim and hope of obtaining a full understanding of the ‘other’ side’s real interests and views.

The papal diagnosis of the environmental crisis as a result of a ‘structurally perverse system’ was widely shared by the participants, as well as the necessity of an alternative to the absurd and irrational neoliberal politics of austerity. The participants from transform! europe proposed a debate on the socialist – or eco-socialist – alternatives beyond the capitalist mode of production and beyond a capitalist way of life.

Following the exchange of opinions, Vincenzo Zani broke in to say that he was convinced that ecology and the environment needed to form part of Catholic education worldwide. A further common conclusion was that concrete measures were required to address the issues of climate change and solidarity with the immigrants seeking refuge in Europe.

The organisers agreed to continue with and expand upon these initiatives and to intensify communication. A further event in the same format is planned for 2017. The debate on an ongoing research and training initiative in the coming years has begun.

transform! europe and the European Social Movements

Katerina Anastasiou

Change4all / Re-launch

Change4all was launched in 2016 in the midst of Europe’s new immigration

regime with borders closing down one after the other and human-rights regulations giving way to militarisation. The solidarity networks, including grassroots groups, activists, and volunteers established in autumn 2015 continued their work in assisting newcomers in their journey to safety, and change4all continued participating in this effort, connecting and supporting transnational organisation where possible.

We participated in and contributed to numerous transnational meetings and conferences of which there is a detailed list below. Our participation always aimed to enhance cooperation and solidarity between groups and to support all efforts towards a strong pan-European resistance to both austerity and the avalanche of reactionary policies (state of emergency, deportations, militarisation, structural racism, etc.) applied in European countries and EU institutions, as well as to contribute to the process of articulating alternatives from below.

2016 was planned as a year of giving fresh impulse to change4all with a new interactive and inter-connective platform that could respond to the needs of transnational solidarity efforts, taking into consideration the density of political time and the new possibilities of organisation through online and horizontal participation.

Together with activists from several European countries and after months of intensive work and exchange, we drafted a detailed concept for the next evolutionary step for change4all, while making sure that the new launch of the page will include democratic governance of the platform, maximum security for the users, and content quality.

The process, that was kick-started in January 2016 was intensified in the three-day working meeting that took place in Vienna in April 2016. Unfortunately, due to technical difficulties and problems that could not be foreseen, we could not launch the new platform in 2016, but this will be done in the near future.

Alter Summit

Within the Alter Summit network the 2016 Alter Summit Conference took place on 25 and 26 November, focusing on labour with the title 'Rights4All Now!'. The conference aimed at facilitating a broad discussion on contemporary labour realities in Europe along four axes:

- Struggles against climate change and austerity: could the ecological transition be the issue that unites us?
- Resistance 2.0: Digitalisation and technology push are pushing production and the economy into transition. Organising responses for a new labour reality.

- Defend and promote the commons and public services for all!
- Towards convergence of struggles, building bridges to unity!

We contributed intensively to the conceptual, political, and organisational processes leading up to the conference. It brought together 200 activists from the labour movement, social movements, and progressive networks.

Blockupy

During the weekend of 6 and 7 February 2016, the Blockupy Consultation meeting, a two-day discussion on the future of the alliance and next steps, took place at the Technical University of Berlin. Under the motto ‘Welcome to the heart of the crisis regime – The summer of migration and the social question’ the discussions addressing a broader public focused on the re-orientation of the alliance to face the challenges of the current European reality.⁶

We continue to participate in the Blockupy process, and a follow-up face-to-face meeting of Blockupy International took place on 27 November in Brussels to strategise the mobilisation steps towards next year’s G20 in Germany.

Diem25

A new European initiative for the democratisation of Europe was launched in February 2016. The purpose of Diem25 is to ‘put the demos back into Europe’s democracy’ and to facilitate an explorative process around a way to address the various crises of Europe that are leading to its disintegration, approaching the matter directly from a European perspective.

transform! europe and change4all participated, followed, and co-facilitated the process of Diem25, building consultative and trusting relationships. In addition to our participation in the launch event in Berlin and the event in Rome, we co-organised a Diem25 public event in Vienna, focusing on issues of immigration and Europe’s responses, which was very successful.

Activities which change4all and transform! (co-)organised:

- *Change4all re-write/Towards a democratic tool for activists*, 15 and 17 April 2016, Vienna.

This workshop with three full working days took place in the premises of the Vienna transform! offices. Eleven activists from eight different countries came together to debate, re-think, and re-design change4all. The result was a detailed concept document for change4all’s next step.

