

RESETTING THE LEFT IN EUROPE
CHALLENGES, ATTEMPTS AND OBSTACLES

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Return to ideology

A solution to stumbling Social Democracies: The case of Corbyn¹

Abstract

European social democracies are in crisis. For more than a decade, leading social democratic parties have been driven out of power or forced to form coalitions with conservative parties. In this century, they have already lost almost half of their electoral support. During the last four decades, these parties have failed to offer an alternative to neoliberalism. Moreover, even when in power, they have pursued almost the same policies as conservative parties as in Germany and the United Kingdom during the chancellorship of Gerhard Schröder and tenure of Prime Minister Tony Blair. For the first time after almost half a century, an alternative to neoliberalism emerged in the United Kingdom, when the left-oriented politician Jeremy Corbyn took over the Labour Party. Corbyn served as leader of the Labour Party from 2015 to 2020. His plan, to nationalize public utilities, raise taxes on the rich and scrap university tuition fees, won strong support among voters, especially the younger generation. Like the neoliberal conservatives in the 1980s, Corbyn not only wanted to win elections but sought to change the political agenda in the UK. Similar developments have been seen among the Left in Germany and France. It is not only the destiny of the social democrats that depends on the success of these new leftist projects but also the destiny of Europe as a whole since social democratic policies have crucially contributed to its economic progress and democratic stability following the Second World War.

Keywords: social democracy, Europe, neoliberalism, Third way, Corbyn, Labour Party

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■ European social democracies are facing a huge crisis. The traditional Left is practically out of power everywhere in Europe or it has been forced to form coalitions with moderate right-wing parties as in Germany. At the same time, its electoral support has more than halved. Even more importantly, it has lost its ideas and vision. It is enough to look at the book titles on the subject published over the past ten years to size up the true scope of the problem affecting the traditional European Left. Scores of researchers and authors write and have spoken of the crisis of European social democracy (Keating and McCrone 2013), the death spiral it is in (Berman 2016) or even about its death (Berman 2018). In this chapter, we will first focus on the various shapes and forms of the crises affecting social democracies, analyse their causes and then try to answer the question of whether leftist parties have accomplished their historical mission or if there is still space for their activities in a different form.

In this context, the focus will be on the British Labour Party which, under the leadership of Jeremy Corbyn (2015-2020), was the only one among the most prominent social democratic parties in Europe that, in spite of the election defeat in 2019, managed to hold more than 30% of votes and to offer a political alternative to the ruling Conservative Party. The question here will be whether the radical left policies of Jeremy Corbyn can be seen as a harbinger of a happier future for left parties and a promising turn for social democracy in Europe or is it rather a strategy that will never be able to bring the Labour Party to power, as his political opponents claim? Before that, we will look at the policy of the so-called Third Way that enabled social democrats to come to power during the 90s but which, over time, robbed them of ideology and voters (Pribićević 1989a). Finally, this chapter also aims to ask what the future of social democracy could look like and whether it could win over its voters, and if so, which ideas of the left-wing parties would be crucial for getting them back into power.

The decline of Social Democracy in Europe

The failure and decline of the European social democratic parties can be explained by a number of factors, one of which is their electoral results. In Germany, since 1945, support for the Social Democrats (SPD) has held steady, ranging between 30 and 45%, with the last peak of over 40% in 1998. Triggered by the financial crisis in 2008, a significant decline started with support falling to 20.5% at the parliamentary elections held in mid-September 2017, their worst post-war electoral result. The rise of their sister party in Italy came later under the charismatic leadership of Matteo Renzi; yet, within four years, the Italian Democratic Party faced the same destiny as the SPD. While climbing, under the leadership of Renzi, to 40% voter support in 2014, in 2018 this support dropped to 20%. However, comparatively speaking, the strongest defeat was suffered by the French Socialist Party which, in 2017, won a meagre 6.4% of the vote, its worst result ever. In Greece, the social democratic PASOK dropped from 160 seats in 2009 to only 19 in 2019. The Dutch Labour Party's support fell from 25% to only 5.7% in 2017, and even the Scandinavian countries, once considered a leftist stronghold, are no longer that. There, the support for social democrats dropped from 40% to approximately 20%. Given the decline of social democratic parties in member states, it does not come as a surprise that at the election for the European parliament in May 2019, the group of Socialist and Democrats was the biggest loser. It got 24% of the votes, 6% less than in the previous election held in 2014, and instead of 185 seats in the European Parliament, they currently have 154.

