

Social Democracy and Integration

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The Mission of Social-Democratic Politics

Liberal socialism or social democracy emerged in mass form in the late 19th century, with the launch of the Second International on Bastille Day in Paris in 1889—100 years before the fall of the Berlin Wall placed its deformed successor in history's dustbin. While its participants were often enthused by a vulgar-Marxist narrative—in which it was conveniently presumed that a catastrophic crisis of capitalism would issue in the socialist utopia—in practice they operated from day to day according to the pragmatic slogan of the German 'revisionist' Eduard Bernstein: the movement is everything, the goal is nothing. Socialism became not an end in itself but what socialist parties did.

So social democracy sought to tame the capitalist tiger, not to kill it. And to do so it aimed, under progressively more universal franchises, to translate the demographic strength of the emerging working class into a parliamentary majority, capable of introducing reforms which would reduce the exposure of members of that class to the risks of unemployment, poverty, ill-health and so on. Its apogee was the post-war 'welfare states' in western Europe, buttressed by Keynesian demand management, which for the first time allowed (male) full employment and a measure of security against social ills for most working-class people, even if there remained significant numbers of the socially marginalised.

Today, globalisation and individualisation have acted as twin social processes, on a world scale, undermining the sense of the working class as a relatively homogenous social majority, exhibiting a 'natural' solidarity. Indeed, the far right has made significant inroads into social democracy's 'core' support, with its illusory message that security will be guaranteed if national preference keeps the twin barbarians of the Immigrant and Islam outside the gate. Witness the advance of Marine Le Pen in France or Geert Wilders in the Netherlands.

There is thus no longer any necessary correspondence between social origin and electoral behaviour. Some, though by no means all, members of the older manual working-class, consumed by insecurity in today's 'risk society' as the state retreats under the banner of austerity, are vulnerable to conservative and populist appeals. Conversely, in a world of mass tertiary education and large-scale public services, some, though by no means all, modern professional workers are amenable to the egalitarian and internationalist appeal of social democracy. If that means that one answer to ethnic division—'class politics'—is past its sell-by date, it means that another—what I will later discuss as cosmopolitanism—has much going for it.

Tackling Ethnic Division: The Austro-Marxists

Actually from the outset social democrats had to face real, often deep, divisions within that supposedly unified working class. Nowhere was this challenge more vivid than for the so-called 'Austro-Marxists', with Otto Bauer and Karl Renner pioneering a way of thinking about ethnic division which avoided the key mistake of reducing it to a plot by the bourgeois parties, instead taking it seriously in its own terms. In the wake of the Russian revolution of 1905, Bauer became concerned about the potential implications for the Habsburg monarchy, and in particular the possibility of worsening relations between German and Czech workers. At the time, a rapidly expanding Vienna had become a multicultural city, with large immigrant populations drawn from a range of nationalities. It was in this context that he wrote *The Question of Nationalities and Social Democracy*.

The solution Bauer and Renner advanced for coexistence was 'nonterritorial national autonomy'. If in the Ottoman empire the millet system essentially assigned people to separate groups, in the Austro-Marxist scheme autonomous communities were to be organised democratically, based on individual consent to belong. This related to the individualist 'personality principle', which Renner advocated should be formalised as a decision by each citizen as to their nationality upon reaching voting age. Interestingly, this idea originating with the left was able to attract some support from conservatives at the time—and was to influence the revision of German citizenship law as the century came to a close.

National identities were thus conceptualised not as naturally given and invariable but as culturally changeable. This was, ironically, too radical for Lenin, who commissioned Stalin to write his wooden *Marxism and the National Question* in response. Stalin adopted instead the inherently collectivist approach of defining the 'nation' by a set of taken-for-granted common characteristics (such as language). It was partly for this reason that, after the end of the cold war, 'bureaucratic collectivism'—as the Polish dissidents Kuron and Modzelewski were to describe Soviet-type regimes—could so readily transmute, for some of the nominally leftist parties in power, into ethnic nationalism.

The personality principle, then, would enshrine rights of 'voice' and 'exit' for individuals within the suggested

national 'communities'. This remains today an important corrective to what Rogers Brubaker calls the 'groupism' which ethno-political entrepreneurs—and some misguided radical advocates of 'identity politics'—are so keen to impose upon the social world. In so far as these political figures succeed, they establish captive clienteles at the expense of the wider social solidarities which socialists are keen to engender. This has become a serious problem for the Dutch Labour Party.

