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This volume provides a timely contribution to the urgent problem of how to resolve the dead-end of the present European and global multi-dimensional crisis. It demonstrates the intellectual strength and theoretical breadth of left-oriented social sciences at present. Contrary to the now conventional pessimistic bent, the volume offers a solid base for a brighter view towards future endeavours and political projects on the left, for future research, and constitutes an excellent instrument for scholarly and educational purposes. Students of all levels will be able to use it to inform and orient themselves. I hope the volume will find a broad reading public, and will stir new discussions upon the horizons that it opens with competence and perspicacity.

Prof. Dr. Rastko Močnik

This volume comes at the right moment, when the world is emerging from a global crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. And it is very much needed in an atmosphere of, as two authors point out, an “an organic, permanent crisis, which is failing to create a revolutionary potential”, and in which all classical, liberal solutions have already been tested, with horrifying results. The diversity of theoretical perspectives and case studies contained in this book converge into an overarching analysis, which, I believe, will trigger further discussions about this topic.

Prof. Dr. Vladimir Ilić

A great deal of academic writing about the Left is being written without data and sufficient knowledge about the contemporary Left. This volume countervails this absence by providing an insight into the historical and current conditions of the Left.

Dr. Goran Bašić

RESETTING THE LEFT IN EUROPE CHALLENGES ATTEMPTS AND OBSTACLES

EDITED BY
Irena Ristić

Thirty years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, Europe is struggling with itself. Inequalities are growing, nationalism is increasing, and populism is exploding. New emerging political movements, if these exist at all, are predominantly arising from the (populist) right, despite the fact that the majority of people in need belong to traditionally left constituencies. But instead of embracing these people, the Left is struggling too: with the wrong paths of the Third way it opted to take during the 1990s, with the consequences of globalization, and – most of all – with detaching itself from the dominating capitalistic economic order and offering a sustainable economic, political and social alternative. This volume sheds light on the theoretical and political challenges that the Left has faced over the past three decades, looks at attempts at and hopes for new beginnings, and outlines the challenges and prospects encountered on the road to a recovery. And, among the many conclusions we can draw, one certainly cannot be dismissed: the overlapping of the crises that both Europe and the Left are facing is not a coincidence, but moreover a sign that the decline of Europe is closely linked to the decline of the Left. Consequently, neither Europe nor the Left will be able to reconsolidate themselves without one another.

RESETTING THE LEFT IN EUROPE
CHALLENGES, ATTEMPTS AND OBSTACLES

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Foreword

■ This edited volume was inspired by the international conference “The Left is Dead, Long Live the Left? The Changes and Challenges of the Left in Contemporary Europe” that took place on 28 and 29 November 2018, at the Institute of Social Sciences in Belgrade.¹ The conference was conceptualized by the Institute of Social Sciences and jointly organized with the Friedrich Ebert Foundation in Belgrade.

The aim of the conference was to provide a framework for understanding the institutional, socio-economic and historical causes and the patterns of the downfall of the left idea and the left agency, as well as to grasp the challenges of the Left in contemporary Europe. This of course required going beyond the usual (and until recently) dominant explanatory model, according to which the crisis of the Left was triggered by the global financial crisis in 2007/08; an argument that overlooked the complexity of the economic and political transformation in Europe after the fall of the Berlin Wall and of the acceleration of globalization. Neither did this explanation take into account the failures of the Third Way, seemingly interpreting the firm decisions taken by social democratic parties throughout the 1990s as being merely aimed at a restructuring

¹ Not all authors of this volume participated in the conference, while some conference participants chose to contribute to this book on topics different to those on which they had presented.

of the social welfare state and enhancement of free trade, as opposed to the reality of their paving the road to far-ranging deregulation, non-transparent privatizations, fiscal austerity and market fundamentalism throughout Europe. Therefore, in spite of all external factors and circumstances, which have not looked kindly upon leftist policies over the last three decades, there is certainly also a responsibility of the Left for its continuous stumbling when it comes to taking clear stances on political issues that used to lie at the core of Left politics. In this sense, the discussion in this book is not reduced to looking back to the (structural) roots of the crisis, but also opens questions regarding failures of the Left and, finally, also sketches out ideas for the near future, in which the Left will sooner or later need to (re-)position itself.

After an introduction to the topic, the first section of this book traces the roots of the crisis of the Left. The opening chapter, by Alpar Lošonc and Kosta Josifidis, discusses the philosophical and economic issues lying at the crux of the crisis as an inherent part of the Left in the framework of capitalism, but also embeds the problems of the Left in the broader picture of the crisis of the contemporary societies in the Western world. Heikki Patomäki in his chapter looks at the crisis of the Left by using *ethos*, *pathos* and *logos*, classic rhetoric terms, and explains the minimal turns the Left has to make in order to reach out to people again on the basis of these, illustrating also in an excursus the case of the Left in Finland. While referring to examples of successful social movements in individual European states, Patomäki points to the necessity and importance of a broader transnational, European, and even worldwide movement, given that many examples of local or national Leftist parties have shown that in the long run, they are unable to sustain themselves without a wider front. He also warns that an automatic Polanyian “double movement” – a dialectical process in which societies, in their development towards a deregulated free market, simultaneously create counter-forces that act against these uncertainties and consequently undermine capitalism – is not to be taken for granted, and that instead the Left needs to counteract through political agency and collective actions. Finally, this first section of the book is concluded by Vassilis K. Fouskas and Shampa Roy-Mukherjee, who in their chapter deal with the failure of the Third Way and the long-term consequences of accepting ordoliberalism. They show how this did not

just weaken the Left itself, but how it has also had a significant influence over the transatlantic rise of populism since 2010.

Bearing many of these discussed aspects of the crisis in mind, the chapters in the second section of this volume delve into a variety of dimensions and aspects of the Left in different European states. Philippe Marlière takes on the French movement *La France Insoumise* and, by analysing not only the movement, but also its leader Jean-Luc Mélenchon, he shows how, by employing populism as a strategy, the Left runs the risk of eventually discrediting itself. Contrary to the French experience, the white hope of the Left in the United Kingdom, Jeremy Corbyn, despite also calling for radical changes, addressed societal problems in a less populist way. As Ognjen Pribičević demonstrates in his chapter, Corbyn was a true spark of hope, not only for the Labour Party in the United Kingdom, but also for the Left throughout Europe. And his sudden decline only two years later was ultimately less due to the fact that all these social issues became once again irrelevant for the British public overnight, but rather because the 2019 elections in the United Kingdom were again dominated by the nationalistic narrative of Brexit, in which political parties and actors from the Right had a clear predominance.

From these two examples from Western Europe, the book then turns to cases from Southern Europe. José Castro Caldas takes a look at Portugal, but – in contrast to the previous chapters – his focus is not on political, but rather economic developments. He deals with two opposing philosophies and ideologies related to the market and the envisaged economic model and society behind it, and indirectly questions whether giving the precedence to economic over political integration within the European Economic Community (EEC), which was a conservative decision, served only the centre of the EEC, while its peripheries would have rather benefited from giving priority to political (and social) integration first in the long term. Staying in the south, Katerina Labrinou and Ioannis Balampanidis analyse the relationship and interaction between the Radical Left and Social Democracy, based on three comparative examples: Greece, Spain and Portugal. They show how Radical Left forces in all three countries started as challengers to the existing and established Left, with an image of a pariah, but then not only became relevant participants in the political arena, but also, due to electoral successes, turned into a threat to the mainstream social

democratic and centre-left parties. At the same time, social democratic parties in these countries were confronted by their own process of *pasokification* and the dilemma of “renovation or resignation”. As a consequence, as Labrinou and Balampanidis show, these two streams of the Left came closer to one another in some aspects, while in others they moved further apart.

The final two chapters of this section stay thematically in the south of Europe, but outside the EU. They deal with Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia; two countries that shared the same socialist heritage until 1989, and have undergone very similar, mostly politically traumatic, periods since. Jasmin Hasanović looks at the opportunities of the Left in Bosnia and Herzegovina since the end of the war, with a special focus on recent political developments. As for the majority of political ideas and grass-root organizations in Bosnia and Herzegovina, for the Left the biggest challenge comes from the dominating ethno-determined narrative, which is not only reinforced by the political elites but also, to a great extent, institutionally cemented by the Dayton Agreement. Hasanović analyses whether such a scenario poses a chance or rather an obstacle for the Left in Bosnia and Herzegovina to regain ground. Jovo Bakić likewise dedicates one part of his chapter to the emerging Leftist scene in Serbia, which is predominantly active at the local level. He sketches its strengths and weaknesses, and frames it in a wider context of the European Left, while simultaneously bearing in mind the geographically and economically peripheral position of Serbia. By doing so, he also sheds light on the problematic legacy of the Serbian Left, given that during the 1990s Serbia was governed and ruled by two formally ‘Left’ parties, that came to compromise the term Left for a long period to follow.