- *Sabir Festival of Mediterranean Cultures, Workshop: Democratic transition/ Struggles and Convergences*, 12 - 15 May, Pozzalo
A meeting between political representatives and civil society from the two shores of the Mediterranean Sea, aimed at strengthening the democratic movements and political alliances of the region.⁷

IPB Congress Berlin 2016, Workshop: (in-)visible, (in-)secure, (in-)dependent – The future through the prism of women’s resistance

The so-called ‘European refugee crisis’ is not gender neutral. In this workshop in the framework of the International Peace Bureau World Congress (IPB) 2016 we tried to explore the issue of women refugees and women in solidarity movements as political subjects.⁸

NOTES

- 1 The extended report of the event, as well as selected contributions from the participants, can be found at <<http://www.transform-network.net/en/focus/strategic-perspectives-of-the-european-left/news/detail/Programm/alliance-for-democracy-and-against-austerity-in-europe.html>>.
- 2 The previous surveys can be accessed at <<http://www.transform-network.net/en/publications/publications-2016/news/detail/Publications/-35447d3439.html>>.
- 3 See <<http://www.transform-network.net/en/publications/publications-2016/news/detail/Publications/a-new-energy-to-change-europe.html>>.
- 4 See also our e-book ‘Socialisation and Commons’, released in 2016, at <<http://www.transform-network.net/en/publications/publications-2016/news/detail/Publications/socialisation-and-commons-in-europe.html>>.
- 5 Although some countries call this by a different name – e.g. the ‘Ran-Utt Programme’ in Bulgaria.
- 6 See <<https://blockupy.org/en/6280/invitation-to-the-blockupy-consultation-meeting-6-7-2-2016-in-berlin/>>.
- 7 A full report on transform’s workshops can be found at <<http://www.transform-network.net/en/blog/blog-2016/news/detail/Blog/2nd-sabir-festival-of-mediterranean-culture-pozzalo-2016.html>>.
- 8 For details of the workshop see <<http://www.transform-network.net/en/calendar/calendar-2016/news/detail/Calendar/international-peace-bureau-world-congress-2016.html>>.

Authors and Editors

Walter Baier, an economist in Vienna, was National Chairman of the Communist Party of Austria (KPÖ) from 1994 to 2006. He was an editor of the Austrian weekly *Volksstimme* and from 2007 has been Coordinator of transform! europe. His latest book is *Linker Aufbruch in Europa?* [Left Breakthrough in Europe?] (2015).

Maxime Benatouil, based in Paris, is co-director of transform! europe. A focus of his work is transform!'s Productive Transformation programme which brings together researchers, trade unionists, social movement activists, and progressive political actors to tackle the issues of a progressive industrial strategy for Europe, a socially fair energy transition / just transition, labour markets, welfare models, and trade unions' strategies.

Joachim Bischoff is a German economist and co-editor-in-chief of the monthly *Sozialismus*, Hamburg. His latest publication is (together with Klaus Steinitz) *Götterdämmerung des Kapitalismus?* (2016).

Ulrich Brand is a member of the Advisory Board of Attac Deutschland and Professor for International Politics at the Institute for Political Science at the University of Vienna. His most recent publication is 'How to Get Out of the Multiple Crisis? Contours of a Critical Theory of Social-Ecological Transformation', in *Environmental Values* 25/5, October 2016.

Lutz Brangsch was a researcher at the Academy of Social Sciences in Berlin before 1990 and, from 1990 to 1999, on the staff of the National Executive of the PDS. Since 1999 he has been a researcher at the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, and since 2009 Senior Research Fellow in the Institute for Critical Social Analysis of the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation where he specialises in economics, economic and social policy, and the theory of democracy.

Ludmilla Bulavka-Buzgalina is professor at the Moscow University for Finance and Law, member of the editorial board of the journal *Alternativy*, and studies cultural-philosophical questions in diverse contemporary

societies, the genesis and contradictions of Soviet culture, the social-cultural problems of alterglobalism, as well as the nature, forms, and contradictions of the society-changing creativity of human beings.

Alexander Buzgalin is a professor of economics at Moscow State University and the coordinator of the organisation Alternatives. He was a member of the Organising Committee of the second Russian Social Forum. He focuses on problems of Marxism's actuality and the resulting challenges for left movements.

Eric Canepa is a music historian and co-editor of transform!. From 2001 to 2006 he was the Coordinator of the Socialist Scholars Conference/Left Forum in New York and from 2008 to 2012 Co-coordinator of the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation's project North-Atlantic Left Dialogue.

Pedro Chaves Giraldo is political advisor at the European Parliament and coordinator of the Task Force on European Governance in transform! europe. He has been a Lecturer of Political Science at the Carlos III University (Madrid), and member of the federal political committee of Izquierda Unida (Spain).

Judith Dellheim is a consultant on Solidary Economy at the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation in Berlin. She was active for more than 10 years in leadership bodies of the PDS. She is active in Die LINKE and social movements and has published extensively on socio-ecological transformation, the EU, and the work of Rosa Luxemburg.

