

A decorative graphic consisting of a grid of dots in various shades of gray and red, arranged in a pattern that suggests a map of Europe or a network of connections.

Future Scenarios of a Better Society?

Political Visions and Key Programmatic Ideas of European Social Democracy

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- Europe's social democratic parties find themselves caught up in a process of reorientation, which also includes the working out of a coherent narrative that overarches countless everyday policy measures.
- In their economic policy ideas social democrats, in particular in competition-based democracies, are focused on consociationalist forms of cooperation, such as the institutionalised cooperation between government, economy and society glorified as a »partnership«.
- *Performance* and *responsibility* are crucial to current social democratic notions of society. While performance is largely equated with labour, the old »workers' parties« have been transformed into modern »labour parties without workers« under the banner of the performance principle.
- In a communitarian return to communal networking, preliminary political work and empowerment of the party base seem to be among the most striking changes in comparison with the elite and professionalised parties of the Third Way.
- The debates on *Blue Labour* and the *Good Society* represent one of the most striking and interesting attempts to reconceptualise social democracy, which also points beyond traditional lines of conflict and group differences.



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1. Introduction¹

We closed our report on organisational reform in a number of social democratic parties, in particular in Western Europe, with a quotation from Robert Misik: »If you have no vision no spin doctor can save you and the best home page is worth nothing« (Micus 2010 and Butzlaff/Micus/Walter 2011). We wanted to explain that in our view, without a mobilising substantive point of view, without a political vision, without – to quote Karlheinz Blessing, SPD executive director from 1991 to 1993 – »concrete utopias«, no organisational innovations have much value. In this regard we asked social democrats a number of what were no doubt not particularly original questions in order to clarify what they wanted to achieve in what way, with what means and for which target groups, where they want to go and, finally, how and with whom they wanted to get there. We also diagnosed that concrete utopias and ideas on new social democratic outlines of society and projects concerning the future were lacking (Butzlaff/Micus/Walter 2011, as well as Walter 2011).

This was possibly a little brash and premature, and thus we want in what follows to subject the diagnosis to a thorough assessment. In preparation we turned our attention once again to social democratic parties in a number of countries, but with the focus now exclusively on Europe. We slightly varied the set of European countries, in particular supplementing the North, West and South European social democratic parties of the first study with eastern and central European cases, so that in the present investigation, besides the United Kingdom, Sweden, Denmark, the Netherlands, France, Spain and Italy, we also looked at the Czech Republic and Poland. Our question was, whether and, if so, which social democrats could provide, based on future scenarios of a better society, »new answers in changed times« and, not least, what these answers were.

1. The following people have also collaborated in this study: Bastian Brandau, Jens Gmeiner, Christoph Hermann, Daniela Kallinich, Danny Michelsen, Teresa Nentwig, Martin Polasek, Andreas Wagner and Julia Walter.

2. Overall Context: Outlines of the Future and Current Crises

First of all, it can be shown that the consciousness of the need to possess a coherent narrative that overarches countless everyday policy measures is widespread in social democratic circles. This is particularly pronounced in countries such as Denmark and Sweden, which are accustomed to the welfare state from whose services – at least in most cases and up until recently – all citizens benefit equally and regardless of income and which can thus be called »universalistic«. In Scandinavia against this overall background of experience, quite apart from social policy in the narrow sense, there is a desire to overcome petty daily politics in favour of overall design or at least to imbed it in it. In view of an increasing multiplicity of social situations and individual attitudes the Swedish political scientist Bo Rothstein thus calls for a policy oriented towards the idea of »universal human beings« and »universal human rights«, which is characterised, in contrast to the »relativistic, anti-empirical (so-called postmodern) way of thinking«, by a combination of ideological visions of »the good« and empirically based investigations of »what is possible« (Rothstein 2009).

Also in general the circumstances for basic party political debates are currently favourable. Self-assurance concerning joint reflection and efforts are usually triggered by election defeats and hostile public opinion. This is shown by Polish social democrats who at irregular intervals re-establish programmatic circles or reactivate existing party platforms – whose work not by chance, given the situation-driven motive, loses ardour once again before actual results can be achieved. The same thing can be said, perhaps even more strongly, in relation to France. In any case, whenever the French socialists find themselves in crisis they begin a process of self-re-examination. Whenever the problems appear particularly daunting the party's intellectual pulse increases, debates intensify, thought is given to »why?«, questions are raised about »who we really are« and »what we want«. The fact that in early summer 2012 in virtually every country – apart from Denmark and France – the social democrats find themselves in opposition and thus have the opportunity, far away from governmental responsibility, to argue about their basic political goals and ambitions should also fuel fundamental debate.

But an element of doubt immediately enters in here. Directly after the general election defeat in 2010 – in other words, in circumstances ideal for debate on fundamentals – the FES and the think tank Arbetarrörelsens Tankesmedja (which is close to the Sveriges socialdemokratiska arbetareparti [Swedish Social Democratic Workers Party – SAP] held a two-day seminar in Stockholm in April 2011 on »Justice in the Good Society«. Despite this key issue and prominent speakers both from home and abroad interest in the meeting among Swedish social democrats was extremely low, which can be explained, among other things, by the fact that intellectuals are increasingly turning away from the party and also are no longer to be found in its activist organisations (Landsorganisationen – LO, Arbetarnas Bildningsförbund – ABF). Circumstances in Poland, certainly, exceed those in Western European countries. For example, at an event held at the Centre for Political Analysis, which is close to the SLD, concerning the book *Project for Poland: A Left-wing Perspective*, the planned discussion on how capitalism could be democratised and whether the concept of democratic socialism is already obsolete did not take place. With the exception of a number of older professors all the participants in the event left, together with the then chair of the SLD Grzegorz Napieralski, after his welcome address at the buffet. Similarly, the presentation of 60 »proposals« by the Parti Socialiste in the French presidential election after 17 years in opposition scarcely testified to the existence of a focused strategic goal. After all, Mitterrand had presented the voters with 110 »demands« in 1981.

3. The Crisis and a New State: Capitalism and Keynesianism

Nevertheless, controversial debates and attempts at perspectival clarification are taking place in the various social democratic parties, for example, about the general thrust of economic policy. This is not without reason. The parties of European social democracy today find themselves in particular need of outlining a coherent and consistent model of a desirable world and society of tomorrow. On one hand, in the course of the crisis in which Europe and large parts of western (industrialised) countries have been mired since 2008 loud voices have been raised, due to the crisis, both inside and outside social democracy, calling into question apparently fundamental certainties, not stopping even at the cornerstones of the state, the

economy and the social order, starting from scratch with the question of what social democracy really is today.

On the other hand – and this complicates the task of developing a future scenario immensely – the same economic crisis means that parties' prospects of political power depend to a considerable extent on economic competence and successful crisis management. This means that many social democrats in the crisis have rather tried to prove their practical viability, pragmatism and grasp of reality, especially with regard to economic and financial policy. For example, in the period after New Labour and Tony Blair in the United Kingdom, the goal of fiscal credibility has taken priority (Wintour 2012). And Francois Hollande, then presidential candidate of the French Parti socialiste (PS), tried extensively in his election campaign to make as few promises as possible and to appear particularly realistic with regard to the budget situation and political room for manoeuvre. The fear of opening oneself up to attack was all too great and providing political opponents with opportunities to stir up old prejudices about the indiscipline of social democratic budget policies and out of control debt mountains. As a result, a restriction to reality is currently built in to social democratic thinking about future scenarios and consideration of possible »better« societies is from the outset severely curtailed by the constant call for compelling proof that social democrats are reliable with regard to budget issues.