That is why no one on the left should bemoan the demise of the modern millet system known as 'multiculturalism'—just because Angela Merkel gave it its last rites. Based on the stereotypical imperial gaze, multiculturalism was imported into Europe by the UK and the Netherlands to deal with the diversity brought by immigrants from their former colonies. Its conservative communalism underpinned what Unni Wikan called the 'generous betrayal' of the individual rights of young south Asian women in Norway, subject to forced marriages. As Jeff Spinner-Halev has insightfully put it, the trouble with multiculturalism is that while we may as a result have fellow Catholics or fellow Muslims or fellow Jews, *citizens* are no longer our fellows.

World War I and 'National Self-determination'

The Habsburg empire collapsed in the furnace of the first world war, in which context different 'national' social-democratic parties fell largely in line with 'their' states and the International faced an acute crisis. But the problem was hardly solved by the post-war Versailles formula—advanced by Lenin as well as Woodrow Wilson—of 'national self-determination'. For this could all too easily translate into a conflict between two equally determined 'selves'.

Instead of addressing the subtle challenge of how individuals of different national affiliations could coexist, as the Austro-Marxists had essayed, the self-determination formula instead proposed the blunt instrument of 'one people, one state', with all its inevitable consequences for minority oppression, partition and secessionism. As Wilson's secretary of state, an international lawyer called Robert Lansing, prophetically warned 'The phrase is simply loaded with dynamite ... What misery it will cause!'

It was to be the downfall of the inter-war League of Nations and was to offer Hitler a slogan with which he could challenge the Versailles settlement by raising the plight of the Sudeten Germans now located in Czechoslovakia. The strength of the social democrats among Bohemian Germans played a restraining role in preventing the eruption of national conflict and ensuring the Czech majority took a liberal line—but, tragically, this accommodation was not to last.

World War II and Universal Norms

The destruction and delegitimation of fascism in World War II were to lead to the embrace across the democratic political spectrum in western Europe of the universal norms of democracy, human rights and the rule of law through which it was possible to say 'never again' to the particularistic, nationalistic intolerance and aggressive which had brought ideological civil war to the continent. In the succeeding decades, it was only to be in an arc around the periphery—in Northern Ireland, the Basque Country, Corsica and Cyprus—that ethnic conflict was to remain a periodically violent challenge.

But no such bitter lessons were to be learned on the other side of the Iron Curtain, as the 'people's democracies' rapidly degenerated into Soviet-type totalitarianism. A triumphalist rhetoric around the Great Patriotic War in the USSR and official anti-fascist ideology elsewhere ensured that the cold-war logic of the blocs was accompanied by blocked thinking on nationality and ethnicity.

The collapse of the Stalinist grand narrative thus saw, as Eric Hobsbawm wryly put it, 'the old chickens of Versailles' come home to roost. Multi-ethnic Yugoslavia disintegrated into ugly and competing ethno-nationalisms, as former neighbours were encouraged to perceive themselves once more decked out in the wartime stereotypes of Chetniks and Ustashe.

So is enlightenment universalism—of which socialism, along with liberalism, is an offshoot—dead, as many were quickly to claim? Not quite. Happily, there is something after faddish post-modernism.

Ernesto Laclau made an important distinction between the end of the universal political actor—such as the *Proletariat* with its supposedly pre-programmed destiny of 'dictatorship' over the rest of society—and the end of universal political *values*. Far from the latter being redundant, Laclau argued, they remained all the more essential to trump particularistic identities and so make coexistence possible.

What are these universal values that can provide the impetus for a modern socialism which is able to address ethnic division? The best answer we have is the case for cosmopolitanism, advanced by David Held among others, which builds on but transcends the historic contribution of the Austro-Marxists.

Cosmopolitans of All Lands Unite!

In common parlance, cosmopolitanism often conveys a sense of rootlessness, but Held gives it a precise definition, comprising three interrelated elements. First, it entails an 'egalitarian individualism', where the individual—not the state or other particular associations—is the unit of moral worth and the whole of humankind is deemed to comprise a single moral realm. Secondly, it implies 'reciprocal recognition', in the sense that this equal moral worth is recognised by everyone. And, thirdly, it requires that each person enjoy 'impartial treatment' of their claims by public authorities, which therefore must have a 'lay' or neutral character, guaranteeing freedom of conscience for all. Together, these principles provide for peaceful coexistence in a diverse world, in just the same way as their opposites—inequality, communalism and competition for state control—are, in combination, sure-fire guarantees of ethnic conflict.