There are many explanations for the electoral catastrophe of the traditional European Left. Some claim that this is a normal state of affairs, where the traditional moderate Left and the Right succeed each other in power; others claim that social democracy has fulfilled its historical mission of creating welfare states and that the time has come for new parties and movements. However, most of them link the failure of these parties to the changed social structures and the shrinking of their traditional electoral body, the working class in particular (Keating and McCrone 2013).

The first reason given for the declining influence of social democratic parties is the shrinking of their traditional electoral body.

"From the early socialists of the nineteenth century to Karl Marx and the leading socialists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, they were always clear about one thing: They represented the interests of workers and ordinary people everywhere" (Berger 2012, 13). Due to accelerated technological development and globalization, the number of workers has fallen along with the influence of the trade unions that supported them, leaving leftist parties without a significant number of voters. These tendencies have been most prominent in Great Britain, where once-powerful trade unions have lost almost all their influence, and in Germany, where half of all employees belonged to the traditional working class, whereas today, this is a quarter. As a consequence of Thatcherism, the share of the industrial sector has fallen to 17% of GDP of the United Kingdom, while in Germany, it is 26% (Blackburn 2018, 6). There is no doubt whatsoever that the transformation of modern capitalism has largely undermined the foundations of European social democracy. The disappearance of the working class and the burgeoning middle class, to a large extent, have disparaged former theories of class divisions and clashes between workers and capitalists.

Second, traditionally, the basic instruments of the social democratic parties' activities have been the state and its corrective role in a market economy. In the 1970s, due to predominant state ownership and excessive regulation, European markets could no longer sustain a competitive advantage over the US and Asian markets. This was blamed on the social democrats and their ideology of state interventionism. At the same time, in the USA and the UK, claims for more deregulation and the reduction of the welfare state, supported by Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan, became stronger, and introduced a new tendency in favour of conservative policies regarding the role of individuals and the economy. In this upcoming era of individualism, the traditional solidarity among workers started to dissipate, while under the influence of this neoliberal ideology, the new right-wing policies subjected all state institutions, from schools to utilities, hospitals and energy companies, to market criteria, which included the privatization of a substantial segment of that sector in the UK (Pribićević 1989b, 1853-1856).

Third, the great success of neoliberalism in the field of economic growth brought about the so-called Third Way of the

European social democratic parties, personified by the British Prime Minister Tony Blair and German Chancellor, Gerhard Schröder. This approach boiled down to a more moderate variant of Thatcherism and enabled these parties to come to power and hold on to it for an entire decade. The consequence of this was, by conducting neoliberal politics, they lost their identity, which caused mass disillusionment among their traditional voters: "These policies hurt members of the working class, alienating them from the political system and the centre-left parties that had traditionally protected their interests." (Snyder 2019, 58). Globalization only accelerated this trend of pushing social democracies closer to neoliberal policies because the leaders of these parties feared that implementing more radical left policies (increase in taxes and low wages) would drive capital to go elsewhere, especially to the Asian continent.

Fourth, this disappointment resulted in an extensive fragmentation among the parties of the Left which was particularly evident in Germany, where the far-left party *Die Linke* won more than 9% of the votes at the parliamentary elections in 2017. In the first round of the presidential elections in France in 2017, Jean-Luc Mélenchon, leader of *La France insoumise* from the left won 19.5%, while *Syriza* in 2015 won 36% of the votes in Greece. The same went for *Unidas Podemos*, the Spanish party of the new left which, in 2015, scored a remarkable total of almost 21%, which later, at the 2019 elections, dropped to 12%.

As a result, after more than four decades of ascending neoliberal policies, the world is marked by slumping economic growth, rising poverty in most developed Western countries, unsuccessful wars in the Middle East, a migrant surge from Arab countries devastated by Western powers in the early 21st century and, last but not least, terrorist attacks in the USA, UK, Germany, France and other Western countries. This crisis is being reflected in decisions taken by voters on various issues. "For the first time since the 1930s, the United States has elected a President that is actively hostile to liberal internationalism... Simultaneously, Britain's decision to leave the EU and a myriad other troubles besetting Europe appear to mark an end to the long post-war project of building a greater union... Meanwhile, liberal democracy itself appears to be in retreat as varieties of 'new authoritarianism' rise to new salience