The last section of the book focuses on the challenges faced by the Left on the road to its potential return. Natalija Mićunović looks at this from a broader theoretical and global perspective. What she identifies as the two main problems of the Left are first, parallel, though not necessarily conflicting, narratives within the Left, which may hamper a sustainable cohesion on the Left. This to a great extent stems from the change in the constitution of the Left over time, and the larger role that vulnerable groups, which are usually attached to left-wing parties, are being afforded. The second problem of the Left that Mićunović focuses on is the existing disparity between centre and

periphery; arguments that are also put forward by Castro Caldas and Bakić in Section 3. Finally, Catherine Samary analyses two major political developments that unveiled the key weaknesses and lack of capacities of the European Left to unite toward a common goal and to offer a new vision for the entirety of the EU: Brexit and the Greek crisis followed by the bailout referendum in 2015. Samary shows the false binary choice into which the Left has manoeuvred itself, to either “remain” within the EU and accept its neoliberal rules or to “leave” in the name of “national sovereignty”, the latter being a narrative exploited by nationalistic and racist political streams. Given the crisis of the dominant neoliberal economic system, which certainly also provides a chance for the Left to take the floor, Samary offers a proposal as to how a new Internationalist European Left should look, and what aims it should prioritize.

This book was supposed to have been published much earlier. Two unforeseen events, one after another, however, came in between: one personal and marginal – a new-born of the editor of this volume and subsequent one-year maternity leave – and a global and striking, and rather sore one, the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to a slow-down of many processes. And while both events gave rise to delays, the responsibility lies solely with the editor. There were moments during 2020 when the topic of this book seemed to no longer hold attraction, especially as the COVID-19 pandemic rose to dominate all spheres of life. But the more time passed, the more it became obvious that the developments around the world, and in particular the economic and social consequences of the pandemic, are about to lead to a striking *new normality*, which will amplify the existing inequalities and make the need for left alternatives more pressing than ever. I hope and wish that this book will offer a contribution to the creation of these alternatives, even only in that it will trigger further discussions, exchanges, collaborations and interactions among the authors, their institutions and left political organizations to which they are attached in one way or another.

Irena Ristić

Introduction

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The changes and challenges of the Left in contemporary Europe - An introduction¹

Abstract

Left-wing parties in Europe have been faced by a crisis for more than three decades. What in the 1970s started as a challenge by conservative political elites to the post-war constellation characterized by a welfare state and an institutionally regulated market, was, from 1989 onward, strengthened by the Fall of the Berlin Wall and the subsequent acceleration of economic globalization throughout the 1990s. Most social democratic parties in Europe did not only fail to question this emerging model of deregulated capitalism, but also went so far as to embrace it, thus triggering a ground-breaking ideological, political and also structural shift in themselves. The consequence was a loss of their traditional constituency, which, to a not insignificant extent, turned to right-wing populist parties. New Left movements, challengers of the established social democratic parties, started once again after the global economic crisis to garner support in countries in which economic deprivation had hit hardest, mostly in Southern Europe. Their examples showed that there is not only a strong need, but also a huge demand, for leftist policies. But being scattered between different countries, these movements also showed that without a united, transnational and solidary front of leftist movements throughout Europe, the chances of achieving a sustainable impact and paradigm shift of the dominating economic model will remain low.

Keywords: Left, crisis, change, critical mass, internationalization

¹ This chapter was written and this publication edited as part of the 2020 Research Program of the Institute of Social Sciences with the support of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia.

■ For a long time, the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 was seen as a pivotal and undisputedly progressive event in world history, which marked both the end of the true state socialism and the end of the political and physical division of Europe. Capitalism had allegedly proven to be the only game by whose rules humanity should play, while the model of liberal democracy had completed societal accomplishments. Although nobody spelled it out so bluntly, the fact that communist regimes had collapsed brought about the general conclusion that the Left and socialist ideas as such had become redundant; moreover, that the Left had lost to the Right.

It was however already a decade earlier, during the 1970s, when the Right had started to turn away from the post-war period of reconstruction and welfare state and to claim that there is no alternative to the liberal self-regulated market. Moreover, that a successful political and economical system is centred around individuals in which “there is no such thing as society” (M. Thatcher), while governments were perceived as problems, rather than a solution or even merely contributors to solutions (R. Reagan). The deregulated capitalism that is in place today had already then started to regain the upper hand, with conservative elites beginning to dominate politics once more, with policy reversals following in the wake of this. What back then had only seemed convincing to significant portions of the populations of the USA and United Kingdom at first was soon after fuelled by additional two factors. The first of these was the doctrine rising from the fall of communism, that all that the emerging national states in Eastern and Central Europe were in need of was a free and deregulated labour and financial market, with democracy following as a natural outcome, due to the absence of political repression. The other factor that helped fuel deregulation was the economic (hyper-) globalization, which, although being the result of a specific historical moment in global economic development, stood nevertheless in close relation to the other two factors. In other words, the pushing of economic globalization beyond the boundaries of institutions in charge of regulating, stabilizing and legitimizing markets (Rodrik 2016), was both in addition to the economic agenda of transatlantic conservative political forces in power and also largely driven by the wind of change blowing in Eastern and Central Europe.

The choices of the Left and the reasons behind them

Within this back-then-new narrative of the triumph of capitalism and the rising self-confidence of the conservative parties as its carrier, European left-wing parties found themselves disillusioned and discouraged, which was at that moment certainly not conducive to the development of an alternative economic model that would differ from capitalism, and at the same time be ideologically detached from the *really existing state-socialism* (Piketty 2020, 611-725). Consequently, instead of developing political, but more importantly economic, alternative ideas, social democratic parties in much of Europe embraced this new doctrine with relative haste, and during the 1990s systematically began to both adopt and internalize capital liberalization and to approve the processes of what later would be coined 'hyper-globalization'. While the Schröder-Blair paper of the Third Way was the best-known manifestation illustrating this trend (Schröder and Blair, 1999), it was certainly not the only one to emanate from parties with a social-democratic profile.² Abdelal shows that in France it was, in fact, more the elite gathered around the Socialist party, and hence formally around the Left, as opposed to the Right, that was more fervent in the introduction of these new paths, essentially making the views of the French Right and Left on further capital liberalization indistinguishable (Abdelal 2006, 6-7). Eventually, by the end of the 1990s social-democratic parties had more in common with conservative parties than with their own position three decades earlier in regard to economic governance and market regulation (Manow, Schäfer and Zorn 2008, 32). And while Vassilis K. Fouskas and Shampa Roy-Mukherjee in this volume leave no doubts about the responsibility of the social-democratic parties in adopting the Third Way, Piketty tends to find also some explanation, if not understanding, for the position in which left-wing parties found themselves after 1989: according to him, it was partially also the *Zeitgeist* of that period that drove social democrats to a scenario in which they did not feel that an attempt to change the dominant doctrine

² Interestingly this paper was published when both the Labour Party under the leadership of Tony Blair and the Social-democratic Party under Gerhard Schröder were already in power, and hence it was neither meant as a tool to come to power, nor demanded by their constituency.

in Europe was necessary, but instead that it was sufficient to just help 'pave the road' to the winning free market which they would then come to take control of, and through this, begin to tackle social inequalities (Piketty 2020, 611-725). By doing so, left-wing parties created a paradox, in which, by failing to challenge capitalism as it was emerging after 1989, they helped establish it as the only remaining economic model, effectively rendering themselves superfluous.

However, one cannot but notice that, as a consequence of the economic progress in the post-war period, the traditional voter bases of social democratic and left-wing parties went through bigger changes than those of conservative parties, and that hence the left-wing parties also had to adapt to such change, both internally and within society, much more than was the case for parties on the Right (Krell and Hollenberg 2018). Up until the end of the 1960s, the left-wing (social-democratic/labour) parties were associated with lower education and lower income voters (working class). Then, in the 1970s and 1980s, the structure of the voters for left-wing parties began to change, including also those with higher education, turning them also into parties of the intellectual elite/class (Piketty 2018, 16-19). This marked the beginning of a *representation gap*, in which a mismatch developed between the preferences and interests of the traditional voters and the policy profiles of left-wing parties (Berman 2016): those parties that used to protect them from the negative consequences of capitalism now had embraced the principles of capitalism. In such a situation, traditional left-wing voters consequently, being dissatisfied with the political choices and representation offered to them by left-wing parties during the 1990s, opted – in the categories employed by Albert Hirschman – either for *exit* or for *voice*: exiting by abstaining and turning away from the party that had represented them for decades, or raising their voice against them by voting for other parties by whom they felt better represented, mostly (far-)right-wing populist parties, as witnessed during the second decade of the 21st century throughout Europe.