French political scientist Laurent Bouvet talks in this connection of the »two bodies« (*deux corps*) of the Parti Socialiste, which contradict one another. The »material body« through which the PS wins adherents and support via material or bureaucratic dependencies is confronted by the »mystical body« of ideology (Poulet 2012). Bouvet calls the practical political and the world view sides of things the two decisive pillars of social democrats' appeal to voters and supporters. He goes on to say that the parties' political discourse is »very bureaucratic« and often limited to material support measures, rights or guarantees, but that at the same time discussions about the importance of individuality that have been going on for 25 years have pressurised considerably the idea and legitimacy of state action. The PS has so far not been able to resolve this tension between a collective public project and individual rights.

3.1 An Ethical Economic Policy

In the realignment of the British Labour Party the economy and mutual relations between the economic sphere, state functions and civil society took central place. On one hand, here too the abovementioned tension between the desire to propagate optimism about the future by means of ambitious alternative conceptions and the perceived pressure to have to demonstrate a sense of reality and management skills in the crisis was discernible. For example, although Labour Party leader Ed Miliband, on one hand, refers to creating a »different kind of economy in the future« (Labour Party 2011: 8), on the other hand, he limits the scope of such demands with the placatory statement that there is less scope for political schemes. As a result the resulting outline of a new economic order is based largely on negatives: we have to put a stop to »casino capitalism«; the country has »no future as a low skill, low pay economy« (Labour Party 2011: 8); the »irresponsibility of an underregulated finance sector« is an expression of »short-termism« which has produced a »fast buck culture« (Labour Party 2011: 6 and Miliband 2011a). However, it is not possible to derive a positive narrative from such observations.

Nevertheless, in particular in countries hard hit or under threat from the economic crisis, a shift in the debate can be discerned in comparison to political debates before the economic collapse. With regard to his own ideas on economic policy the Labour leader has presented four sets of values concerning a good society that are fundamental for both the Labour Party and British political culture and society: reward linked to effort, something for something, hard work and the long term are the cornerstones. This represents an attempt to formulate an ethical project for economic policy based on a firm bedrock of values.²

Long-term economic policy goals can be derived from this according to which the British economy is to be restructured. Banks should – *first* – be motivated and pushed by legislation and tax incentives to give long-term loans and to function as »servants« of industry and society. This is to be achieved through more competition *and* tighter regulation. State regulation per se is thus not set against market competition. *Second*, long-term

thinking should be established in companies with the state resorting to tax measures in order to regulate by making short-term behaviour more expensive (Miliband 2012). As a *third* goal, Miliband has taken up one of New Labour's favourite issues, emphasising the need for improved training and further training (for example, see Michelsen and Walter 2011: 129–150). On the basis of an agreement between the state, employers and employees, qualification measures are to be better coordinated in the future. Government incentives will be used once again: for example, government contracts may be given only to companies that have signed a »training pact«.

Fourth, Miliband applies the demand for the responsibility of the individual to society – the obligation to give something back to society (something for something) – also to high earners, in contrast to New Labour and Tony Blair, which tended to direct the slogan »responsibility« one-sidedly to the unemployed. Miliband talks about »responsibility at the top as well as at the bottom« (Miliband 2012) and in particular emphasises the obligation to act on the part of the social elite. While New Labour put particular emphasis on those who received public care as the recipients of state assistance Miliband attaches at least the same level of responsibility to the UK's top earners. It is far from irrelevant for the rest of society whether for these exorbitant wages they put in an extraordinary performance and bear a corresponding responsibility, as well as – in the case of company failure – have to bear some responsibility or not (Miliband 2011b). Finally – and the focus is on active government regulation – Miliband would like to step up government action against cartels and organised interests that only have their own benefit in mind and counteract the interests of society as a whole.

All in all, Miliband's idea of future economic reform in the United Kingdom points towards Rhenish capitalism.

Already in autumn 2011 Miliband was criticised for being »at heart« a »social democrat of the continental type« (2011). Germany is generally held up as a model for the organisation of the economy: when it comes to more codetermination; efforts to maintain well paid, high skilled jobs in industry; the notion that overall income inequalities should not be too great; or with regard to a crisis-proof organisation of bank and the financial world – Germany is often and enthusiastically referred to as exemplary (see, for example, Labour Party 2011; Miliband 2010; Miliband 2012; also Pierce 2012).

2. The postulating of these four central values and long-term economic policy goals can be found in Ed Miliband's party conference speech in 2011.

In sum, in the United Kingdom sympathy appears to have grown for an active, steering and intervening state. In contrast to the New Labour government the terminology is no longer that of a weak, largely passive state that gives citizens as equal opportunities as possible, but otherwise stays on the sidelines and leaves it to individuals how they take advantage of these opportunities, with personal effort determining social status. Labour under Ed Miliband talks much more about industrial activism, active government, managing investment and tax incentives by means of which not only are opportunities equalised but behaviour is guided. Although every effort is made to avoid the impression that a paternalistic state is being advocated, which is what was always said about New Labour – for example, redistribution would not take the form of transfer payments but via higher tax rates while reducing the burden on middle and lower incomes – the privatisation of various public responsibilities, as happened under New Labour, is a thing of the past. The emphasis on fiscal discipline means that these ideas basically converge on a limited Keynesianism.

3.2 The State and Its Pilot Function

A comparatively even more emphatic belief in the state can be read in the programme of the French socialists. An enhanced sensitivity to social developments, initiatives for desirable change and ideas about the economic and social forms of the future are to be stimulated primarily through the creation of new public institutions. The PS would like to restore state influence in this way and through strong intervention achieve »le retour de l'Etat dans sa fonction de pilote industriel« (restore the state's function as pilot of industry) (Parti Socialiste 2011).

Its programme for 2012 attributes to the French state four key functions with regard to society: first, it should be an *état stratège*, a planning state that anticipates problems and works out solutions by means of a planning committee (a national expert and research centre); second, an *état pilote* able to intervene directly and take counter measures using public resources if the priorities laid down by the legislature appear out of reach; third, an *état prevoyant*, an anticipatory state that seeks to prevent rather than be limited to the role of cleaning up after things go wrong; and fourth, an *état partenaire*, thus as a state that includes all citizens in decision-making processes that precede its intervention and steering ac-

tivities. Generally speaking, the PS has in mind a »massive and revived state intervention« (see Parti Socialiste 2011). Although French concepts of the state are based on a specific tradition and national culture, as well as an institutional order that differs, for example, from those of the Anglo-Saxon world or Southern Europe, which favours a belief in the regulatory function of the state, political centralism with Paris as the undisputed centre is only one – if indeed striking – example. Nevertheless, this discussion of the French socialists clearly points towards a more general return to state governance and the new appreciation that European social democrats nowadays generally attach to public institutions.

With regard to the *état partenaire*, for the Sveriges socialdemokratiska arbetareparti (Social Democratic Workers' Party of Sweden/SAP) it means primarily ensuring that the sources of legitimation of the state and public institutions do not wither. Although the Swedish social democrats do not deny the importance of economic efficiency for development potential and the viability of the state – as a result of which boosting its economic policy competence ratings is extremely important for the SAP – the focus of the party's efforts is individual dignity and opportunities to have a say within the institutional framework. Grassroots opportunities for democratic participation and, especially, the general interest-oriented embedding of public – and economic – decision-making are thus central, with fellow citizens being ranked above the market (see Socialdemokraternas party programme 2001). The Swedish ideal is thus a coordinating state that integrates and brings together the public, the economy, science/academia and the trade unions in a deeper corporatism.

This is a remarkable aspect of the current economic policy reform ideas of social democratic parties: a recurrent motive is cooperation between the state, the economy and citizens in the solution of socio-economic problems which, interestingly, of all things is currently being semantically refined in the explicitly competitive democracy of the United Kingdom as »partnership«. Nevertheless, the British Labour Party is pointing in the same direction as, for example, its Danish sister party, except that where it talks of *co-production* the other talks of *samproduktion*. In both instances, however, the new economic order is to be characterised by cooperation rather than conflict, which hitherto had been linked mainly with concordance democracies traditionally building on social partner alli-

ances between employers' associations and trade unions and usually governed by grand coalitions.