in countries like Hungary, Poland, the Philippines, and Turkey” (Ikenberry 2018, 7). As in the 1970s, when neoliberalism emerged as a response to antiquated social democratic policies, the newly announced changes, albeit with different political and ideological notions, emerged in the United States and Great Britain. Dissatisfied and disillusioned citizens have voted for new policies and leaders. Trump, Brexit and Corbyn are just by-products of these developments. That is why Edward Luce claims that: “...the most mortal threat to the Western idea of progress comes from within. Donald Trump and his counterparts in Europe did not cause the crisis of democratic liberalism. They are the symptom.” (Luce 2016, 11). But what is it that took place before Brexit, and propelled Jeremy Corbyn in the UK?

The case of New Labour

As indicated earlier, in the UK, Germany and many other European countries that followed in the footsteps of Blair and Schröder at the end of the 20th and early in the 21st century social democracy opted for the policy of the Third Way or New Labour. What did this actually mean? Basically, it implied coming to terms with the fundamental elements of neoliberalism and, to a large extent, abandoning traditional social democratic goals and values. As we go along, we shall try to explain how the Labour Party journeyed from the triumph of New Labour to the total collapse of these politics and the election of a far-left politician, Jeremy Corbyn, in 2015. Unlike his Labour predecessors, Blair came to power (1997) at a time when the economy was still growing and unemployment was falling. The UK was increasingly asserting its position in the international market, technology was advancing and there was domestic and international stability. London was becoming a global financial hub (Pribićević 2019, 143-147). In line with the rules of New Labour, Blair continued with the Thatcherite policies of curbing public spending and maintaining the same tax levels on the wealthy. Moreover, his Labour Government reduced corporate taxes from 35% to 28% (Blackburn 2018, 7). The GDP in the UK continued to rise; from £1.3 to £1.7 trillion, during his premiership from 1997 through to 2007.

His followers particularly highlighted substantial investment in the construction of new schools and hospitals in that period (Seldon 2007, 646). However, these circumstances dramatically changed within a single decade. Already at the end of the first decade of the 21st century, in the wake of Thatcherite policies pursued by Labour and Conservatives before them, social inequalities deepened dramatically. For example, between 1980 and 2010, the middle class in the UK shrank by 27% while the number of the poor rose by 60%. At the same time, the number of wealthy people rose by 33% (The Guardian 2015). The social stratification was particularly prominent in the north of England, where former industrial centres were devastated, while new technologies did not create new jobs to fill the vacancies created by big companies which had fled, primarily to Asia. It was even then evident that Thatcherite policies, despite some good results, particularly in encouraging individual initiatives and economic growth, had adverse consequences in the field of social policy, which ultimately led to the crisis of the neoliberal concept, the vote for Brexit and to the rise of Jeremy Corbyn. The Blairite policies dealt a devastating blow to Labour in one of its major strongholds in the UK, i.e., Scotland, where the support of the traditionally social democratic electorate fell to below 20%.

The second wrong decision by New Labour, in addition to the indiscriminate implementation of economic neoliberal policies, was the open-door policy to migrant workers from Eastern Europe, which proved fatal to UK membership in the EU (Pribičević 2018, 196). In the last years of Blair's mandate, more than 200,000 migrants were coming to the UK every year, half of them from newly admitted Eastern European EU countries (Sturge 2018). While a huge influx of migrants substantially boosted the British economy and increased real estate prices, it diminished support for the Labour Party from its traditional electoral body that felt threatened by this wave of cheap labour. Afraid of losing their national identity, but even more of losing their jobs or of suffering a drop in wages due to the incoming workers from Eastern Europe, some Labour voters turned to the right-wing populist UK Independence Party which, among others, advocated an anti-migrant policy.

In addition to abandoning leftist ideas in the economy, Blair also abandoned another fundamental element of leftist policy