These social processes during the 1970s and 1980s in effect triggered the creation of new dimensions of inequality and conflicts, and the gradual development of new cleavages, against which left-wing parties had to position themselves. In addition to these changes, the increase in economic growth, global integration and

technological progress from the 1990s primarily benefitted only the wealthiest, and hence not the traditional constituency of leftist parties (Milanović 2016), producing another burden for such parties. Further, the social structure of the leadership of left-wing parties also shifted over time, so that – as Patomäki in this volume argues – the contemporary Left is no longer even formally controlled by those who they want and claim to represent, which consequently puts their credibility additionally at stake.

Finally, also the sensitivity for socially vulnerable groups and minorities had changed over time, as these groups gained more rights and recognition. Traditionally attached to left-wing parties, there had been an expectation that they would continue to be represented by them, and that left-wing parties would adjust to their needs. However, vulnerable social groups are nowadays highly diverse regarding the social and economic backgrounds of their members, creating conflicting narratives within the Left, which might not only impede a sustainable cohesion and the creation of an overarching Left ideology and policy, but also reinforce divisions among different groups, regardless of the fact that they are all supportive of the policies of the Left. This is also because the historically-used category of *class* became too narrow and less functional for the purpose of addressing all issues within a society, which naturally fall in the realm of the Left. In addition, combining the interests, needs and experiences of all these socially and economically diverse groups, and at the same time developing an alternative economic model that would accommodate all of them has opened up another essential question: that of whether left-wing parties should structure and narrow down their programs around one social group or class, or rather attempt a ‘catch-all’ approach (Krell and Hollenberg 2018).

In spite of these obvious detrimental circumstances, the crisis of the Left over the last three decades still remains mainly a product of its own making. Given its long time frame, it is questionable whether the crisis of the Left can be described as *a current crisis* of the Left, or whether there are rather intrinsic structural problems pertaining to capitalism that cause the Left to be in a “permanent crisis”, as Lošonc and Josifidis in this volume argue. Further, the question remains as to how the Left can once again regain credibility and power.

The difficult return

As just discussed, in the party landscape of Europe, the left-wing parties seem to be the biggest loser of the last three decades of globalization. But when looking closer at what globalization has produced – growing inequality, climate change, migrations, the deconstruction of the welfare state – one tends to think that all these negative consequences of globalization are textbook examples of issues that are served up on a plate to the Left. Income and class cleavages in particular have traditionally strengthened the political Left, and the only thing the Left needs to do is to reach out and resolutely address the concerns of those who have suffered the most as a result of these changes, with a high chance of striking a chord of resonance. But why is this not happening?

According to Chantal Mouffe, left-wing and social democratic parties in Europe are stifled because they refuse to be introspective. Calling them prisoners of their post-political dogmas, Mouffe thinks that they are reluctant to admit their mistakes, which, as with a personal ‘new beginning’ is a precondition to allow moving on. Being stuck both in their past and in the capitalist system that they have embraced, they are incapable of recognizing all these negative effects of globalization – originally an issue for the Left *per se* – and instead leave them to be addressed by populist Far-Right parties. These populist right-wing parties are the ones that are stepping out of the given capitalistic frame, articulating demands among which, Mouffe believes, lie also some democratic ones, to which a progressive and Leftist answer or a Left alternative must be given. And if it wishes to work on its future, the Left will sooner or later need to position itself to face such demands (Mouffe 2019).

In Southern Europe, indeed, Left movements have already taken upon this argument of Mouffe, and made an attempt to address popular demands. Coming out of a particular historical moment in which the discontent with the dominant neoliberal system was growing and heavily impacting the lives of the majority of people belonging to the middle and lower classes, left-wing parties in Greece, Spain and Portugal have succeeded in formulating an

alternative program.³ A large part of their success has to date been based on a populist strategy, and on explicitly distancing themselves from the social democratic parties in their countries and acting as their challengers, as Labrinou and Balampanidis show in this volume. However, it was not only the readiness and credibility of these movements to question the system as such that drew a distinction between these Left movements in Southern Europe and other similar movements in Western Europe, e.g. *Momentum* in the United Kingdom, *France Insoumise* in France or the movement *Aufstehen* in Germany. It was also an – at least temporary – critical mass in these societies and the will of this mass to break not simply with the life of economic deprivation imposed by austerity programs, but with the overall neoliberal logic of humiliation and dehumanization of which a policy of austerity is just one element in the complex logistics of economic, political and moral devastation. The persisting popularity of, for example, Syriza, even after the rejection of the referendum outcome, should be understood in the light of this larger historical mandate (Douzinas 2017).

One reason for this critical mass (still) having not reached Western European countries is because they – contrary to the South – did not (yet) reach such a level of inequality and deprivation, while their welfare state is, though in the process of being actively dismantled, still strong enough to maintain a minimal social balance, which certainly also goes back to different paths of economic growth and expansion in the postwar period. Apart from the absent critical mass the political agenda in Western European societies have been for more than a decade to a great extent dominated by the issues of migration and terrorism, and in the United Kingdom in addition by the highly polarizing and nationalistic issue of Brexit. Contrary to class cleavages, these are identity cleavages based on race and ethnicity, and consequently traditionally

³ The same can be to some extent said for two other left movements in Europe: For France Insoumise under the leadership of Jean-Luc Mélenchon in France and for Momentum and the Labour Party under Jeremy Corbyn in Great Britain. Both movements achieved a remarkable success for a Western European left party, but still far from the ground-breaking success of the left in the south of Europe and hence also without reaching a majority to form the government, as Marlière and Pribičević analyse in this volume.

exploited by right-wing parties, often in a populist manner (Rodrik 2016). And as the examples of the Labour Party under Corbyn and France Insoumise show, entering these domains means adopting a similar populist technique and sliding into a right-wing rhetoric and into narratives of sovereignty, nation, and even xenophobia, which, as Pribičević demonstrates in this volume, was eventually a game which Corbyn was only destined to lose to the Right. Marlière, on the other hand, shows through an analysis of France Insoumise, how, by using populism as a strategy – strongly advocated for among others by Chantal Mouffe – many principles of the Left are being sacrificed or simply ignored. But, moreover, she explains how the usage of populism and the simplification of complex social issues, as done by Jean-Luc Mélenchon, eventually backfires and does a disservice to the future strengthening of Left ideas and movements throughout Europe. This certainly is overall contrary to a New Left doctrine, which as Patomäki points out, has to be based on international interdependence, common transnational institutions and hence upon the rejection of national borders.

Internationalization, and moreover an international mobilization, is certainly one of the crucial elements for a sustainable success of the Left. After all, history shows that the requirement of internationalization was also present in previous times, and is even more so in the globalized world of today. The lack of such a strong solidarity movement within the European Left and social democracy was, according to Douzinas, the main factor for Syriza, once it had gained political office and gathered a critical mass, failing to translate this into a longer-lasting dominance of the Left. However, at the same time, and based on the experience of Syriza, he urges the Left to give up its ideological puritanism and to resist what Walter Benjamin termed the “Left melancholy”; a militant commitment to a high ideal at the expense of action. The Left should not confine itself to resistance and rebellion, nor is it any longer about reform vs. revolution. When assuming power, the Left has to be both in and against the state, and to take over the responsibility for running a country, disrupt the institutionalized balance of social forces and make pragmatic compromises (Douzinas 2017).

Many examples, from Syriza, through Momentum, to small local (grassroots) movements show that leftist social policies are

possible, because they are needed. And that social freedom has still not reached its limit. The complexity of addressing the variety within the wide and growing voter base of the Left in the conditions imposed by 21st century world politics and economy, and creating cohesion within this, is a challenge for the Left on many fronts. It requires thinking outside the given capitalistic frame, and offering an economic model that goes beyond balance sheets. It requires further a transnational joint action and political solidarity. And finally the hope, in line with Patomäki, that the accumulation of relatively small quantitative changes in specific areas in one part of Europe or the world can lead to ruptures, sudden transformations and substantial qualitative changes in other parts, in this way triggering a reaction that will gradually lead to the formation of a critical mass able to support and implement substantial change.

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II

**Where are we
and how did we get here?**

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The Left between crises: Antinomy of powerlessness and power

Abstract

The starting point of this paper is the notion that crisis can offer a comprehensive perspective for the antinomian situation of the portion of the Left that is attempting to transform capitalism “from within”. Using political-economical terms, we describe how the leftist proviso is determined by the constitutive tension between its capacities for transformation and the fact that it is embedded in the structural fields of capitalism. On the one hand there are trajectories of crisis that disarm its capacities, i.e. pose a threat to the Left, while, on the other, the crisis can be seen as an entry point for riots, protests and resistances that call for leftist “translation” and articulation. This work consists of three parts: In the first, conceptual part, we criticize the standard discourse of neutrality concerning political polarization, and present the crisis as a multidimensional process that inevitably involves the crisis of the Left. In the second part, select dimensions of the 2007 crisis are dealt with, and the gap between the organic and revolutionary crises is presented. The third part analyses the contemporary aspects of a crisis when viewed as a process that is merely a continuation of a previous one, changing the temporality of the horizon of the crisis, and opening up new (contradictory) possibilities for the self-reflection and self-transcending of a Left whose future remains uncertain.

