

Re-Inventing Social Democracy: The Threat of Xenophobic Attitudes



There is no way out of this. Day by day all over Europe, a desire for re-inventing social democracy grows. If one is down-to-earth and looks with open eyes

at the social, cultural and political realities of our time one would see human values at risk, more and more people living in deprived conditions, a exclusion is triumphing while inclusion is in retreat. We are very far from having Amitai Etzioni's vision of a 'Good Society'. Quite the opposite in fact. The illusory conservative right ideology of 'ethnic closing' is gaining ground.

Just take a look at the data of sociologists at Bielefeld University. Wilhelm Heitmeyer and his group published, some weeks ago, some very disturbing findings. They found 'Group Focused Enmity' is on the rise in Germany, Great Britain, France, Italy, The Netherlands, Portugal, Poland and Hungary. Even after allowing for each countries institutional specificities, including media, churches, trade unions, political cultures and civil society at large, all of them share at least in common general xenophobic attitudes towards immigration and especially towards immigrants and the most vulnerable, asylum seekers.

Hostile attitudes towards emigrants and believers of Islam are particularly loud and widespread. Large portions of the peoples of these eight countries conceive of homogenous communities based on culturally orientation or descent or by nationality. Immigrants are viewed as second class. What is striking in the fact that the data points to elites dramatically changing their mindsets also. In this regard elites are closing the gap between the so-

cial sectors, especially in prejudicial xenophobic attitudes.

This means that the mindsets of some segments within European Societies are shifting to the right. This is alarming and what's worse is that the conservative right are exacerbating this problem by building frames of reference upon selected facts. Unfortunately, we are observing a process of Europeanization in the wrong direction. How come? Is it because we Social Democrats, when we had the chance to make a real difference at the beginning of the century, were too reluctant to strive for fundamental changes?

We have been witnessing the silent neoliberal poisoning . As Tony Judt, who has written furiously against the neo liberal trend would say, "Ill fares the Land". We have been observing a 'Berlusconization' of the political scene, turning the arena into a series of farces with the media the only people to profit from this downturn. We have been stunned by the obscene rise of populism and are nearly helpless to stop the excessive gap of social inequality which grows year by year.

What should be done? With the odds stacked against us, the best collective tool we have, is the European Union. But this project must be re invented. The United States of Europe can become the new conceptual framing for what we should strive for. One of the radical consequences to arise out of the catastrophic experiences of the first global breakdown in the industrial world since World War I, has been the aim to lay out a new concept of Europe that overcomes the fragmented European landscape. In 1925 the SPD began to work towards on the project of establishing a United States of Europe.

In hindsight perhaps it would have been a constructive answer to the shortfalls of the globalization

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process at the time, we all know how the efforts of the time ended. Maybe this time we are a bit wiser. If we fail again, what will come next? The writing is on the wall and looks threatening.

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