– non-intervention in international relations. Conversely, he became synonymous with interventionism after joining the USA in military intervention around the globe: from Kosovo and Afghanistan to Sierra Leone and, finally, Iraq, which effectively put an end to his political career. Tim Dunne labelled Blair's foreign policy doctrine as liberal interventionism. "Such a doctrine develops out of the quest for moral progress in a world in which there are many enemies of liberalism. In this respect, Iraq was not an aberration. The path to war was laid by missionary-like distinctions between moderate or fundamentalist religions, tolerant or despotic governments, societies committed to eradicating the threat of terrorism and those geared towards nurturing and protecting them." (Dunne 2008, 340). At first, the Iraq war enjoyed popular support among the British public due to its alleged humanitarian character. However, the failure to find weapons of mass destruction, which had served as a pretext for the military intervention, brought about blunt accusations that Blair had intentionally deceived the public while seeking to justify UK involvement. The Iraq Inquiry (also known as the Chilcot Inquiry, named after its chairman, John Chilcot) into the UK involvement has since confirmed these allegations. The report contains serious criticism of the government, and Prime Minister Blair in particular. According to the report, Blair greatly exaggerated threats to UK security posed by Saddam Hussein while, on the other hand, he failed to properly assess the consequence of entering the war. Also, the report claims that the UK had resorted to the war option before all peaceful options had been exhausted and that the preparations and planning for post-Saddam Iraq had been wholly inadequate (The Guardian 2016). Speaking of Blair's failed Iraqi policy, Andrew Gamble said that: "The impact of Iraq was substantial. It had already had a major impact on British domestic politics because the fallout from the invasion had significantly weakened the position of Tony Blair as prime minister, so much so that before the election, he had been obliged to announce that if Labour was re-elected he would step down as party leader and prime minister before the next election." (Gamble 2011, 306). Blair had not only dragged the UK into an unjustified war but, additionally, weakened the standing of his party by abandoning the non-interventionist position which had always been one of the major pillars of European left-wing parties' foreign policy. His successor, Gordon Brown,

immediately started to distance the party from the Blair legacy, as did the next Labour leader, Edward Miliband, both in relation to policies and the style of Blair. Despite belonging to Labour and being a social democrat, Blair had become a symbol of greed and arrogance, symbolizing the rise and fall of a new political elite created in Europe in a neoliberalism era. Moreover, he discredited the idea of social democracy.

The Corbyn bang

Blair's policy of the Third Way contributed, to a large extent, to Labour staying in power for more than a decade (until 2007). However, at the same time, it contributed to the result of the Brexit referendum, as well as to the party leadership being taken over by the far-leftist Jeremy Corbyn in 2015, with a landslide victory. At the first elections with him at the helm, Corbyn achieved the biggest increase of votes for the Labour party between two election cycles since 1945: from 30.4% in 2015 to 40% in 2017 (The Independent 2017). In 2017, 12.9 million citizens voted for Corbyn. For a comparison, in 2001 and 2005, Labour, under the leadership of Blair, won 10.7 and 9.6 million votes, respectively. In 2010, Gordon Brown won 8.6 million, while Ed Miliband won 9.3 million in 2015. Corbyn has generated much interest in the UK and the world at large as the first leader of a major social democratic party in Europe to offer a political alternative to the 40-year rule of neoliberalism. He highlighted as his priorities the fight against poverty and inequality, a commitment to nationalization and opposition to Western interventionist policies. Consequently, Corbyn stood, by all accounts, opposite the current political elite, not only in terms of the policies he embraced but also by his style, which was reminiscent of social democrats from the 1990s, like Olof Palme, Bruno Kreisky, Francois Mitterrand, or Willy Brandt. His program was based on re-nationalization of the railways and utility services, especially water, energy and mail, and the scrapping of university tuition fees. He also advocated tax hikes for the wealthiest. His priority was to do away with austerity, and the all-embracing privatization initiated by Margaret Thatcher (Seymour 2016).

An important segment of his program was the proposed establishment of the National Transformation Fund which, with £250 billion capital, over the following ten years, would be invested in new technologies and infrastructure. It is particularly interesting that Corbyn and his shadow Finance Minister, John McDonnell, were advocating greater participation of employees and workers in the management of public enterprises, and profit-sharing. In his speech at the Labour Party conference on 14 October 2017, Corbyn said that: “the technology of the digital age should be empowering workers, enabling us to co-operate on a scale not possible before. And yet too often it has enabled a more rapacious and exploitative form of capitalism to emerge. Look at Uber, Deliveroo and others. (...) But imagine an Uber run co-operatively by the drivers, collectively controlling their futures, agreeing their own pay and conditions, with profits shared or re-invested” (Corbyn 2017). In his speech at the Alternative Models of Ownership conference in February 2018 in London, McDonnell pledged that Labour would put nationalized services and industries “‘in the hands of those who run and use them’ - learning from the everyday experiences of workers and consumers” (Blackburn 2018, 16).