Keywords: capitalism, crisis, Left, structural determinations, temporality of crisis

Structural antinomy of the Left: Crisis as the “Moment of truth”

■ Although the focus of this paper is not the definition of the Left, we still, first, have to define the important thread of our argumentation. The heterogeneity of the way in which the concept of the Left is applied, its negation that even goes so far as to write its obituary,

does not allow us to apply the term in a conformist way. The devastating estimates of its disorientation and historical regression have taken away from it the certainty of its existence. It has been stated that the relativization of the Left-Right axis has made the Left lose its footing. In accordance with this, the classical polarization between the Left and Right that emerged with the French Revolution and consolidated around 1848 is no longer relevant. A "third way" (Giddens 1994) or habitualized "common sense" (Howard 2019, Mair 2007) were offered up to oppose the alleged exhausted dichotomy of Left and Right. Further, advances in globalization processes have changed the models of political mobilization, perception, and articulation of interests, preventing the confrontation of the Left and Right being used as a valid ideological navigation (Nowak, Gallas, 2014). The post-industrial society has shifted the patterns of orientation towards "post-materialist values", and in this way also weakened class's usefulness as a reference point for ideological attitudes and underlined the importance of the middle class or new *petite-bourgeoisie* (Poulantzas) and, finally, has brought about total "individualization" (Azmanova 2011).

We are especially interested in a provocative attitude towards the "structural impossibility" of the Left (Hamza 2016). Yet, we will modify the hypothesis. Namely, such a view exceeds the well-known diagnosis that the end of the 20th century heralded the dusk of both the Radical Left, which relied on emancipation based on the teleological perspective, and the gradualist-revisionist social-democratic Left which, based on "piecemeal engineering" of the structural tendencies of capitalism, intended to maintain a class balance. Hence, while the first form of the Left had to learn that the negation of the bourgeoisie would not automatically lead to an emancipation from capitalism, the second hopelessly attempted to build mechanisms of mediation between capitalism and democracy.

Even the mentioned view of "impossibility" goes beyond the emphatic attitude of the Left towards its own defeats, and is aimed at learning "through defeats" and conducting the dialectics between defeats and "redemption" (Sotiris 2018, Adamczak 2017). In fact, the Left has always sublimed defeats. Pessimism, therefore, did not necessarily imply paralysis, but rather a combat-biased attitude (Achcar 2000, 28). Finally, the cited attitude goes beyond the orientation of the "New Left" that criticized the dogmatism of the "Old Left" and

only added certain subjects to the repertoire of the Left in terms of power and domination.

Of course, it should be kept in mind that the starting point of *one part* of the Left was its “tragic” position (Clark 2012). However, the quoted assertion of the “impossibility of the Left” goes further than is stated above. According to it, the project of the Left is based on the transcendence of collective patterns of life organization, such as the coercion-based practices of the state and commodification bias of the market: the same project promoted workplace democracy as the seedling of comprehensive economic democracy. The Left would be impossible without leaving some space for the manifestation of anti-capitalism, without plebeian and international interest, concern for equal-power design, as well as without the fact that certain forms of human suffering or inequality are heavily rooted in *social mechanisms in capitalism*; unlike the Right, which explains, for example, suffering as existing on the basis of natural inclinations or as resulting from the logic of natural order. Even those who are trying to renew the concept of the Left today think in a similar manner (Bauman 2019, Renault 2002), that is, suggest innovation of the stated elements of the orientation.

Still, the Left will always be confronted by the *structural* constraints of capitalism. More precisely, the Left itself is (over-)determined by the laws of capitalism and its power-domination idiosyncrasy. Moreover, there is a high intensity of creative *resilience* of capitalism: it does not only neutralize the frequent resistances to it, but also appropriates these and accommodate radical impulses within its sphere. Consequently, capitalism can absorb the intention of the Left to progress or to revolutionize social relationships. We will use here Gramsci’s term “passive revolution”¹ to throw light on the present crisis: the capitalist class reacts to “sporadic and disorganized subversive movements of popular masses through restorations that accept some popular demands, and therefore progressive restorations” (Gramsci 1975, De Smet, 2016) but without interruption to the system. Any such resistances could be neutralized or, if they “grew to a point of threatening the dominance of capitalism, they would simply be crushed” (Wright 2018).

¹ “Passive revolution” has multiple interpretations.

Eventually, there is the *mimetic* Left which, even unconsciously, shifts into the zone of the Right, and imitates it or appears as a perfect agent of capital by passing through its laws such as the imperative measures of austerity during the crisis that began in 2007. Unlike previous opinions that point to something beyond the division between Left and Right, we have here a scheme of the “impossibility of the Left” *and* (at least tendentially) we could reach the conclusion that the Right is the only player in town (i.e. there may be the “impossibility of the Left”, but is there a non-impossibility of the Right?).

This tendency explains precisely the existing constellation. Nevertheless, in order to avoid fatalistic conclusions, we are talking about the *structural antinomy of the left in capitalism*. At the same time, we do not accept the tacit assumption of numerous articles that the Left/Right axis can be treated as confrontation-competition in one *neutral* space; the social democracy, for which various obituaries have already been written (Lavelle 2016), was troubled with the same problem, although it believed that this had been resolved. However, as the current crisis has repeatedly shown, the contradictions between capitalism and democracy are constantly renewed (Merkel 2014) and capitalism must undergo a process of de-politicization in order to ensure its unobstructed reproduction. This means that the contradiction of capitalism and democracy is inscribed within the system itself, which prevents the creation of a neutral space for the development of a polarization in which the Left would find a symmetrical position. Elaborate empirical studies that prove steady existence of “economic-elite domination” against “Majoritarian Pluralism” strongly confirm the original *non-neutral* constellation arising from the structure of power (Gilens and Page, 2014).

Crises are historical sequences in which the structural antinomy of the Left arises to the surface. For example, while one part of the Left initiated the struggles against anti-austerity, the other part of the (established) Left promoted certain forms of austerity by itself; a risky gambit considering the fact that austerity measures had traditionally been a component of the right-wing instrumentarium, insofar as parties from the right and far-right had been apt to apply this measure (Kraft 2017).²

² For austerity in the perspective of fascism, see C. E. Mattei (2017).

Thus, every major crisis³ is the crisis of the left that is compelled to compromise with positional antinomy. The Left is crisis-embedded by its very constitution. If we turn to the Great Depression (1929), it seemed as if this crisis was the one to have caused the gigantic defeat of the Left and the breakthrough of Nazism; at the end of the 1960s and throughout the 1970s, the crisis manifested contradiction of the combination of Fordistic-social democratic taming of capitalism and its Keynesian management (*Trente Glorieuses*), that is, the contradiction between the logic of capital, the iron cage of capitalism and welfare state arrangements, as well as the crisis of the belief that the contradictions of capitalism transitioned from the economy into the system of governance. The Great Recession of 2007 announced the end of an (un)happy marriage between neoliberalism and "social-democratic statism" (Poulantzas), that is, neo-liberalized social democracy itself reached a crisis. After all, social democracy wished to apply infinite "fine-tuning" of capitalism in order to affirm pacified reformism against the "adventurous" revolution of the Radical Left that had blindly relied on revolutionary force.

But crisis flows are a constant reminder that reforms inevitably face a *limit*: the *structural imperatives of self-reproduction of capital* are cruelly imposed against reformism. Thus, the Left, which is integrated in capitalism risks (as is social democracy) the suspicious affirmation of capitalism as an infinite process without alternative; on the other side, the Left that propagates negation risks underestimating the way in which people's preferences/orientations are formed by the mechanisms of capitalism. Thus, the antinomy is expressed in terms of contradiction of the *immanent* and *transcendent* perspective of the Left in relation to capitalism.

Crises are, at the same time, a strategic test for the Left, as well as (tortuous) moments of self-reflection when certain issues of self-understanding of the Left become a permanent part of (certain) public deliberations. Thus, a crisis acts as an undecided process of the self-problematization of the Left. At the same time, we know that for a large swathe of the Left, the crisis is an *immanent part of capitalism*, an "expression of its normality", and, accordingly,

³ The attribute "major" is imbued with analytical meaning (Aglietta 1997).

the respective Left is, in *a certain way*, always situated in-between, i.e. between the two crises.

Of course, crises affect far more than just the self-reflection of the Left. We know that they are a cyclic form of temporality, as well as periodic forms of disruption on the basis of which the periodization and framing of the course of history is performed, just like the re-channelling of meanings of interruption and continuity. In retrospect, there is an impression of multiplicity of a crisis phenomenon that cause epistemological problems, that is, the problem of special accessibility regimes compared to acquiring knowledge and reflection (Habermas 1973, Koselleck 1961). Describing the crisis and the discursive struggle over its hegemonic interpretation and the operationalization of its meaning permanently frames crisis as a “conceptual paradigm” (Gilbert 2019, Roitman 2014), albeit one with a *contested* “conceptual repertoire”.