3.3 New Conflict Orientation?

That is on one hand. On the other hand, the rhetoric of several social democratic parties in comparison to their rhetoric in previous years of government is much more conflict-oriented. Once more taking the example of the British Labour Party, an appeal to the »national community« and the invocation of »one nation« has been replaced by a return to the vocabulary that emphasises opposites and contrasts »we« with »them«. Or, in the words of Labour leader Ed Miliband: »Let me tell you what the 21st century choice is: Are you on the side of the wealth creators or the asset strippers? The producers or the predators?« (Miliband 2011a). Those who are accused of frustrating key values – by tax evasion, personal enrichment and misuse of social security systems – are set up as antagonists of the decent, good, hard-working and solidarity-oriented community. To that extent, equating bankers and their bonuses with robbers is also no indication that Labour's new course is hostile to the economy. Rather, according to Miliband, it is a matter of the contrast between »hard-working people« and »those ripping off our society« (Miliband 2011b). This is possibly the real core of Labour's »political narrative« after Tony Blair and Gordon Brown: taking the side of hard-working people who play by the rules and are concerned about »concentrations of private power in this country when it leads to abuses« (Ashton 2012).

In Spain, too, the tone of the Partido Socialista Obrero Espanol (PSOE/Spanish Socialist Workers' Party) with regard to the curtailment of state power and the social security cuts justified on the basis of economic crisis by the centre-right government has become considerably harsher. Being in opposition, the horrendous unemployment and the social policy austerity measures have once more put the PSOE in a position in which it can try to pose as protector of ordinary people. Not without success: at the last regional elections the PSOE held on to the important regional governments in Andalusia and Asturia after a rowdy and disorderly campaign on the issues of »social cuts«, »state protection functions« and the »intervening state« (Witte 2012). And this although it was the socialists themselves who during their period in office instigated the first social security cuts, which a

year ago brought them a bitter loss of credibility and a disastrous defeat in the national elections in November 2011 (Butzlaff 2012a).

Of course, in the relevant social democratic parties there is also sometimes significant criticism of the currently dominant internal party majority position with regard to questions of the state and economics. For example, in his essays in *In the Black Labour* labour activist and commentator Hopi Sen diagnoses that although the talk is usually of getting to grips with neoliberalism, developing new concepts and opening up avenues to transform the system, with regard to specific policies high-flown announcements were rarely followed by serious proposals. This is why, according to Sen, rhetoric should be dispensed with and a clearer, less opaque language used: a »plainer language of structural reform« (Sen 2012: 22f).

4. Europe and the European Level: Vanishing Points of National Interests

For social democratic parties Europe has played a key role as point of orientation and entity able to provide solutions since 2008, at least as far as the official version is concerned. At first glance this makes perfect sense. In periods in which nation-states are increasingly finding themselves in difficulties due to globally networked capitalism the prospect of regaining, by homogenising welfare state regimes and tax systems, at least part of the old shaping powers of the (welfare) state is becoming more and more attractive.

Nevertheless, the topic of »Europe« is by no means unproblematic for social democratic parties. Demonstrably as a result of the constant speculation concerning the impending bankruptcy of more and more EU member states and the dangers that this gives rise to for domestic savings and assets, not to mention the crisis summits of heads of state and government and the opacity of the whole discussion for ordinary people distrust has grown with regard to European integration. Even the populations of crisis states doubt the value of the unification project since they see themselves harassed by a drastic consolidation programme imposed from outside. At the same time, however, both interest in the EU and the level of information concerning European affairs has increased markedly. The European Union has outgrown its political shadow existence and has taken on considerable impor-

tance in the public debate, in particular because it has become the object of political controversy.

Spanish political scientist and newspaper commentator Fernando Vallespin, who is close to the PSOE, considers, moreover, that Europe is currently the only vehicle by means of which politics in general and parties in particular can experience a resurgence. Only in relation to the European level does the rhetoric of the primacy of politics make sense. The *marco europeo* (European framework) is the sole rational context of action for left-wing politics; within the framework of the nation-state left-wing politics cannot contribute to further develop democracy if the important decisions are taken in an authoritarian manner at the EU level. Increased credibility and the requisite capacities and capabilities to cut the Gordian knot of global problems can ultimately be generated only at the European level. Vallespin specifically mentions the welfare state and competitiveness as examples of sets of problems that have long outgrown the national regulatory framework and in future can be solved only internationally or at least on a European basis.

4.1 Hope of the Elites – Grassroots Scepticism

With regard to Europe, however, there is also the problem – according to Vallespin – that in the broad population trust is lacking, even among large parts of the ordinary party faithful, since there is no robust emotional attachment to the EU able to compete with nation-state patriotism. It must therefore be declared much more emphatically that it is precisely Europe that will guarantee democracy and democratic politics in future (Butzlaff 2012b). The rift given expression here between social democratic party elites, on one hand, and ordinary members and sympathisers, on the other, with regard to the Europe question – the European hopes of the leaders and the scepticism of the base – is to be found in many of the countries under examination. In Denmark, thus the new Social Democratic government under Helle Thorning-Schmidt – who as a former MEP has a close biographical relationship to Europe – is trying to allay the Euro-scepticism of her party with a new Ministry for Europe and more vigorous treatment of this issue in day-to-day politics (on this see Hjortdal and Hartmann Eskesen 2011; see also *Socialdemokraterne* 2012: 6).

Needless to say, also among party elites eulogies of European integration are often given in pursuit of tactical interests determined by internal politics. In periods of government participation, as Christian Krell summarises his interpretation of the Europe policy of UK, French and German social democrats in the 1980s and 1990s, »in all three parties more of a strongly instrumental perception of the EC/EU is evident than was the case during periods of opposition« (Krell 2009: 399).

It could be objected that thus the time is once more favourable for courageous pro-European visions and comprehensive lists of social democratic demands for deepening European integration. Social democrats were in government in only three out of 27 EU member states in December 2011. At best, however, expectations should be modest with regard to a possible impending implementation of the Europe policy visions of opposition social democratic parties, if, after France, also in Germany in autumn 2013 there is a change of government and the executive also in Europe's leading states turns red once again. In any case, comparative examination of the Europe policies of social democratic parties shows that, unaffected by the internationalist ideals of the early period of the workers' movement, in the past three decades they have solidly rejected transfers of sovereignty to the European level and instead have become the Europe policy advocates of the subsidiarity principle and the regulatory competence of the smallest possible unit and to that extent, consequently, have not infrequently demanded that individual policy areas be renationalised, in other words, brought back within the sphere of influence of the nation-state (see also Butzlaff and Micus 2011: 78–85).

4.2 The Devil Is in the Detail

In particular with regard to issues of the welfare state and likewise for questions of international competitiveness, as well as – with qualifications – tax systems, the European level has increasingly evolved into the object of the problem diagnoses, expectations and alternative conceptions of social democratic party elites. If welfare and competition regimes were harmonised, however, first, the competitive pressure on social systems would be markedly reduced and, second, the social and wage policy race to the bottom would be stifled. Even in Sweden – a country with a population particularly critical

of European integration – the idea is coming to the fore that the level of care provided by the Swedish welfare state can continue to be ensured only if it is possible to expand its basic structural characteristics to other countries across Europe.