For the first time since the triumph of Thatcherism in Britain, the Conservatives were facing an alternative project. As with his political opponents 40 years earlier, Corbyn wished not only to win but to change the overall social and political agenda: i.e., the popular mindset. In his speech at the Party congress in 2017, Corbyn said: “Today’s centre-ground is certainly not where it was twenty or thirty years ago. A new consensus is emerging from the great economic crash and the years of austerity when people started to find political voice for their hope for something different and better. (...) We are now the political mainstream!” To win over the centre-ground and become a part of the political mainstream, as Margaret Thatcher did, Corbyn had to bring ideology back into politics, attack key elements of the Conservatives’ political programme, such as privatization and deregulation, and identify allies and political opponents. In short, he had to return to the old and somewhat forgotten policy of making a distinction between ‘us and them’. That is why his political slogan was “For the many, not the few”. For the Tories, the main enemies are the leftist politicians who

advocate policies of public ownership and high taxes, support trade unions, and take up a pro-Russia stance; this is what makes them distinctive to the voters. Now, after a long time, a Labour leader emerged with his own programme. He believed in the state, public property, justice and solidarity. His opponents were Conservatives favouring austerity, New Labour, the City and the right-wing media, all unsuccessfully trying to bring him down from the moment he took hold of the reins of the Labour Party.

Faced with an alternative, for the first time since the 1970s, the Conservatives and the media close to them, embarked upon an unprecedented vilification campaign against the leader of the Labour Party, labelling Corbyn as a traitor, pro-Russian, anti-Semite, a hater of his own country and a threat to the security of British citizens (The Telegraph 2015). A study carried out by the London School of Economics, which analysed articles on Corbyn from eight national dailies from 1 September to 1 November 2015, noted:

“the results of this study show that Jeremy Corbyn was represented unfairly by the British press through a process of vilification that went well beyond the normal limits of fair debate and disagreement in a democracy. (...) Even more problematic, the British press has repeatedly associated Corbyn with terrorism and positioned him as a friend of the enemies of the UK. The result has been a failure to give the newspaper-reading public a fair opportunity to form their own judgments about the leader of the country’s main opposition. The overall conclusion from this is that in this case, UK journalism played an attack dog, rather than a watchdog, role. This is unhealthy from a democratic point of view and poses serious ethical questions as to the role of the media in a democracy, especially when it concerns the legitimate contestation of the Government of the day.” (Cammaerts 2016, 1).

Still, contrary to all criticism, Corbyn could not be described as an ideological fanatic, as the majority of the British media sought to portray him, but a convinced leftist, and a pragmatist, at that. Most of the major elements of his program discussed earlier enjoy vast electoral support, in some cases exceeding even 80%,

especially regarding the re-nationalization of the railroad, utilities and the cancelling of tuition fees (The Guardian 2017). His tax policy was less radical than his political opponents accused him of. "Under Labour's plans, 95 per cent of taxpayers will be guaranteed no increase in their income tax payments. (...) Only the top 5 per cent of earners will be asked to contribute more in tax to help fund our public services. UK corporate tax is the lowest compared to other major developed economies. Our new settlement with business will ask large corporations to pay a little more while still keeping UK corporation tax among the lowest of the major developed economies." (Labour Manifesto 2017, 9). In terms of re-nationalization, which attracted the greatest attention of his political opponents, Labour's proposals were not radical, mainly being centred on bringing the rail companies back into public ownership as their franchises expired and to re-nationalizing the mail (Labour Manifesto 2017, 19).

Even when most sensitive issues related to defence and security are concerned, the Labour Manifesto did not propose leaving NATO or abandoning the Trident nuclear deterrent. Instead, it claimed that the Labour Party advocated the end of support for unilateral aggressive wars of intervention (Labour Manifesto 2017, 120), which was a position already supported by an overwhelming number of UK voters.