Having said all this, we can now ask the question: What is the manifestation of the idiosyncratic nature of the crisis that began (at least in terms of standard interpretation) in 2007, to which numerous dispersed traces can be attributed even today? This question is not posed in the sense of tautology that each crisis produces certain differences, but rather as to whether this prolonged crisis has evoked a change in the conceptual horizon of the Left?

Organic crisis without revolutionary crisis

Numerous characteristics of the aforementioned crisis of the last decade of the 21st century allow it to be categorized as “major” (Carchedi and Roberts 2018). There was heterogeneity of interpretations: some interpreted the crisis as the “Great Recession” (the term we ourselves have chosen to employ here), some as “Long Depression”, others still as a crisis of over-financialization, debt or inequality, while other mainstream thinkers merely frame and interpret it as a generic excess of greed. Nevertheless, the depth and effects of the relevant crisis upon the overall societal structure cannot be called into question. The crisis could have been expected by the Left, as such a crisis has always been projected *ex ante* as an expression of the structural tendencies of capitalism. In other words,

as the Left incorporates into its self-conscious attitude the thesis on the immanency of a crisis of capitalism, it should not have been surprised by the eruption of the crisis, unlike the mainstream discourse that was lulled in the belief of a flawless machinery of capitalism that only allowed insignificant conjunctural oscillations having been discovered. As far as the Left is concerned, this crisis refers to a totality: it includes the “crisis of social democracy”, “crisis of work” and “crisis of social reproduction” as well (Pitts and Dinerstein 2017, 10, Aruzza 2016).

However, this does not mean that there are already framed and effective alternative strategies of the Left regarding the crisis as a disruption of the stabilized meaning of the chains between socio-economic relations and ideological-political forms. Such a diagnosis has also been confirmed by the crisis, which deeply challenges the Left, both analytically and strategically.

There is an under-determination of the *configuration* and *outcome* of the crisis. As already mentioned, Gramsci rightly pointed to the *ambivalence of every (major) crisis*: the explosion of contradictions entails the ruling classes being in the “crisis of hegemony”, destabilization of the structures of authorities and motivational resources being weakened. But the crisis is also a field of possibilities for coercive measures of the ruling class (De Smet 2016). Crisis is an *objective opportunity* for the Left, but for the ruling class as well, which can reorganize its hegemonic potentials based on “transformism” (Gramsci) for the purpose of the combination of “passive revolution” and “restoration” (Azzarà 2018) – we would emphasize that the related reorganization can be operationalized on the basis of a “*politics of fear*”, based on discursive constructions of negative expectations by potentiating danger (unemployment, the Other as an intruder who can steal “my job”, etc.), thus demobilizing the resources of resistance.

If this happens, we can offer a *situative* answer to the classic question: “What does the ruling class do when it rules?” By imposing economic barriers, it renews its structural power/ domination through crisis. Ruling classes are often homogenized during a crisis, aligning themselves toward restoration, and the state develops a “strategic selectivity” (Jessop 1999) toward the restoration of the order hit by the crisis.

The aforementioned “transformism” has also been reflected in various state-mediated interventions – for instance bailouts – during the crisis. This has led some commentators to draw conclusions about the return of former Keynesianism in the midst of the resurgence of the crisis. As an aside, it must be noted that Keynes can be selectively exploited as a “saviour of civilization” and his extensive opus can always be promoted as the “panic button” (Mann 2017) for the survival of capitalism, but it is now Keynes’s work that has been roughly dragged into the whirlpool of neoliberalized capitalism. Thus, the expression “*transformism*” actually manifested itself in the crisis as a *metamorphosis of neoliberalism* in the form of authoritarianism and rejection of its “progressive lines”, that is, the overcoming of “progressive neoliberalism” (Fraser 2019). It was hence no accident that the crisis produced new concepts and, in fact, a new research program: “authoritarian neoliberalism” (Bruff and Tansel, 2018).

At times of crisis, the Left faces the structure-agency-problem and, consequently, an articulation of crisis subjectivity. *This stems from the “anatomy”, that is, from the political-economic determination, of capitalism.* And this controversy, too, reflects dilemmas for the Left. We can notice that there are such leftist-objectivist theories of crisis that *de facto* subordinate the structure-agency-issue by suspending class struggle and reducing the crisis subjectivity (possibly) to the desirable strengthening of such traditional institution as trade unions. Here belongs one of the most relevant representatives of critical narration of the present crisis; namely, post-Keynesianism, which (while consequently perceiving the pernicious tendency of stabilization of inequality and austerity in capitalism) attempts to reconstruct the theory of its *spiritus rector* (J. M. Keynes) and breathe new life into the politics of demand. Unlike mainstream economic theories, post-Keynesianism argues that capitalism is inherently unstable, and that it does not have automatic stabilizers. At the same time, it must defend itself against accusations that cannot be easily refuted; largely those in relation to “trade-unionism” and to the unjustified belief in (neutral) technocratic management (Bieler, Jordan and Morton, 2019) of the contradictions of capitalism.

Let us draw a clear distinction here: we recognize two approaches regarding the given problem and the crisis (2007). *The*

first version develops causal explanations based on a “*top-down approach*” and is open to perceiving the constant fading of emancipatory interests by supporting “left(ist) melancholy”⁴ The supremacy of structural capital domination still successfully epitomizes the objective possibilities of emancipation against capital; consequently, we can learn much more about the course of the crisis if we describe capital-restructuring processes that *consolidate* capitalism.

The second version is along a “*bottom-up*” line, and is open to the riots and resistances that develop in fragmentary form and mobilize resources on the micro scale. The crucial elements of the meta-framework of such thinking are expressed by the French philosopher Alain Badiou, who has declared that we are “in the age of riots” (Badiou 2011, Smith 2015).

This version carefully analyses the range of various forms of resistance and struggle, and raises doubts that the previous (leftist) approach is insufficiently sensitive to the dynamics of those forms of resistance and revolt that call into question the established institutional channels of expression of interest. In accordance with this, the failure of the Left is also manifested due to the continuous paralyzing diagnosis of the collapse of classical leftist forms (parties, syndicates), which subordinated the problematization of the few visible, in fact non-contagious, forms of struggle for emancipation. For example, the literature of “critical political economy” supports such gestures and arguments that go beyond the framework of “elite-orchestrated domination”, or, more specifically, the “under-conceptualized” forms of struggle that are “elite-contested” are recognized, and therefore emerge from the institutional channels of conflict. Moreover, instead of the analysis of the dominance of capital, they call for a responsible and persistent monitoring of “incomplete” acts of protest-based “disruption”. Thus, various perpetuated forms of “popular protest” against austerity, reduction of wages, etc. are perceived, and a reflexive left-wing position that is “beyond defeat and austerity” is called for. Unlike the gloomy recapitulations, the analysis here emphasizes that, during the crisis, experimental forms of resistance have developed, that is, even

⁴ The melancholy is the frequent topic of leftist intellectuals; however, it does not automatically refer to passivity, see the application of Pascalian wager by D. Bensaïd, 1997.

tendencies that do not manifest the traditional “teleology of emancipation” but rather represent “extra-capitalist impulses in the midst of the crisis” (Bailey 2019, Bailey et al. 2018). This orientation is highly appreciative of those movements that support, for example, biopolitical egalitarianism and develop leaderless horizontalism, and which transform the *conditions* of ruling hegemony: at the same time, they criticize those leftists who underestimate the movements mentioned for their serious strategic deficits and insufficient (political) radicalism. This is the criticism of the approach that treats the social movement and renewed movementism only in the perspective of the state, and, in the light of different demands addressed to the state apparatus (Maeckelberg 2016). In critiquing the preoccupation with state-oriented concepts, these theorists emphasize the importance of such movements that *here and now*, in special combat zones, and “interstitial spaces” realize the “prefiguration” of post-capitalist relations. They suggest that the Left should benefit from the strategic analysis of creation of different socio-economic patterns of spaces and times by the mentioned movements. In their arguments there is a new relationship between “doing” and “believing” in these movements, and these theorists without hesitation rehabilitate the classic leftist term: “concrete utopia” that embraces the actual forms of “commoning” (De Angelis 2017, Dinerstein 2012, 2016), communalism, and solidarity economics. The fear that exists in a crisis is counter-balanced by emerging hope or by learning by doing within movements.

In accordance with this, the Left lags behind in the perception and articulation of such struggles, or modes of conflict consciousness that cannot easily fit into the traditional teleologically based concepts of emancipation. New (underestimated) forms of struggle that are relevant to the survival of the Left cannot be subordinated to the unique imperative of emancipation, as it is an immense procedural task. Thus, this orientation, critiquing the doubts regarding the effectiveness of movements such as Occupy Wall Street or the Arab Spring phenomena, emphasizes the necessity of the struggle (a cultural one, too) regarding the configuration of hegemony of capital logic (Rehman 2013) and the weakened cohesion of capitalism. New struggles bravely provoke the hegemony of

ruling classes, break the continuity of their reproduction, and try to change the discursive frames of the problematization of power. They start from the crisis of representation of interest in capitalism that destroys the possibility of effective democratic mobilization.