Nevertheless, the fact that Europe can create a consensus on the solutions to various crisis phenomena between the continent's social democratic parties at best at an entirely abstract level is another matter. In any case, a cursory glance at the various social democratic parties shows how difficult it would be to attain unanimity about European action even among social democratic governments. Many electorates are expressly Euro-sceptic, albeit by no means always for the same reasons. The reasons for their defensiveness with regard to Europe range from the rejection of Brussels bureaucracy and arrogance to opposing views about their own position in the globalised world. The British, for example, in many instances stand alone, having retained an insularity concerning a changing world that knows no fears about marginalisation comparable to those of continental Europe's political elites to whom a European Community promises to guarantee defence of its customary global significance (see Leithauser 2011). If the Labour Party in the United Kingdom seems comparatively Europe-friendly it is only owing to the political and cultural environment of a predominantly euro-critical public and the decidedly EU-averse Tories. When Labour politicians speak out in favour of European integration their advocacy is always linked to strong national overtones and underscored with rationalisations. For example, in the Party Programme of 2010 it says: »Our belief is that Britain is stronger in the world when the European Union is strong, and that Britain succeeds when it leads in Europe.« However, none of that is new and rather constitutes an updating of familiar trends.

5. Freedom, Equality, Solidarity

Similarly, the interpretation of basic social democratic values continues along familiar lines. Freedom, equality (justice) and solidarity are mutually dependent. There is no real freedom without equality (of opportunity); just societies are based on a system characterised by freedom; solidarity requires basic equality and creates the necessary social cohesion in freedom. There are differences in the details, however. In France, for example, »freedom« is less important than »equality«, which

President Hollande recently called »France's soul«. In Denmark and the other Scandinavian countries, too, equality forms the foundation on which freedom is built: in a community with equal opportunities everyone is free to live out his dreams (Socialdemokraterne 2011: 5 f). In Poland, in turn, for the Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej (SLD) freedom is primarily »freedom from something« and less »freedom for something«. Freedom here is an autonomous realm, a protected area against state intervention and thus primarily freedom of choice, freedom of conscience, religious freedom, freedom to travel – and only much later freedom from material constraints (see Skrzypek 2012).³

Furthermore, in the wake of the economic and financial crisis and heightened public attention to growing income differences, sharper social injustices and increased risk of poverty social democratic discourse has moved a little to the left and has softened. In Sweden at the same time as the financial crisis and the crisis of neoliberalism the value of »equality« once more became a core value of the SAP. From the 1980s not much use was made of it and it seemed to have been supplanted by »effectiveness«. In the current programme of the French PS, adopted this year, equality is afforded considerable importance, justice is not reduced to equal opportunities, but also includes distributive justice and the commitment to solidarity is pervasive. The Danish Social Democrats' definition of their state as the land of equal opportunities (*de lige muligheders land*), in which bridges are built over cultural divides between Danish and other ethnic groups and between various social strata sounds temperate, harmonious and peaceful.

On the other hand, the *Principprogram* of the Danish Social Democrats declares that differences must be tolerated (see Socialdemokraterne 2011: 6). In general, little has changed beneath the surface of a new rhetoric with regard to the premises of Third Way social democracy. Also still in place is the emphasis on individual obligations as a counterweight to collective rights. The general development over the past two decades could be characterised as solidaristic giving to society. This has become more important, while demands for solidarity or taking from society have come to be linked to quid pro quos.

3. A comparative analysis of the ideological vision of the member parties of the PES, February 2012, available online at: http://www.feps-europe.eu/uploads/documents/20120315-short-article-on-progressive-values_DE.pdf (last accessed on 27.07.2012), here 17 ff.

6. Meritocracy: the Social Democratic Utopia

Ultimately, »performance« and »responsibility« are of pivotal importance for the current social democratic conception of society. The importance of education derives from this. Thus so much attention is paid to equality of an equal start in life. This focus also explains the hopes currently invested in »fairness«, for example, in Italy and the United Kingdom where the principle of equal opportunities and a fair wage for services provided trades – rather emotively – under the slogan *Promise of Britain*. In Denmark, the election programme of the left-wing party block before the Parliamentary election last year was entitled *En Fair Losning* (»A Fair Solution«).

The fact that the concept of fairness is increasingly taking the place of solidarity and justice in the discourse of social democratic party leaders and has become synonymous with the traditional basic values testifies to the continuing influence of Third Way thinking in European social democracy and justifies some scepticism with regard to conjectures of a far-reaching shift to the left. The fact is that much less redistributive impetus is likely to come from the principle of »equal opportunities« and the creation of »fairer« starting chances than, for example, from the notion of solidarity, which is based on the responsibility of the strong members of society for the weaker members and accords the state an active role in getting the former to exercise a material obligation with regard to the latter. This is entirely independent of the fact that a concept of fairness deriving from liberal traditions can be filled with moderately left-wing policy contents. Thus tax fairness can justify both tax cuts and a progressive tax system, while tax rises for high earners can also be described as »fair«. Not least this slogan refers to the responsibility of elites for the whole of society.

However, these nuances do nothing to change the basics. Under the banner of the »performance« doctrine modern »workers' parties without workers« have grown out of the old »workers' parties«. Performance is broadly equated with work and it goes hand in hand with an orientation towards those in work, as well as with stricter control and sanctioning of the unemployed and – what is generally perceived to be the same thing, especially with regard to the long-term unemployed – the workshy. Everyone should make an effort and those who do not make a proper contribution are soon suspected of abusing and exploiting the benefit system. To modern social

democrats, work is »virtuous activity«, even as »valuable in itself«. It is thus assiduous workers who are in a better position and whose social inclusion will be guaranteed. Problematising material inequalities is restricted – on this understanding, logically – to the »working« population who should receive a fair wage for their work effort.

The social democratic ideal of the »meritocracy«, as it is postulated primarily in the United Kingdom, but also in slightly modified and diluted forms in the other countries considered here is by no means unproblematic. Already in the past the »utopia of meritocracy« (see: Marg and Walter 2012: 6–18) – as the belief in performance or merit could be called – sharpened social divisions. The meritocratic society takes away from the lower classes their former ideologies of resistance and robs them of a well run party that could take up the interests of those at the bottom of the social ladder. In a meritocratic society both an oppositional programme and an oppositional party vanish. This is because in such a society inequality is ultimately the outcome of selection and filtering that is the same and thus fair for all.

Indeed, in a meritocratic society, which is supposed to supersede the old class-based society, class differences are stronger and deeper than ever. Income differences between the top and the bottom have sharpened in the recent past. Encounters and overlaps between those belonging to the respective classes are rare. In a society based on equal opportunities those who moved up in the wake of the education reforms of the 1960s and 1970s do not consider themselves collective actors but as individuals in pursuit of the dividends of success. Thus a society based on equal opportunities counteracts affiliations and solidarity.

»Basically«, according to Stine Marg and Franz Walter, »this could have been foreseen: Open access to opportunities in a society otherwise remaining unchanged, with enormous income differences, power hierarchies, class differences, distinctions of rank, reputation and renown must lead to a fierce struggle for the positions of privilege that remain in place« (Marg and Walter 2012: 17). Anyone who cannot keep up in this individualised battle by taking advantage of their opportunities is lost, absolutely and forever. Education is the holy vision of secular societies, although according to Paul Liessmann they are also »false consolation for those brazenly labelled losers from modernisation who, because they lack education,

are to blame for their fate« (ibid.). This is because in a meritocracy those who have fallen behind with regard to education and the unemployed are regarded as having »rightly failed because they failed to take advantage of the opportunities fairly made available to them, in other words, they are themselves responsible for their negative fate – or rather they are made so« (ibid.).

7. Fine-Sounding Lists of Basic Values – but often without consequences

The definitions and attempts at re-evaluating the binding social democratic basic values of freedom, equality and solidarity – despite small national variations, for example, in Poland where the notion of »solidarity« is the province of the Solidarnosc movement and its epigones, as a result of which Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej (SLD Alliance of the Democratic Left) prefers »fraternity« – are also problematic in two respects and, one might say, have so far failed for two reasons: (i) the resumption, due to the economic and financial crisis, of a more strongly protective, measured and less burdensome interpretation of freedom, equality and solidarity is scarcely credible to many voters and, in particular (ii) to the former core electorate, especially against the background of the policies of the Third Way, which for years were applied unswervingly and then abandoned ad hoc across the board.