Despite the fact that Corbyn's ideas and the Labour manifesto attracted a lot of attention, once the referendum on Britain's exit from the EU in 2016 took place, the Brexit issue started to exclusively dominate political life in Britain. Prime minister Theresa May tried three times to get parliamentary support for her proposals for Britain to leave the EU, but without success. Eventually, she resigned and Boris Johnson was elected as the new prime minister. After a few unsuccessful attempts in parliament to "get Brexit done", he called for an extraordinary election in December 2019 and won with an overwhelming majority of 43.6% of the vote. Meanwhile, the Labour Party suffered a heavy defeat. It got 32% of the votes, 8% less than at the elections in 2017. These election results clearly showed that the major challenge for the Labour Party and other social-democratic parties are the so-called national or state issues, such as the relationship between national and

supranational institutions (as in Brexit) or coping with immigration and terrorism. The case of Brexit proved that when faced with those issues, the voters choose right-wing parties and tend to put aside left party issues such as social inequalities, taxes, reform of the health system, etc. Moreover, the left parties are usually divided within themselves over these state issues, as the Labour Party was in 1975 and 2019, which led them to act inconsistently. Corbyn was trying to bridge the divisions within his party and British society as a whole on this issue, claiming that he would fight for the best possible Brexit to protect jobs and living standards. But he failed and announced his resignation, which eventually came about in 2020.

Apart from these issues, which were particular to Britain, major challenges for the Labour Party and other social democratic parties in Europe include a growing individualism, new technologies reducing the number of jobs, and divisions between generations. The fact that Jeremy Corbyn managed to attract a large number of young voters implies that with the right programme representing a political alternative to right-wing parties and the ensuing activism, it is possible to mobilize younger people who are traditionally distrustful of politics. Research results indicated that in 2017, as many as 61.5% of those below 40 voted Labour and only 23% Conservative. As for the youngest voters, the percentage of those voting Labour was even higher, with 66% of those between 18 and 19 voting for Corbyn, and 62% between 20 and 24 (Independent 2017). As far as the 2019 elections are concerned, 56% of those between 18 and 24 voted for the Labour Party. But it turned out not to be enough for victory, since the crucial voting was that of the older generation, which overwhelmingly supported the Conservative Party: 57% of those between 60 and 69 and 67% of those older than 70 voted for the Conservatives (McDonnell and Curtis 2019).

Conclusions

Despite all the problems and challenges that the Labour Party was and is facing, their political revival confirms that for the rehabilitation of social democracy, it is necessary to identify an idea – an alternative programme to challenge the right-wing parties. For almost half a century, the right have monopolized the entire social agenda, including economic development, unemployment, migration, national issues, terrorism, and more. Conversely, old social-democratic ideas, like the welfare state, minimum wages and free health-care, have become a part of generally accepted policies, particularly in Germany, France and the Scandinavian countries, which is why it is not easy to differentiate between the parties of the right and the left. Therefore, social democracy has to come up with new ideas that will attract a wide range of voters comfortably employed and not only traditional voters – primarily the working class and public employees. However, this is not as simple as it sounds and is a key problem the present-day Left is facing. There are simply no new ideas attractive enough to a broader circle of potential voters. An attempt by the former leader of the British Labour Party Ed Miliband, to win support with ideas like Blue Labour or One Nation ended in failure, while the slogan of the German Social Democrats at the 2017 elections “Time for more Justice” became a subject of ridicule, even among their own voters. In today’s modern age of powerful ideas and slogans like Trump’s “America First” or that of the Brexit proponents for leaving the EU; “Get Brexit done”, leftist slogans are difficult to sell. The question is whether the Left has any political space to formulate new ideas at a time characterized by strong individualism, egoism, violence, terrorism, migration and the revival of national identity. Is the time right for the Left?

After so long, the Labour Party appeared with a strong political slogan: “For the many, not the few”. Corbyn attracted his voters by clearly disassociating himself from the ideological projects of the right. The state-sponsored housing projects and free tuition attracted a large number of young voters, whose turnout at the 2017 elections reached 66% compared to 43 % in 2015 (Adler 2017). However, a significant number of Corbyn’s ideas are not new; they are mostly recycled ideas from the arsenal of traditional social

democratic policies. However, they are ideas that had been mostly forgotten over the previous decades, when social democratic leaders thought that it was the end of history and ideology and that market economy and capitalism could play a self-corrective role. It turned out that human greed was more powerful than human solidarity, and that greed and the market had to be reined in if we wished to achieve a democratic and stable society. The fact that there is an aspiration towards something different has been proven by the support extended to Corbyn, even though he did not present many new ideas but merely offered a project contrary to the one espoused by neoliberalism.