And so a new concept of resistance(s) is proposed, one that relies on the hermeneutics of empirical results of different contests, as in the case of the projected “market-based preferences” despite the epoch of “permanent austerity” (Douzinas 2014, Bailey 2015) that is legitimized by many established parties of the Left. However, the aforementioned conceptualization does not need forgiveness of the old institutional articulations of the Left, but rather a *restored dialectics* between strategy and analysis, party and movements.

We need to know that there is no linear relationship between the crisis and (class protest) struggles. Several decades ago, the famous economist Ernest Mandel promoted the thesis on the “*relative autonomy of class struggles*” in relation to crises, that is, the breakdown in accumulation of capital (Mandel 1992, Toscano 2017). He suggested that the dynamics of class struggles depends on the continuity of these struggles, namely whether already-habitualized or relatively stable forms of the same struggles presently exist in the given context.

The political economy of various struggles cannot be functionally derived from the dynamics of accumulation. Mandel, however, *tacitly* assumed a certain temporality of the crisis, namely, the distribution of continuity and discontinuity of the capital accumulation process, whereby a “*before*”, “*amid*” and “*after*” the crisis are known.

Is this temporality now questionable? Are we in a situation where, in the context of stable disparities and stabilization of inequality, it is difficult to distinguish a “before” and “after”, and thus clearly bound crisis cycles? In addition, it remains unclear as to what the “triggers” are, what represents the “proximate” and “ultimate” causes of this struggle.

In any case, even if we stick to the standard temporal framework (the crisis exploded in 2007), we can say that, despite the withdrawal of the Left, there were movements that expressed resistance to different forms of neoliberalism even before this time

(for example, the *Global Justice Movement*). Consequently, in a strongly differentiated combative context of the Great Recession, we can also see elements of continuity and discontinuity in relation to the previous constellation. We can also report on the protests and riots that have broken out and against which the Left should not remain indifferent. The crisis awakened interest in social movements that aligned themselves in opposition to neo-liberalized capitalism, and old dilemmas about such social movements were renewed. In addition, it must be noted that a wide range of movements around the world and on different scales exist that have problematized (neoliberal) capitalism (della Porta 2015, 2017). Besides frequent reports on strikes by employees in the public sector and certain portions of the working middle class, studies have also reported different new forms of strikes (even some with transnational elements), although without stabilized forms of success (Schmalz and Weinmann 2013, Gallas and Nowak 2013). In spite of the “crisis of social democratic unionism” (Cillo and Pradella, 2019) many researchers have recognized the capacity of renewed (radical) unions (Gallas 2016, Nowak 2019), which have proven their potential to learn from the crisis and to orient the thinking of the Left. There have also been – and remain to be – fragmentary and emergent forms of post-capitalist and non-hierarchical alternative economies (Zanoni et al. 2017).

The following provisional conclusions are therefore proposed regarding the left-wing perspective of crisis based on the briefly presented constellation. Despite the claims about the paralysis of the protest mood and the “crisis of imagination” (Haiven 2014) in the era of “permanent austerity” and politics of fear, certain forms of crisis subjectivity with critical potentials that overcome an embeddedness into passivity have been developed. The Left, which has always sought out subjects (working class, citizens of the third world, indigenous people, knowledge workers, proletarianized migrants, “new masses”, etc.), should perceive this kind of subjectivity. Criticisms directed toward the Left may underscore the fact that it has failed at doing this, and has not transferred “extra-capitalist impulses” into a discursive macro-problematization of capitalism.

At the same time, we have to be open to criticisms against inadequate strategic non-articulation of the aforementioned

movements (and it should be borne in mind that those criticisms stated that the interests of the representatives of the mentioned struggles, for example for the unemployed, could be explained by the perception and articulation of immediate risk rather than criticism of capitalism in its totality, McNally 2011). Their crucial point was the fact that the mentioned struggles merely addressed neo-liberalism, and not capitalism *as such*. The Left remained confused regarding the relationship between immanence and transcendence of capitalism.

We believe that it is a sign that the “organic crisis” (Gramsci) existed in a contradictory space of crisis but *without* a revolutionary crisis: “organic crisis” means “unevenness” of the replica to the crisis and “incapacity” to “polarize” a crisis “in favour” (Kouvelakis) of the agencies of struggles, which also means that “ruling classes still have important reserves at their disposal” (Kouvelakis, 2019, 78).

An organic crisis without end: The Left in relation to the projected next crisis

Let us answer the previously posed question: Uncertain, “reluctant” recovery from the crisis, the establishment of capitalism with high profits but low investments, stabilization of the regime of inequality as a long-term tendency, the existence of neo-mercantilism with the elements of trade war, secular stagnation, dissemination of the traces of the 2007 crisis lead to such a situation that the temporality that distinguishes clear time sequences between “before” and “after” is questioned.

A repetitive prediction of the upcoming crisis (Williams 2019, Spencer 2019) within other frameworks of discourse than those of the Left seems to act as a *diagnosis* and *prognosis*, as well. Namely, the projecting of the forms of the next crisis has a *performative* effect, as it affects the perception of present day and forms expectations. We get the known paradox of the projected time (the anticipation of prophetic message) based on which the future retroactively determines the present and past (Dupuy 2002). Moreover, instead of clear sequences in time, there are doubts regarding the meanings of “interregnum”, which represents a problem

concerning the elements of uncertainty; it describes uncertainty in a certain way and the already mentioned post-Keynesianism precisely explains “ontological uncertainty” (Voss 2012, 114-117). Therefore, unstable dynamics of capitalism must be understood from the perspective of this type of uncertainty modus. In any case, the Left is inevitably faced with such uncertainty. A number of left-ist intellectuals have warned about the next crisis (Durand 2019) because they can recognize the intensified tendencies. In this regard, an alertness regarding an upcoming crisis is a *minimum* of left-wing self-reflection.

A characterization of the present epoch as an “age of riots” could additionally incorporate new elements of protest cycles. The Yellow Vests movement (*Mouvement des gilets jaunes*) appears instead of *Nuit debout* and the *Rif* movement emerges in Northern Morocco, for example. This means that, in parallel to the crisis, ongoing protests are additionally supported by new motivational impulses (Rasmussen and Routhier 2019, Luke 2015). Furthermore, we should bear in mind that perpetuated aspects of the ecological crisis are also included in the field of political-economic crisis tendencies. These have various special meanings and paths, but are certainly not independent of the political-economic mechanisms of capitalism and affect the space for a chance of achieving a resolution to the crisis. Moreover, if we also involved highly critical interpretations of the climate crisis, the nexus between crisis and the Left would become even more complex and complicated in terms of possibilities. As a result, consistent argumentation can be used to prove that different subjects’ experiences of climate regression and change can objectively affect the possibilities of transformation in a *contradictory* way, that is, it can cause both regressive and progressive tendencies, with corresponding consequences for the Left (see the different implications of food crises for the revolution, Malm 2014, 35).

In any event, the sense of “interregnum” in regard to the present situation, which will only heighten, is evident among those left-wing interpreters who believe that self-destructive technological dynamics have already exhausted opportunities for potential reconstitutions of capitalism (Carchedi, 2017), although a (possible) transition that would be both very long and uncertain is still

anticipated. Neoliberal capitalism is characterized by a number of weaknesses, in spite of its power structure; the set of methods that it uses to resolve the crisis is poorer than should be expected, as has been pronounced by a number of critically minded economists (Patnaik 2019).

At the same time, it should be emphasized that the fears of the existing tendencies of capitalism are experienced by those non-left-wing circles that notice that this is no longer capitalism “as we know it”, and that even the core of capitalism is affected by the crisis. In addition, in certain countries that are fundamentally critical to the status of capitalism, motivational resources have been weakened, in particular among younger generations (Howard, 2019), indicating the presence of legitimation deficit. Some relevant theoreticians have mentioned a deep *anxiety* that has arisen as a result of numerous “catastrophic failures” of capitalism (Collier 2018), in spite of the fact that they do not represent anti-capitalist tendencies. Are the attacks on capitalism in its present form by people such as Bill Gates only a cynical *bon mot*, or something more concrete (Ben-Ami 2013)?

The Left was unable to ignore the fact, however, that a former suspicious “term” of capitalism has returned and that serious discussions about its fate have ensued. This leads to the conclusion that the present intermediary situation is not just a mere conjunctural regression of capitalism nor a simple stage in the re-composition of neoliberal hegemony, that is, it is not even a change in the representation of neoliberalism. Consequently, the present public discursive framework, which also determines the performance of the Left, has changed in comparison to the situation that arose after the ecstatic euphoria of 1989. Capitalism, presented as a system without any alternative, is nevertheless disrupted, in spite of the existence of additional potentials. It seems that a politics of fear now affects not only subaltern but also the ruling classes: one provocative interpretation proffers the notion that there is fear between members of the very same class due to the fact that the (dysfunctional) post-crisis imbalance of power is growing (Bichler and Nitzan 2019) that is, because capitalism can only be reproduced by *more intense forms of inequality and additional authoritarian increase in affirmation of the power of capital*.