The reputation of the Scandinavian social democratic parties as welfare state parties has been severely battered over the past two decades by their government policy. It is difficult for the Swedish SAP to channel the protests against privatisation in welfare services because it has sometimes initiated such privatisation (see Borgnas 2012). Although a narrative in which welfare and work for all is demanded has been revived in the SAP it cannot be put across very credibly to broad sections of the population, for example, because re-regulation in schools, health care and the labour market after years of repeated incantations concerning the overextension of the state bureaucracy (see Borgnas 2012). Likewise, the Social Democrats in Denmark can only selectively present themselves as welfare state parties and in contrast to the ruling centre-right austerity and consolidation coalitions. Due to the government's radical measures and their harsh criticism of it, however, the Social Democrats were able – if only temporarily – in the most recent election

in 2011 to present themselves once again as the »true« defenders of the welfare state.

The withdrawal of numerous resources from fundamental segments of the parties and years of neglect of theoretical activity have favoured the hegemony of centre-right values and ushered in a situation in which even the interpretation of left-wing slogans takes place in terms of the normative categories of the opposition political camp. This explains the strongly economic focus of social democratic values and the narrow concentration of even traditional social democratic emancipatory instruments on the requirements of the globalised economy in Denmark. With regard to education and research, for example, it is claimed that the main reason for expanding investment in education is to improve the country's international competitiveness. Similarly, in the Netherlands, the Partij van de Arbeid (PvdA) has limited solidarity and participation to competitiveness factors. An inclusive society that invites everyone to get involved and develop their talents, they say, is also more efficient simply in economic terms. And with regard to demographic change human potential can no longer be allowed to go untapped.

Distinctively social democratic concepts are hardly found. With regard to Poland the historian of ideas Andrzej Mencwel has said that the Polish Left has long lacked even a language of its own. Instead, it pays lip service to left-wing clichés that at first glance are catchy and plausible, but in reality are arbitrary and ungrounded. In many instances the dominance of right-wing discourse is so great that unexpectedly even people and institutions generally considered on the left resort to conservative explanations. In 2006, within the framework of anonymous interviews the ideological motivations of over 100 members of the governments of Jerzy Buzek (1997–2001) and Leszek Miller (2001–2004) were investigated. Remarkably, none of the interviews yielded a list of values that might distinguish the SLD elites from post-Solidarnosc elites. Social democratic values, such as they were, remained limited to the vague expression of »left-wing compassion«.

A lack of clarity concerning one's views leads to indecisiveness. For example, recently the political scientist Laurent Bouvet called on the French PS to attempt a *reconquête*, a resolute »reconquest« of workers and ordinary employees. In its programme for the presidential

and parliamentary elections, however, the PS tried to implement this and other demands – but very hesitantly, not courageously and energetically. For example, the PS's programme proposals were aimed primarily at the middle classes, including those in the education sector, especially teachers. In this way, social democrats tend to come across in many ways like the Dutch PvdA, as vague copies of serious efforts on the left of the party. The PvdA is perceived as too soft and too meek. In opinion polls, the biggest opposition party in the parliament has now fallen behind the »real leader of the opposition«, the Socialistische Partij (SP). The post-Maoist SP, with new party leader Emile Roemer, kept more than 90 per cent of its votes in the recent parliamentary election. It is particularly attractive to social democratic voters, in particular among low earners, around a third of whom tend towards the SP.

It is also far from being the case that the interpretations of basic values would direct the practical action and specific policies of social democratic parties. In Sweden, for example, the Social Democratic Party in rhetorical terms remains committed to class struggle. Basically, however, it is a wholly pragmatic party which came to terms with the market economy early on and never attempted any renationalisations. On the contrary, it »deliberately promoted a modern, highly profitable export industry, ruled by influential family dynasties. No serious effort was made to disrupt the corresponding oligarchical ownership structures« (Hinck 1998: 1167). To that extent, criticisms of the »market« and the demand for »economic democracy«, as laid out in the SAP party programme, are largely rhetorical.

Although the Polish SLD continually uses the terms »left« and »security« – when one is entitled to refer to the first and what measures will be taken to realise the latter remain indeterminate. In Italy, too, the social democrats' discourse is full of platitudes when it comes to the basic values. For example, the following self-description by the Partito Democratico contains no guiding or action-directing information: »Our profile is the product of what we do for Italy and Europe by upholding the values and interests we stand for« (Bersani 2012). For the past few decades there has been a particularly curious disproportion with regard to the gap between rhetoric and political practice in the French Socialist Party. At the latest since Mitterrand it has been tame and moderate and for years higher earners and professors have dominated its ranks,

as a result of which in 2008 the elitist PS finally bid farewell to the notion of »revolution«.

8. The Window of Opportunity of Think Tanks and Foundations as Providers of Ideas

As external providers of ideas and progressive thinkers think tanks come to the fore during periods of crisis of confidence and approval, in which internal activists and functionaries lose the self-confidence to be able to address their own concerns. In France, for example, there are around 160 larger or smaller think tanks at present. Most of them were established fairly recently. On one hand, they are an expression of an »era lacking in new ideas« (Courtois 2012), while on the other hand they reflect disenchantment with political parties. »Political parties«, according to political scientist Pascal Perrineau, »find themselves in crisis, their membership is very weak, their youth organisations are depleted, they are no longer laboratories of ideas but bureaucratic machines concerned above all to distribute appointments. It is thus logical that debates will develop on their periphery« (quoted from Courtois 2012). In Sweden, social democratic ideas-factories experienced a boom when the SAP lost the election in 2006 and thus also access to the apparatus of the state with its scientific and analytical resources (Andersson 2012). However, in almost all the countries under consideration are generally considered as lacking impact and influence and having no say in the important decisions.

In reality, relations between parties, political elites and think tanks are much more complex. How receptive social democratic parties are to external advice, how willing they are to take up, discuss and ultimately implement the recommendations of affiliated ideas workshops depends not least on whether the famous »window of opportunity« is open. In other words, an issue must »fit in« with the context, the environment and the Zeitgeist if it is to attract attention.

The significance of the environment for the success or failure of external impulses can be demonstrated taking the example of the French Socialists and the think tank Terra Nova. For example, the idea of holding primary elections in the process of nominating the Socialist presidential candidate goes back to Terra Nova. In summer 2009 this think tank launched the first initiatives in this

direction, including a petition in which 100 personalities from politics and society called on the PS to introduce the principle of primaries and on that basis to determine the Socialist presidential candidate for 2012. The petition, published in the newspaper *Liberation*, was available on the internet to be signed by any citizen (Agence France Press 2009). The Socialist Party leader, Martine Aubry, who at first opposed primaries (Barotte 2009), allowed herself to be convinced by the public reception of the campaign and, after initial scepticism, took personal charge of the primaries initiative. The primaries thus marked a spectacular success for the advocates of elements of direct democratic participation. Instead of the one million participants initially expected, almost 2.7 million people took part in the first election round on 9 October 2011 (Barotte and Bourmand 2011) and even 2.9 million in the second and deciding round a week later (Wesfreid and Karlin 2011). Taking into account that the Socialist Party only has around 200,000 members it is clear how much interest this vote aroused among party sympathisers (Rossignol 2011).