Cosmopolitanism balances private autonomy with a common public sphere where dialogue can take place in a

secure context. It allows cultural diversity to be combined with at least a thin civic allegiance. As Jürgen Habermas argues, democratic citizenship establishes an abstract, legally mediated solidarity among strangers. This is the basis for his notion of constitutional patriotism.

Ulrich Beck provides the corollary, equally mindful of 20th-century German history, in his concept of constitutional tolerance. He contends that today the state must undergo the same paradigm shift *vis-à-vis* national identity as it did in previous centuries with regard to religion. Just as it was realised that the principle of *cuius regio, eius religio*—the ruler determines the religion of the state—was a recipe for intolerance in multi-religious states, so in the contemporary context of mass migration the state must be neutral among the various national identities of its denizens if tolerance is to be preserved.

Can this work? Well, it is worth looking more closely at ex-Yugoslavia, as not everywhere erupted in ethnic flames during the 1990s. Tuzla in Bosnia-Herzegovina was, for the most part, a prime example of an enclave of peace amid the ravages of war. Researchers from ex-Yugoslavia and the social-democrat mayor of Tuzla, Jasmim Imamovic, explained how this had been sustained at a Council of Europe seminar in 2003. Society in the town was quite integrated by Bosnian standards, with one in four marriages ethnically mixed. The social democrats (the reformed Communists) had done well in elections in 1990 and there was a broader inter-ethnic municipal leadership committed to peace.

Mr Imamovic described their values thus: 'anti-nationalism was the highest form of patriotism'. When a Serbian Orthodox church was attacked in the town, the council ensured the church—'our' church, as Mr Imamovic, from the Muslim community, tellingly described it—was repaired within three days in an important demonstration of civic leadership.

Thus cosmopolitanism is by no means misplaced idealism. Far from being seen as the exclusive preserve of a globalised business elite—the class consciousness of frequent flyers, Craig Calhoun has called it—as Chan Kwok-Bun puts it, we can look to the unspectacular, practical, everyday life activities that allow movement beyond group identities to the business of simply living together and solving practical problems collectively. But developing cross-communal civic associations, particularly through the trade unions and the voluntary sector, is a key weapon in tackling ethnocentrism. The trade-union tradition in Tuzla was a strong one and in Northern Ireland the key role of the 1993 peace marches, organised by the trade unions, in bringing about the ceasefires a year later has never been properly recognised.

Similarly, for all that Belfast remains a city divided by nearly 100 sectarian barriers of one sort or another, one area stands out as a neighbourhood integrated in religious and social-class terms: Ballynafeigh. Why should this be? A critical role has been played by the local community association, initiated at the height of polarisation in 1973 by a group of residents who wanted to form an organisation which would preserve the cultural mix of the area. Now at the hub of a dense capillary network of cross-communal local groups, it has ensured the neighbourhood's social fabric can withstand wider political controversies.

Conclusion

Immigration and integration have often proved awkward subjects for social democrats in recent years. Yet cosmopolitanism can be defined at its simplest as the inclusion of the other within oneself—rather than the demonisation of the Other. It is the essence of the solidarity on which social democrats have always relied, reconceptualised for a diverse, 21st century world.

Nor does it require a PhD in political science to understand it. At the social level, it is merely a preference for openness over closure. And just as we know that open societies enjoy the liberty denied by 'really existing socialism', we know that those that embrace what Beck calls 'really existing cosmopolitanisation' will thrive while those that do not will stagnate, in a knowledge economy in which the unfettered and rapid exchange of information is at a premium. Contrast the still dynamic US economy with the lost decades in Japan, as the former social-democrat Austrian chancellor, Alfred Gusenbauer, points out.

At the European level, that means, finally, embracing what Ash Amin calls an ethos of 'hospitality'. Against those who, like Canute, would strive to stop the tidal flows of humanity stimulated by globalisation, social democrats must instead seek to regulate them in a non-discriminatory way for the benefit of all the citizens of the world. Within Europe, that means campaigning for a minimum wage set at 50 per cent of national means, so that immigration can be a source of enrichment for all, rather than a mechanism for wage undercutting in a race to the social bottom.

In recent years, the far right has insidiously pulled the centre-right, and even sections of the left, over to its language of intolerance—Nicholas Sarkozy's presidential re-election campaign has been a low point. By being the most consistent advocates of universal values in favour of integration and intercultural dialogue, social democrats can regain the political initiative by retaking the moral high ground.

This post is part of the 'Basic Values Debate' jointly organised by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung and Social Europe Journal. Read more on social democratic integration policy: 'Living together as Equals: Principles of Social Democratic Integration Policy'.