Furthermore, a classical socialist problem of planning has returned (i.e. that there is a keen interest of trade unions in planning): according to some (non-left-wing) interpretations, the *Big Data "revolution"* will actually revive the phenomenon of the planned economy (Thornhill 2017). If this hypothesis is proven, even to a relatively limited extent, then we will become witnesses to new contours of economics. We are left to wonder: How should the Left accept the plausible hypothesis that Google, SAP or Alibaba will prepare the post-capitalist future unwillingly? (N.N. 2017, Durand and Keucheyan 2012). Does this mean that the Left will now be unable to invest anything in the post-capitalist dramaturgy due to withering of its otherwise necessary creative imagination? Naturally, there are certain (theoretical) left-wing scenarios on potential forms of post-capitalism (Mason 2015, Kouvelakis 2008, Srnicek and Williams, 2015), with some being determined by a strain of techno-futurism that avoids confrontation with the structural determinations of capitalism, and the mechanisms of exploitation.⁵ In reality, some strands of left-wing thinking projected the end of the already-known capitalism, presenting it in a "de-totalized" form, many years ago, by predicting alternative forms of bifurcation of the form of capitalism already present in the here and now (Gibson-Graham 2005). In parallel to this, some left-wing thinkers have also already *re-addressed* the issue of the *ultimate* resilience of capitalism and its future (Streeck et al. 2016).

Therefore, enough elements existed for different scenarios to be played out. And this assertion challenges the paralyzing form of leftist melancholy. However, is it enough for the self-transformation of the Left? Will there be a post-capitalism without left-wing orientations? Can the Left have a powerful impact on the development of post-capitalist concepts? This would certainly represent a historical fiasco for the Left.

We have already mentioned that the crisis is an undetermined process, which means that there are possible events that yet prove to be a surprise. No one expected Jeremy Corbyn to become the

⁵ These endeavours deserve critique, see, the problematization of the synthesis between basic income and futuristic techno-conceptions (Pitt, Lombardozi and Warner 2017), or refer to the phrase "the mainstreamization of critiquing capitalism" by the Left (Monticelli, 2018).

leader of the Labour Party, or the development of “Corbynism”⁶ nor Bernie Sanders to gain such a level of support in the USA and to intensify the interest for socialism there. Persistence of the latest forms of “French insurgency”, namely, unexpected and impressive continuities of struggles (which have challenged certain “routine-biased” tactics of the Left by promoting, for example, the innovative and militant forms of “occupying roundabouts”, see the analysis of Kouvélakis 2019) of the Yellow Vest movement represent *contingent* phenomena. They pose many dilemmas about the relationship between tactics and strategy, about subjects that participated in several months of struggles, and about the self-defining of the Left, which should be aware of the facts in regard to the manner in which certain forms of collective identity are created by struggle.

However, the question remains as to how similar tendencies can compensate the deep inconveniencies caused by the collapse of left-wing governance in Latin America (for the bitter diagnosis, see Gonzalez 2019), many recurring defeats of Syriza in Greece and defeats of “anti-systemic movements” (I. Wallerstein) which, at the same time, threaten the conceptualization of the imperative that has been long emphasized, that is, the formation of the *Global Left* or the articulation of an adequate performance of the Left in terms of scale, all over again. Namely, the Left really has come to power in certain situations during the crisis and has experienced sharpened contradictions of the commonality of “Left-determined politics” and “remaining structures of capitalist state” (Panitch and Gindin, 2017, 53⁷), namely, the contradiction of parliamentary-biased translation of Left-projected reforms, or the ambiguity of leftist seizure of power in the context of capitalism.

There are different strategies of the Left in relation to capitalism, with complex configurations existing between them. Eric Olin Wright enumerates five strategies with diverse implications: “smashing, dismantling, taming, resisting, and escaping capitalism” (Wright 2018). This classification reflects the history and present of

⁶ We do not wish to exaggerate the radicalism of Corbynism, but it does deserve attention (Bolton and Pitts 2018, 46).

⁷ At the same time, the Left was unable to avoid the recuperation of power: “You can refuse to take power, but then it will take you” (Bensaïd 1997).

the Left, and its dilemmas as well. It should provide strategic and tactical scenarios considering the multidimensional relationships across the multifaceted field of opportunities. In fact, it should affirm its (eventual) strength under historically presented conditions within a concrete analysis. Such an analysis is necessary if it is able to articulate the needs of those social entities that care about transforming capitalism, and challenging the existing forms of stabilizing the existing regimes of inequalities; put simply, it is necessary if it can offer channels for the different struggles and frame them in the context of structural contradictions to capitalism. left-wing orientation should act as an interlocutor of emancipatory energy and a catalyst of an emancipatory way-of-thinking if it is to act in the name of freedom and equality.

The crisis is an objective-subjective process that opens up a new cycle of struggle, which represents the field of reflections for the Left to take into consideration. At present, the Left is affected by *two crises* between which there is an interpenetration of different elements. Structural determinations of capitalism represent the *objective* conditions of the Left: strategic readiness, reflexive learning, openness to empirical wealth of different struggles represent *subjective* results of the Left, and these are nowadays measured. The idiosyncrasy of the present moment for the Left is the fact that it has not yet recovered from the Great Recession, but still must be ready for the (next) upcoming crisis.

The aforementioned issue pertaining to planning is but one example – albeit an extremely *paradigmatic* one – of how the Left is again faced by *political-economic issues* in terms of dilemma. The aforementioned issue of planning is not discussed here as a reductive-technical issue, but rather as a set of political-economic matters that entail and problematize citizens' participation. In addition, the Left should *at least* oppose the "culturalization" of conflicts in capitalism (Rasmussen 2018) and understand the *political-economic structure* of the same conflicts, that is, the *structure of power*. This would imply that, at a minimum, new syntheses between biopolitical (Hannah 2011) and class perspectives should be developed. A rejection of the "cultural war" as the "last determination of capitalism", or persistent resistance to "culturalization" of antagonism in capitalism that the right-wing orientations (Trump,

Pegida, Le Pen, Wilders' Party, etc.) promote in their intensive "politics of fear" of migrants or others, should also be called for. The Left should be concerned with the far-reaching rehabilitation of the "anatomical" political-economic logic, which is to be used in an analysis of the *structure of capitalism*: it is of crucial importance that a misuse of "cultural battles" to hide the structural dimensions of conflicts in capitalism is proven. This does not mean that the Left shall give up culture as a field of struggle and articulation, but rather it should consider the substantive power-domination-fix inherent to capitalism, and avoid making compromises regarding the structural dimensions of the power. In being subordinated to the culturalization of conflicts, the Left excludes itself from the post-capitalist design.

To sum up: In today's antinomical circumstances, the paths of the Left remain uncertain. In other words, there is a radical uncertainty regarding its self-transformation. Its identity within the recent configuration of capitalism is not guaranteed. Certain leftists see the reflected experience of defeat as a peculiar chance, as a purgatory for self-transformation; but we should note the breaking-off of the complicated relationship between "defeat and change of the strategy" (Sotiris 2018) after 1989. A parliamentary presence does not guarantee that the Left has been able to struggle with its antinomies regarding its existence in capitalism. Its rise is just a pure possibility. Dilemmas that determine it in today's crisis occur in an intensified manner. Therefore, self-reconceptualization must remain a guiding principle for the Left. The Left needs to be re-invented if it is to continue to have a pretence of relevance. But, it will not remain relevant if it cannot change itself. This implies that the Left will try to learn from numerous experiments during the crisis on collective life organization, on seeking synthesis between "politics and protest", electoral success and extra-parliamentary struggles, as well as on new relationships between strategy and analysis, i.e. dialectics of reform and radicalization.

Finally, it indicates such "structural" reforms that involve a true transformation of the structure of capitalism. Many years ago ago, André Gorz suggested the concept of "non-reformist reform" (Gorz 1968, see especially Rooksby 2011, 2018, Caillé and Fourel 2013) that implied the aforementioned type of transformation of

capitalism. The distinction between “non-reformist” and “reformist-reform” leads to the deconstruction of the traditional dichotomy between revolution and reform, but also warns that such reforms, which are to be only a means and not the aim, should not reproduce the governing patterns of the (commodity-based) rationality of capitalism in the name of the Left. The Centre-Left (for instance in France during the period determined by the politics of François Hollande) developed exactly such a series of “non-structural” reforms, leading to the reforms themselves becoming the aim, without any progression in emancipation.