With regard to the issue of »integration«, by contrast, Terra Nova, together with the magazine *Respect Mag*, at the end of January 2012 published 16 proposals for a »diverse France« (*France métissée*). The proposals that, among other things, concerned education, housing, culture and the labour market, are intended primarily to boost equal opportunities, regardless of background, and to improve coexistence between people with and without an immigrant background. The aim of the proposals was to enhance the profile of the issue of »integration« in the presidential campaign (see Author Not Named 2012; Vincent 2012). However, the joint effort of the think tank and the magazine did not go beyond mere reporting in the media. Even on the internet no debates on the 16 proposals were in evidence.

Even an attempt to start a debate on student fees did not get a hearing. When at the end of August 2011, at the beginning of the new university year, the student organisations complained about the increase in the cost of living for students, Terra Nova presented a proposal: registration fees should be raised in order to provide the universities with more resources (see Jacque 2011; Floc'h, 2012). »We are aware we are touching on a taboo here, but we have to launch the debate«: this is how Yves Lichtenberger, one of the authors of the Terra Nova report, justified the position on registration fees. Ultimately,

however, no party took up the proposals and the discussion Terra Nova had hoped for came to nothing. This was scarcely surprising – before the presidential election no party wanted to deliberately pick a quarrel with the students' representatives.

8.1 Difficult Situation and Often Problematic Party Relations

The examples given here should make it clear that the significance and function of think tanks with regard to the discussion of social democratic ideas and concepts is by no means fixed deterministically, but must be reworked from case to case. Analogous to the study of the identities of social democratic organisations (Micus 2010) it is not enough to make instant ad hoc contributions to debates that periodically flare up and to select individual conference topics by analogy with fluctuating public debate. The topics and ideas of think tanks have relevance to parties – or the public – only if they are both embedded in party history and connected to the party's current state, if there is a realistic prospect (even if only a tenuous one) of realisation and they encourage party functionaries to take action. The presence of a sympathetic media audience also plays an important role.

The existence and effectiveness of think tanks in the countries under consideration here also vary significantly. In contrast to France, in the Czech Republic, for example, the basic discussion of prospective ideas and concepts in relation to social democracy lies fallow. The foundation landscape to the left of the political spectrum is clear⁴ and the long-established Masarykova demokratická akademie (MDA)⁵ – a now small think tank that arose from the party's educational work – often meets with a lack of interest from the Social Democratic Party (Česka strana sociálně demokratická/ČSSD) and with its small staff and obvious lack of financial resources remains dependent on foreign foundations for support. In Poland, too, the discussion of long-term development scenarios and of social democracy organisationally and institutionally affiliated to the party in particular and of the political arena in general is poorly developed. Thus the effectiveness and political influence of discussion circles and small founda-

4. Besides the MDA, to the left of the political spectrum there are, for example, only *Cesta – centrum pro sociálně tržní ekonomiku a otevřenou demokracii*, founded in 2011, and *Glopolis*, founded in 2004.

5. See: <http://www.masarykovaakademie.cz/> (last accessed 18.06.2012).

tions such as the Ferdinand Lassalle Centre for Social Thought⁶ in Breslau remain limited.

However, with *Krytyka Polityczna*,⁷ which developed from a left-wing intellectual discussion periodical, there is a Polish platform that addresses the younger spectrum of a modern Left in Poland. The issues range from fundamental principles of the party programme to art, history and cultural philosophy and through self-run cultural centres holding events, exhibitions and film screenings also bring people together on the basis of their common interests. Those prominent in the movement are now well known in the Polish media and authors and commentators who publish regularly are listened to. However, all this occurs on the margins and without much contact with the social democratic SLD. *Krytyka Polityczna* does not function as a provider of ideas for the party. It would not even like to play this role, avoiding the SLD, finding its policies and representatives non-credible and insincere.

More evident attempts in recent years to integrate a broader spectrum of competences by mobilising a large number of participants, experts and sympathisers across Europe and to emit a contemporary modernity do not invalidate the familiar factors of success or failure described above. The French think tank *Laboratoire des Idées*, for example, aims to intellectually foster and support party development by means of the voluntary activities of around 800 experts and academics in 30 working groups, together with so-called *innovateurs du quotidien* (innovators of the everyday) (Paul 2009) and civil society. However, here too the decisive question concerns the extent to which the party leadership is open to such initiatives. In any case, frequent changes of think tank leaderships point to a difficult balancing act since they are always founded with reference to an uninterested and recalcitrant party (quoted in Allies 2009).

In brief, the foundation landscape and the environmental conditions for the work of social democratic think tanks and foundations vary significantly among the countries under consideration here. Structurally successful ventures, such as *Fundacion Sistema*, led by sociologist Jose Felix Tezanos, whose publication *Temas para el debate*⁸

is relatively well-regarded among the Spanish public, remain an exception. Cooperation between parties and think tanks often remains sporadic and unsystematic, allowing considerable potential to lie idle due to frictional losses and lack of interest.

9. Variations of a New Narrative

Overall, the domain of new social democratic narratives thus resembles a barren field. Nevertheless, there are considerable variations here, too, between the various national parties. While in some countries the seeds of visionary renewal fall on almost completely infertile ground, in other countries some interesting shoots are emerging, with British ground currently likely to bring forth the richest fruit.

9.1 Pursuit of Communitarian Networking

It is not by chance that the British Labour Party is playing a leading role in a debate that is also being conducted in other social democratic parties about the meaning and use of a communitarian strengthening of local structures and communities. Communitarianism – or, as Labour puts it, social-ism in contrast to the historical socialism – consists of an emphasis on neighbourly community and interpersonal responsibility. It calls for a decentralised strengthening of community institutions and civil society. To communitarians, the locale is the place where the principles of fairness and public responsibility – thus the often-invoked »something for something« – take on concrete form.

For social democratic parties communitarianism means a strategic orientation towards grassroots activities, cooperation with civil society initiatives and empowerment of the party base: ultimately, an attempt to play a stronger role in people's everyday lives and to reappropriate elements of the original movement. In contrast to conservatives, the emphasis on local communities does not serve merely to relieve the central bureaucracy of tasks and costs. Rather the »relational« power of communal networks is thought of as a counterweight to the power of the markets and Big Money. At the same time, communitarian concepts – which to some in the

6. See: http://lassalle.org.pl/?page_id=7&lang=en (last accessed 18.06.2012).

7. See: <http://www.krytykapolityczna.pl/> (last accessed 18.06.2012).

8. *Temas* is a periodical of debate that appears every month in Spanish news kiosks with a print run of around 25,000. See: <http://www.fundacion-sistema.com/Pubs/Magazine.aspx?ID=3> (last accessed 18.06.2012).

British Labour Party come under the heading of »democratic collectivism«, among Danish social democrats »the welfare society« (see Socialdemokraterne 2012) and in Sweden »citizen value« – imply for the individual taking on responsibility and thus is fixated on hard working »achievers«, involved in civil society, concerned about the general interest, making an effort for the community instead of merely depending on it.

Communitarianism to that extent implies extensive overlaps with the new value orientations of today's social democrats, which makes their adoption into the strategic repertoire of the representatives of this family of parties plausible and logical. Communitarianism also justifies the new social democratic sympathy for concerted action by state, economy and society. Communitarian concepts are concepts of harmony. Because communitarianism preaches (local) community – instead of polarised classes – the symbiosis of economic efficiency and social justice (instead of their confrontation) and mutually binding taking of responsibility (instead of anonymising individuality).

In France, the PS expresses this partnership-based, harmonious, proximity creating side of communitarianism in the concepts »*socialisme de la relation*« (socialism of relationships) and »*soin mutuel*« (mutual care). *Soin mutuel* is not limited to the welfare state, but is supposed to contribute generally to better coexistence and the realisation of a good society. The concept links the social with the democratic issue and implies that democracy is genuine only if it is social and not only a supplement, appendix or framework of the market. The French socialists thus see the necessity of strengthening interpersonal relations once again: for them, solidarity is the basis of (social) justice. Policy measures should lead to concrete improvements in life circumstances. Possible measures include equal treatment of men and women with regard to wages and extended rights with regard to care and child care. In this way the axe will be put to the roots of contemporary evil, although the concept of mutual care assumes that the crisis of confidence in France is a crisis of social relations and is based on the fear of giving without the prospect of getting something in return.