Geoff Eley is a British-born historian of Germany and Karl Pohrt Distinguished University Professor of Contemporary History at the University of Michigan. His main interests are modern German history, the history of socialism, social classes, and historiography. His best-known book is *Forging Democracy: The History of the Left in Europe, 1850-2000*, (2002), which has been translated into many languages.

Alberto Garzón Espinosa is general coordinator of Izquierda Unida, Spain, and since 2011 a member of Spain's Parliament. An economist by training, he is member of the Scientific Committee of ATTAC-Spain and founder of the Society for Critical Economics.

Haris Golemis is an economist, Director of the Nicos Poulantzas Institute, Greece, and member of the Central Committee of Syriza. He is the Scientific and Strategic Advisor of transform! europe.

Christoph Görg is a German born sociologist and political scientist. He is Professor for Social Ecology at the Institute of Social Ecology at the Alpen-Adria-Universität in Klagenfurt, Austria.

Gregor Gysi is a lawyer and leading figure of the German party Die LINKE. In 1990 he was elected for the first time as a deputy of the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS) to the German Bundestag and until 2002 was chair of the PDS. From 2005 he became chair of Die LINKE's delegation in the Bundestag. In October 2015 he declined to run again for the same post and in December 2016 was elected the new president of the Party of the European Left.

Eva Himmelstoss is a Vienna-based historian and philologist and co-editor of *transform!*. After many years as General Secretary of the global labour historians' network International Conference of Labour and Social History (ITH), she has since 2014 been in charge of *transform! europe's* publication activities.

Ursula Huws is Professor of Labour and Globalisation at Hertfordshire Business School, UK, where she directs the COST Action IS1202 on the Dynamics of Virtual Work. She is editor of the journal *Work Organisation, Labour and Globalisation*. In addition to managing large international research projects, she has also authored many research reports for international and national government bodies, as well as books and articles aimed at more popular audiences. Blog: ursulahuws.wordpress.com.

Horst Kahrs is a social scientist who has worked in various functions since 1995 for the PDS and then Die LINKE. Since 2012 he has been consultant to the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation with a focus on classes and social structure, democracy, electoral behaviour, and electoral analyses.

Anej Korsika is a freelance writer with a degree in political science and now completing another in philosophy. He has been editor of the student newspaper *Tribuna*, a member of the Marxist think-tank Workers and Punks University and a co-founder of the Initiative for Democratic Socialism, a party in the United Left parliamentary coalition. He is active with the League of the Balkan Left and The Eighth of March Institute.

Yann Le Lann is a French sociologist and Lecturer at the Université Charles de Gaulle - Lille 3, Research Centre 'Individus, Epreuves, Sociétés' (CeRIES). He specialises in labour and wage issues. He is President of Espaces Marx, Paris.

Sabine Leidig is transportation-policy spokesperson for Die LINKE's Bundestag delegation. She coordinates the project group Plan B for a Social-Ecological Reconstruction within Die LINKE's Bundestag group. Until 2009 she was the Executive Director of Attac Deutschland.

Michael Löwy is a French-Brazilian Marxist sociologist and philosopher. Presently he is the Research Director Emeritus in Social Sciences at the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS), and he lectures at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (EHESS) in Paris.

Roger Martelli is a historian. He is active with Espaces Marx and the Fondation Gabriel Péri and is the author of numerous studies on the renewal of the French Communist Party and its electoral results. He is co-director of the journal *Regards*.

Bernhard Müller is a German sociologist and co-editor of the monthly *Sozialismus* in Hamburg. His latest books include (together with Joachim Bischoff and Elisabeth Gauthier) *Europas Rechte. Das Konzept des 'modernisierten' Rechtspopulismus* (2015) and (together with Joachim Bischoff) *Moderne Rechte und die Krise des demokratischen Kapitalismus* (2016).

Andreas Novy is the chair of the Green Education Workshop, Austria, and director of the Institute for Multi-Level Governance and Development. He is a professor in the Department of Socio-economy at the Wirtschaftsuniversität Vienna.

Melanie Pichler is a post-doctoral researcher and lecturer at the Institute of Social Ecology at the Alpen-Adria-Universität, Klagenfurt, Austria, and an Associate of the International Political Ecology Research Group at the University of Vienna. Her most recent publication (co-edited with Cornelia Staritz, Karin Küblböck et al.) is *Fairness and Justice in Natural Resource Politics*, 2016.

Jukka Pietiläinen is the director of Left Forum, Finland. He holds a PhD in social sciences from the University of Tampere and was senior researcher on Russian media and society at University of Helsinki.