Meanwhile, some new or recycled old ideas started to emerge both in France and Germany. In France, La France insoumise won 20% of the vote in the first round of the Presidential elections in 2017. The secret of their success was their attempt to merge leftist economic policies with criticism of France's membership of the Eurozone. Similar ideas emerged in Germany, where the ruling SPD (in a government coalition with the conservative Christian Democratic Union, the CDU), following a crushing defeat at the parliamentary elections in 2017, started to shift to the left in economic policies. The SPD announced a plan guaranteeing that pensions would remain at the current level until 2024, which would cost hundreds of billions of euros and had already received wide criticism from right-wing parties. After the landslide defeat at the 2019 elections for the European parliament, the SPD elected Saskia Esken and Norbert Walter-Borjans, both belonging to the left wing of the party, as its new leaders. They currently advocate raising the minimum wage and the imposition of additional taxes on the wealthy. Particularly interesting is a new movement called Stand up (*Aufstehen*), led by former left-oriented social democratic leader Oscar Lafontaine and his wife Sahra Wagenknecht. The party is trying to link leftist economic policies and national identity issues to attract the voters of the extreme right party Alternative for Germany (*Alternative für Deutschland*, AfD). Still, the big question remains whether Stand up will manage to 'steal' the votes from the SPD, which has also shifted to the left, or to position itself more to the right than the AfD in terms of national identity and migrants. At the moment, their chances do not look very promising. Elsewhere, it seems that

the Green Party, as a predominantly left-oriented party, is gaining more and more support. At the elections for the European parliament in 2019, they got 20% in Germany and 13% in France.

Another question related to the future of social democracy is whether the return to radical policies also means opening up Pandora's box; i.e., whether Corbyn, for example, was not just trying to rectify capitalism but slowly seeking to introduce socialism into Great Britain. Could the British media be right in accusing him of seeking to destroy the current system and its foundations, such as private property and traditional foreign policy alliances? Some of the left-oriented intellectuals supporting Corbyn said that it was too early to make such a claim and that Labour had to come to power first to broach such ideas (Seymour 2016, 8). Of course, such a position only strengthened the hand of those accusing the Labour Party and Corbyn of seeking to change the social system in the UK. Considering his agenda and the Labour manifesto, it would appear that Corbyn was a rational and pragmatic politician despite the changes he would have liked to introduce to British society, and that he did not threaten the very foundations of that society.

Whatever the case, after a longer period of time, we have a somewhat more dynamic situation within the social democratic movement in Europe, one that, at least, gives hope that these parties will manage to recover and again attract voters. Their return, and, in the same sense, the future of Europe, will depend on whether these parties can manage to strike a balance between ever more pronounced individualism and egoism on the one hand, and the need for free education, good health care and quality housing on the other. At the same time, social democracy will have to embrace a more affirmative stance towards national identity since it is obvious that people still care about this issue and that the fear of losing national and cultural identity has become one of the most important issues of our time. For a long time, social democracy wrongfully believed that nation states and national identity were anachronous and antiquated ideas, and that the future lay in multiculturalism and globalization. Should social democracy fail to embrace those issues as their own, they will constantly breed various right-wing extremist movements. Certainly, such a position is not in the spirit of traditional leftist and social democratic

cosmopolitanism, but when these concepts were conceived, there were no waves or exoduses of migrants, nor did some European cities have such high numbers of migrants among their populations: recently, 41% of the residents of London were not born there (Migration observatory 2018). In many respects, this is a totally new age and social democracy needs to adapt quickly or it will disappear from the political scene altogether. However, adapting does not necessarily mean copying the ideologies of others, such as the policy of the Third Way. Real-life facts must not be ignored, facts like those related to national feelings, cultural identity and migrants.

Finally, it should be said that the recovery of social democratic parties is not important only for their own sake and the voters they traditionally represent, but for the sake of the stability experienced in Europe since, after the Second World War, the Left has played a crucial role in ensuring economic growth and stability in these countries (Berman 2016, 70-71). Thanks to the skilful balancing of social democratic parties between the logic of capital and ideas of social justice, for the first time in its history, Western Europe managed to link economic growth and social stability. Europe has become an attractive model of social and economic development, the envy of the world. This is exactly why the future of Europe largely depends on the recovery of parties belonging to the traditional social democracies. An important test for parties of the left were the parliamentary elections in the United Kingdom 2019; however, the result was not very promising. Still, it remains to be seen if Brexit has only postponed the confrontation of Britons with issues such as inequality, poverty, taxes, or reform of the health system or if it really means that left-wing policy has become non-electable in contemporary Western societies.

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