9.2 »Decent Work« and innovative Intermediation

Some other interesting developments among post-Third Way social democrats emerge with regard to the appreciation of work. While for Third Way social democratic parties »work« per se was a gain and its problematic – in other words, burdensome and alienating – sides were masked, currently social democratic politicians are once again propagating the significance of »decent« work. Not least the leader of the SPD Sigmar Gabriel took this stance at the party conference in Berlin in December 2011 when he called for the Social Democratic Party to »never again ... call into question the value of work« (quoted in Sattar 2011).

Particularly significant in this regard are developments in Italy. In the Partito Democratico (PD) a tendency has developed that can be labelled »*il lavoro prima di tutto*« (Work first). Associated with this tendency, to which party leader Bersani has a close affinity, is Stefano Fassina, responsible for »work and economics« on the PD executive. Adherents of this tendency are known as the *Giovani Turchi* (Young Turks) or *Quarantenni* (40 somethings). Fassina is the author of a book with the same title (see Fassina 2012) in which he argues that the current crisis is not so much the result of the financial crisis but of the devaluing of work. Labour cannot be sold like a commodity but is the expression of human creativity. Neoliberal ideas have finally been repudiated by the economic and financial crisis, the market must be reformed (also internationally) and another Europe must be created. If the conditions of work are not improved there can be no way out of the crisis. Thus for the Italian »Young Turks« poor working conditions are not the motor, but a brake on economic development.

In the border area between substantive and organisational reform there are a couple of innovations that we must not overlook. For example, in Poland the Lassalle Centre is engaged in cooperation with the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung in its biggest project so far: a social policy reader for practitioners of social democratic policy. The theoretical part of the finished publication is intended to provide a definition of social democratic values and basic assumptions. In subsequent chapters social policy measures are derived from these basic assumptions. The development of the book has been accompanied by several seminars in which the authors of individual chapters discuss their ideas and assumptions with SLD politicians,

trade union representatives and left-wing academics and representatives of NGOs active in social policy. It remains to be seen how the Polish left will make use of this opportunity for discussion and subsequently the finished book in its own work, although the effort is interesting no matter what. In Denmark, the Social Democrats published three papers in March 2012 that caused a stir under the title *Denmark from Now until 2032* (*Danmark herfra til år 2032*). The idea was to encourage debate among party members and in Danish society on how and with what policies the country should develop under Social Democratic leadership. This is also a promising approach worth keeping an eye on.

9.3 Question Mark against Progress – Citizen Value and Equality

Briefly, even if there is no coherent master narrative there are at least elements of a new narrative. To that extent a number of pointers can be given or proposals made concerning alternative ways of understanding basic social democratic ideas. First of all, the concept of »progress« must be defined anew. The zeal for progress characteristic of social democrats since the 1990s, the idealisation of the progressive and likewise their acceptance of change that uncritically adopts any twists and turns in terms of real life developments lead to a sense of being overwhelmed, uncertainty, spiritual exhaustion and, not least, the deepening of social divisions and finally to immaturity and dependence. It thus became necessary for social democrats to instead put »a question mark against progress« (Walter 2010). A policy that meets people's needs for continuity, security and familiarity brings relief; stable institutions also bring relief. And the vote against the apparent inherent necessity of technological-economic progress crowds out identity, freedom and dignity.

Thus modern social democracy has absolutised and thereby overextended the value of paid employment. On the continuum from those in work to those not in work the population has been divided into working and thus »good« citizens and not working and thus »bad« citizens. Third Way reforms aimed at rewarding workers and increasing the pressure on the unemployed to accept any paid work offered to them, regardless of how stressful and low paid it is. The old Marxism-inspired social democracy knew, however, that work is not necessarily nice

and pleasant but can also be alienating and that many jobs are burdensome, agonising and wretched. In future social democracy will thus have to overcome the current dogma of paid employment and bring people back centre-stage, with their dignity, self-realisation and even emancipation. Naturally, people also experience positive feelings from their work: the sense of being useful, pride, self-confidence, not least satisfaction in the form of social contacts, colleagues, friendships (see, for example, Walter 2011b: 58ff). It is thus not a matter of rejecting but of toning down the value of work, extending the concept of work beyond the narrow realm of paid employment to include unpaid, voluntary activities. There are a number of links, including a broad academic debate on replacing the narrow concept of work with the broader-based category of »activity«, to which Swedish social democrats have linked their notion of »citizen value«.

Finally, in the wake of the economic and financial crisis we can dispense with the fairy tale that private owners are in themselves cheaper and more efficient than the state. The policy of privatisation was at no time cost effective: at the beginning, the privatisation waves rested on major state subsidies, state and society bore the risk and private companies pocketed the profits. That means that an intact state and welfare state is not only important for social integration and social peace, as well as for services of general interest. The state is also not an inefficient, bureaucratic monster, but – to cite a definition of the state circulating in some circles of the French Socialist Party (PS) – first of all an *Etat stratège*, a planning state that anticipates problems and works out solutions with expert committees. Second, it is an *Etat pilote*, which directly intervenes and takes countermeasures if priorities determined by the legislature threaten to get out of reach. Third, it has to be an *Etat prévoyant*, a forward-looking state that involves all citizens in its decision-making processes. For two years or so there has also been a debate on »equality«. It was initiated by the book *The Spirit Level: Why More Equal Societies Almost Always Do Better* by Kate Pickett and Richard Wilkinson (Pickett and Wilkinson 2010). Equality, these authors show, is not a programme of socialist expropriation but also good for the middle classes. In more equal societies fewer people suffer psychiatric problems, people generally enjoy longer life expectancy and children do better at school. It is also noteworthy that more equality by no means inhibits initiative among citizens. On the contrary, equality encourages commitment and mobility; social justice and

individual flexibility are thus not mutually exclusive, but go together.

This book, which is known and has been debated in most of the social democratic parties under investigation here, is broadly in line with the modified interpretation of social equality. Even in the executives of social democratic parties – at least in a very fundamental sense – fair distribution is no longer regarded as contradicting economic efficiency. On the contrary, social divisions that are too deep are considered economically harmful since they disturb the status quo, constrict consumer demand, reduce workers' motivation and reduce people's willingness to take responsibility for the public good at both the top and the bottom of society. Thus more social equality is good not only in moral terms, but important for economic reasons.

However, to date these debates have not been able to stimulate the political practice of social democrats, being largely confined to academia and soon petering out. They leave no lasting traces, as illustrated by the course of the discussion in the Dutch PvdA. A failing that is brought up against the book itself is that beyond very general outlines it offers no concrete proposals, so that although it can serve as source of inspiration it does not provide instructions for implementing practical measures.

9.4 Blue Labour and the Good Society

It has to be recognised that most attempts to rethink social democracy to date remain slogans that would first have to be given content, or remain within the limits of existing lines of conflict and traditional group antagonisms. One of the few exceptions to this rule is the debate about Blue Labour and the Good Society, which has been going on for a number of years mainly in the United Kingdom and – through international discussion circles, albeit with less intensity – more recently in Germany and Scandinavia, too (on these debates, see Blond 2010; Philpot 2011; Davis 2011; Meyer and Rutherford 2012). The abovementioned pioneering role of the British Labour Party by European comparison is clear not least from the fact that the Conservatives, for their part driven by the successes of New Labour under Tony Blair, have been working intensively at redefining their position in society, their political role and their prospective aims, thus forcing the Labour Party to reassess its posi-

tion (see Michelsen 2012). All the more so because the British Conservatives, with their progressive centre-right agenda, whose core elements include – at least rhetorically – the avoidance of dogmatic economic liberalism, commitment to a regulatory welfare state and conversion to green issues, recently brought about a change of government (see Blond 2010). In response to this modernised and social democratised conservatism – aptly known as Red Toryism – social scientists associated with the Labour Party have developed a counter-model of a social democracy enriched by conservative values, known as Blue Labour.