Gavin Rae is a sociologist living and working in Poland and concentrating on Polish politics, society, and economy as well as Central and Eastern Europe. He is the author of *Poland's Return to Capitalism. From the Socialist Bloc to the European Union* (2007) and *Privatising Capital. The Commodification of Poland's Welfare State* (2015) and a founding member of the think-tank Naprzód (Forward).

Pablo Sánchez Centellas is a member of Barcelona en Comú and served as Director of International Relations in the Barcelona City Council. He was the co-coordinator of the first European Citizens Initiative (www.right2water.eu) initiated by the European Federation of Public Service Unions (EPSU).

Daniela Setton is a political scientist and from 2015 has been Research Associate at the Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies (IASS) in Potsdam, with a focus on the transition from coal to renewables. Before 2015 she worked for several environmental and development non-governmental organisations and for nationwide civil society alliances

Richard Seymour is a London-based writer and broadcaster and the author of *The Liberal Defence of Murder* (2008), *Unhitched: The Trial of Christopher Hitchens* (2012), and *Against Austerity* (2014). A contributing editor of *Salvage*, he also writes for *The Guardian*, the *London Review of Books*, and many other publications. He is the host of 'Media Review' for TeleSur, and has previously appeared on BBC, Al Jazeera, and C-Span. He teaches at the London School of Economics.

Euclid Tsakalotos is Greece's Minister of Finance and a member of the Central Committee of Syriza. On 6 July 2015, following Yanis Varoufakis's resignation, he was appointed as Minister of Finance and was re-appointed in September 2015 following the snap legislative election. Formerly, he was Professor of Economics at the University of Athens.

Serge Wolikow is professor of contemporary history at the University of Burgundy, Dijon. He is an acknowledged specialist of the political history of the labour movement, especially the history of economic thought and the history of trade-union and political organisations (socialist and communist) of the inter-war period. He is president of the Scientific Board of the Fondation Gabriel Péri.

Susan Zimmermann is University Professor at the Central European University, Budapest, and President of the International Conference of Labour and Social History (ITH). She has published on the history of women's activism and on the ILO's class, gender, and race policies. In 2016/2017 she is a fellow at the International Research Centre 'Work and Human Lifecycle in Global History' (re:work) at Humboldt University, Berlin, focusing on socialist and communist trade-unionist women and the gender policies of 20th-century trade unions.

transform! european network for alternative thinking and political dialogue

www.transform-network.net

transform! europe ASBL
No 0890.414.864
Square de Meeûs 25
1000 Brussels, Belgium

Working address:
transform! europe
office@transform-network.net
+43 1 504 66 86
Gusshausstraße 14/3
1040 Vienna, Austria

Members and Observers

Austria

transform!at
www.transform.or.at

Catalonia

Alternative Foundation
www.fundacioalternativa.cat

Cyprus

Research Institute PROMITHEAS*
www.inep.org.cy

Czech Republic

Society for European Dialogue (SPED)

email: malek_j@cbox.cz

Denmark

transform! danmark

www.transformdanmark.dk

Finland

Left Forum

www.vasemmistofoorumi.fi

Democratic Civic Association (DCA / DSL)

www.desili.fi

France

Espaces Marx

www.espaces-marx.net

Fondation Copernic*

www.fondation-copernic.org

Fondation Gabriel Péri*

www.gabrielperi.fr

Germany

Journal *Sozialismus*

www.sozialismus.de

Rosa Luxemburg Foundation (RLS)

www.rosalux.de

Institute for Social, Ecological and Economic Studies (ISW)

www.isw-muenchen.de

Greece

Nicos Poulantzas Institute (NPI)

www.poulantzas.gr

Hungary

transform! hungary*

transform.hu

Italy

transform! italia
transform-italia.net

Claudio Sabattini Foundation*
www.fondazioneabattini.it

Cultural Association Punto Rosso
www.puntorosso.it

Luxembourg

Transform! Luxembourg
www.transform.lu

Moldova

Transform! Moldova*
email: transformoldova@gmail.com

Norway

Manifesto Foundation*
manifesttankesmie.no

Poland

Foundation Forward / Naprzód*
fundacja-naprzod.pl

Portugal

Cultures of Labour and Socialism (CUL:TRA)
email: info@cultra.pt

Romania

Association for the Development of the Romanian Social Forum*
www.forumulsocialroman.ro

Slovenia

Institute for Labour Studies (IDS)*
www.delavske-studije.si

Spain

Foundation for Marxist Studies (FIM)
www.fim.org.es

Europe of Citizens Foundation (FEC)

www.europadelosciudadanos.net

Sweden

Center for Marxist Social Studies (CMS)

www.cmsmarx.org

Turkey

Social Investigations and Cultural Development Foundation (TAKSAV)*

www.taksav.org

* *Observers*