Closely linked thematically but also personally with Blue Labour is the debate on the Good Society, which commenced about six years ago at a meeting of British social democrats. By means of a joint paper (Cruddas and Nahles 2012) by Labour MP Jon Cruddas and SPD General Secretary Andrea Nahles it gained additional impetus and since then has been conducted with the participation of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung and the think tank Compass in particular on the website of the *Social Europe Journal*.⁹ Although the two debates are not identical they do have considerable overlaps in terms of those participating and the values being propagated, diagnoses of the problems and the solutions outlined to the crisis of social democracy (Meyer and Spiegel 2010).

9.5 The Local, Tradition and Self-Organisation

Against the background of the economic and financial crash – hardly surprisingly – the image of free market forces has become tarnished again among social democrats compared to the previous radiant optimism. Financial capitalism in particular is criticised openly and the curbing and strict regulation of market forces is under discussion. Thoughts about alternative economic orders are no longer taboo. It is more surprising that those participants who have been known to criticise the market-based system also exhibit skepticism vis-à-vis a strong central state. If nothing else, it is surprising because even left-wing party members have until recently been leading debates in which a belief in a strong state and centralised institutions was considered more often than not as *de rigueur*. The desired Good Society, however, is not considered to be state socialism. Even a (too) centralised wel-

9. See: <http://www.social-europe.eu/> (last accessed 18.06.2012).

fare state is criticised in the two debates as a bureaucratic apparatus since it is unable to respond appropriately to the multitude of individual cases, blocks personal initiative and stymies civil society self-organisation.

But it is precisely that that concerns social democratic thinkers (see, for example, Cruddas 2012). At the centre lie local and community associations and communities that bind people together, activate them and make them aware of what they have in common, breathing life and meaning into the basic values of reciprocity, solidarity and mutuality. The priority given to community and the local is characteristic of the Good Society. And in the call to come together at local level, to become active is rooted the anticapitalism of post-Third Way social democrats, nourished by the concern that the bases of communal action are being undermined by the marketisation of whole areas of life. It justifies the rejection of centralisation and abstract universalisms in favour of local variations, practical community activities and concrete organisational experiences. This is how the critique of pluralism is justified in programmatic outlines since mutual trust and solidarity based on personal contacts cannot work otherwise.

The discussions about Blue Labour and the Good Society are thus aimed at changing our understanding of institutions in order to create an environment in which these values can be realised in everyday life. Reference is often made in this respect to the history of the workers' movement as source of inspiration and the root of its own narrative (see, for example, Becker 2012; Hunt 2011: 61–79). With this as the focal point, using the lessons of the past, they derive ideas for a better economic order with stronger participation on the part of society. This will also help to regain the support of those who have turned away from social democracy in recent decades.

Closely linked to ideas about community is the conservatism of attempts at »refounding« social democracy, the rejection of the technocratic progressivism of the Third Way, the emphasis on nation and family and the intention to conserve what is good or tried and tested. This traditionalism could make these ideas attractive, for example, to the new underclasses for whom slogans such as »globalisation«, »education« and »flexibility« are rather a threat than a promise. In particular the return to an original, early industrial conservatism, forgotten by the centre-right parties, includes a commitment to

the work ethic by skilled workers and to broad public ownership – including nostalgic memories of working class solidarity during the early days of the movement, when the social democratic movement was supported by a close-knit organisational network (see Glasman 2011: 14–34).

The visions of a Good Society are also attractive for the middle classes and the well educated, however, from whose ranks come the loudest calls for grassroots involvement and citizen participation. The Good Society is to be characterised not least by more codetermination – associated citizens are considered to be an effective counterweight to overmighty market forces and state bureaucracies (Cruddas and Nahles 2009; Rutherford 2011: 88–105). That implies a completely modern understanding of justice that ultimately is not confined to equal opportunities or just distribution of wealth. Rather the aim is to liberate citizens from undesired outside influence, give them back control over their own lives and limit state interference to areas and occasions authorised by actively involved citizens. The political party profile of the Good Society roughly corresponds to the Europe-wide concept of so-called »caring parties« which in recent times has demonstrably shown quite a bit of promise.

The debates on the Good Society and Blue Labour show that social democrats have recently developed a better understanding of the need for balance: between pragmatism and visions, tradition and modernity, security and openness. The emphasis on self-organised action, the adoption of values such as »family« and »native country«, as well as the awareness of the dangers of too far-reaching cultural heterogeneity allows us to imagine possibilities with regard to how social democrats might be able to manage contradictory demands and the necessary balancing act between different voter milieus in the future.

Furthermore, not only in the United Kingdom, but also in Denmark and Germany discussions have been launched about the Good Society and – to some extent – Blue Labour among social democratic parties. In Germany, the SPD has tried from time to time to revive party work at local level via various »organising« approaches – taken over from trade union work – and to promote the expansion of personal networks of sympathisers in self-organising (on this, see Butzlaff 2012c). And in Denmark the Social Democrats adopted a programme paper in

March 2012 on the future of the welfare state, which borrows significantly from the British discussions and not least from the British Conservatives. The basis for institutional development is thus – again – decentralisation of power and decision-making authority in order to involve communities and individual citizens more closely and to give them responsibility. On this basis, institutions can be envisaged and made available not for citizens, but formed by and with citizens within a state-guaranteed framework. The democratic legitimacy of institutions is to be ensured by closer involvement of citizens and their effectiveness by means of closer proximity to the users of public services (see *Socialdemokraterne* 2012b). On the one hand, this has the side-effect of getting the economically productive members of society involved and thus relieving the welfare state on the expenditure side, giving rise to parallels with the conservative vision of a welfare *society* (see *Socialdemokraterne* 2012b) (instead of the traditional welfare *state*). The specific social democratic note is represented by the guarantee of a ban on substitution, in other words, government spending is not to be replaced by transferring responsibility to civil society, but civil society involvement is to be deployed to qualitatively improve public welfare. »A new kind of statecraft« (Pierce 2012) is the slogan here, according to Nick Pierce. This combination of less centralised institutions, stronger emphasis on local participation, co-determination and self-organisation, recollection of the history of its own movement and conservative references

to family and nation form, in our opinion, the core of currently the most interesting social democratic vision of the future that can be identified by taking a bird's eye view of social democracy.

However, this is not to say that the Good Society is in fact to be the social democratic master narrative of the next few decades. Even less, whether it is even desirable to live in a Good Society of this kind. When Tony Blair last year took the view that the dividing line between the »good« and the »bad« society is no longer between left and right political preferences, but between »correct« and »wrong« policies this view collided full on with the pluralistic basis of all democratic policies and society, in which there is no single truth and thus no undisputed definition of a correct, true or good policy that could be set against an incorrect, untrue and bad policy (see, for example, Kavanagh 2007: 3–15, here 10). Ralf Dahrendorf asserted more than a decade ago that realisations of »good societies« pose a constant danger of authoritarian drift – or at any rate good societies created »from above«. »The decreed involvement of all makes those who think differently into criminals and deprives many of the opportunities and pleasures that only a free, open society can provide. Societies are only viable if their quality is the work of their citizens. Much is possible, but where people live, not where governments direct« (Dahrendorf 2000). In the emphasis on the »work of citizens«, however, lies an opportunity for a social democratic narrative.



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