Many “extra-capitalist” impulses, “pre-figurative” effects, emerging “concrete utopian” aspirations in “interstitial spaces”, and anti-capitalist niches have been wasted; the Left failed to benefit from the dynamics of the protest cycle in adequate manner. There are deficits of the Left concerning the articulation of these impulses. The harsh criticism of Andreas Malm, regarding the (leftist) climate movement but, *ad analogiam*, directed at the Left as a whole, embodies the essence of this. Therefore, the Left “seemed to gain no momentum from the general turmoil: one could hope. But there are reasons to be pessimistic”, the Left has “distinguished itself [...] for the absence of [...] agenda” (Malm 2014, 39).

Conclusion

We have analysed the multi-faceted importance of the ambivalence towards the crisis for the situation of the Left. This includes the analysis of certain objective and subjective conditions, and the account of the interferences of two related crises (2007 and the upcoming crisis) for the Left. The crisis as an immanent phenomenon of capitalism opens up the possibility for the self-transformation of the Left, which is plausibly proven by a current prolonged crisis that has been deepened by the upcoming crisis. At the same time, the crises expose the asymmetric position of those leftist protagonists who would reject the platform of pseudo-reforms and aim to transform structural determinations of capitalism “from within”. This situation representatively highlights the antinomical position of the Left in capitalism, and explains its embeddedness

into the structure-agency-problem. In line with this, crisis has a *strategic* meaning (Gorz 1968) for the Left.

The Left has lost its certainties based on the traditional “teleology of emancipation”. It must concern the *structural* features of capitalism and re-appropriate its political-economic engagement. Besides, it is faced with new complexities introduced by experimental micro-struggles, “disordered coherence” of communal practices, and heterogeneous movements in different social locations that call for an inclusive approach, and care for the relevant issues of social reproduction. The Left has not yet effectively deconstructed the myth of the *trans*-historical existence of capitalism; it is (partly) fascinated by the “success of capitalism”, although the crises prove something else, namely the historicity of capitalism. “Radicalization of reforms”, and the search for the (fragile) balance between “parliament and street”, representation and “movementism”, the organization of parties,⁸ and fluctuated demands are aspects of the strategic benchmark for the Left in the context of unforeseeable conditions and opacity of future. Otherwise, the Left remains a problem, not a solution.

⁸ See the renewed debates, Walker, 2013.

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On the future of the Left: A global perspective

Abstract

The crisis of the Left has many reasons and causes, some of which are understandable in terms of classical rhetoric: ethos, pathos and logos. Yet this crisis has real causes not reducible to language and rhetoric alone. Attempts at “modernization” of social democracy have eroded hope, while the supposed Soviet legacy has continued to haunt the more “radical” Left movements and parties. Over time, collective memory shifts and political audience changes. The two recently most-successful leftist parties have emerged from social movements: Syriza and Podemos have consciously adopted left-wing populist stances. A problem is that the story of “people versus the dominant elite” loses part of its emotional appeal if the representatives of the “people” appear to be enmeshed with “elite” practices either in one’s own country or elsewhere. The fate of Syriza reveals also how difficult it is to make even a moderate and cautious turn toward the Left, unless there is a broader European or worldwide movement behind it. It is here further argued that there is no automatic or mechanical Polanyian “double movement”. Rather, world history depends also on agency. The discrepancy between territorial states and global capital is an obstacle that can be best overcome by globalizing democratic-socialist politics. It is argued that far from being exhausted as a project or in terms of pathos, a grand task awaits the Left. Social freedom can be increased. Obstacles can be removed. Existing global political economy contradictions and global problems can be resolved by means of rational collective actions and by the building of more adequate common institutions. An experimentalist leftist vision can inspire hope and optimism about our future possibilities.

Keywords: crisis, Left, Polanyian “double movement”, political agency

Introduction

■ The Left often talks about crises, but is arguably itself embroiled in a crisis at the beginning of the 2020s. Decades of neoliberalism have not led to a resurgence of the Left, except in a limited manner (more about these countertrends see below). Rather, in many places, the nationalist populist Right has seized ground from the mainstream parties and perhaps especially so from leftist parties. Mainstream politics has become fragmented and divisive. Processes of disintegration characterize European and global politics, as evidenced by Ukraine, Brexit, Trump, and the US-China trade war. Within the EU, right-wing national-populist forces have turned Poland and Hungary toward increasingly authoritarian governance, and the European Parliament has become more split and partitioned. In Erdoğan's Turkey, the failed 2016 coup attempt and its repressive aftermath have all but ended EU membership talks. Turkey is now on the brink of dictatorship, in spite of ongoing democratic resistance. Similar national-populist developments can be observed also elsewhere, for example in Brazil, Indonesia and the Philippines (Patomäki 2018).

It is in this geo-historical context that the COVID-19 crisis and its consequences have unfolded. A crisis is existential. It is a turning point in a process that can lead to a change in the existence, nature or identity of a community, organization or system. Etymologically, the term 'crisis' is linked to the word 'criticism': it suggests that there is a crucial turning point ahead. Criticism concerns the causes of the crisis, while the crisis provides also an opportunity to learn. This is the context within which the current crisis of the Left must be understood. The crisis of the Left has many intertwined reasons and causes, some of which are understandable in terms of the basic formula of classical rhetoric – *ethos* (character and credibility of the speaker), *pathos* (emotional framing of the issue), and *logos* (plausible reasoning, argument and demonstration). These distinctions were originally made by Aristotle in *The Art of Rhetoric* (1991), and remain useful also in the 21st century.

At the heart of the rhetoric of contemporary populism lies the idea of "people" as a morally good force, which is set against the "elite" described as a corrupt and self-serving group. This frames

the character and credibility of actors and gives emotional meaning to stories that explain problems and insecurities of everyday life in terms of the actions and policies of the “elite”. Attempts to turn populist categories and framings to support leftist causes (Laclau 2005) are not entirely without merit. But the crisis of the Left has also real causes not reducible to language and rhetoric (cf. the debate Laclau vs. Bhaskar 1998). The dispositions of the audience in modern capitalist market societies tend to evolve through the dynamics of political economy. Essential changes have occurred as a consequence of processes such as globalization and deindustrialization. Moreover, feasible and viable institutional and policy alternatives are unlikely to emerge from a mere analysis of rhetoric.

Ethos concerns the extent to which the speaker is able to convince the public that they are credible. Pathos, on the other hand, means appealing to emotions in a way that often involves some grandiosity and high-mindedness. However, pathos can at least as importantly stem from identification with the suffering of others. This requires identification marked by the pronoun “we”. And there are further possibilities. In part two of *Rhetoric*, Aristotle discusses a number of emotions that can be relevant in persuading the audience: anger, calm, friendship and enmity, fear and confidence, shame, favour, pity, envy and jealousy. A successful pathos requires the speaker to put their feelings into play, perhaps making the audience laugh and cry. The most important means to achieving an impression at the level of pathos is through a story resonating with the audience’s life experiences and taken-for-granted categories of everyday practice, however fragmented they may be (MacIntyre 2007; Ricoeur 1984). Our experiences are expressed and shared as stories. Words and deeds become understandable as parts of stories, including the character of actors and their actions, their vices and virtues. Local or small-scale stories acquire their full meaning through merging with grander stories that relate the life of an individual or community to larger processes.

Logos, in turn, refers to rational argumentation in contexts where uncertainty prevails, and claims are only to be deemed more or less plausible or probable. Well-informed plausible reasoning improves the speaker’s reliability and makes them look prepared and knowledgeable to the public. Nonetheless, the world is complex,

and attempts to understand and explain it can easily appear detached from the common-sense viewpoint involving immediate everyday categories and concerns. What the Left nonetheless needs is a systematic analysis of the processes conditioning the possibilities for democratic and emancipatory politics under the circumstances of the early 21st century, characterized by processes such as neoliberal globalization (verging already on de-globalization) and de-industrialization. Truth matters. It is not only that political programs must be designed accordingly, but better stories about politics and our place in the wider scheme of things must reflect our understanding of the obstacles to be removed and replaced by something better. In order to appeal at the level of ethos and pathos, the analysis must be related back to everyday experiences.

The character and credibility of the Left in the 21st century: The case of Finland

Although geo-historical experiences vary, and each leftist party has in its own way(s) a unique history, there are also broad directions around which these experiences tend to converge. Since the 1970s – following defeats such as those related to wage-earner funds in Sweden in the 1970s and to Mitterrand’s socialist program in France in the early 1980s – social democratic and socialist parties began to retreat from their more ambitious programs. As a result of these developments, the “Third Way” came to be redefined already in the 1980s and 1990s as a compromise between pure social democracy and neoliberalism, rather than as a third way between capitalism and communism (for discussions, see Ryner 2002; Patomäki 2000; 2003). What emerged was an attempt to “modernize” social democracy (e.g. Moschonas 2002) in a context where common sense incorporated a version of the Enlightenment belief in a progressive time, and where Margaret Thatcher and other market-oriented conservatives succeeded – even if only partially and paradoxically – in claiming the direction of “progress”.¹ This kind of “modernization” has eroded

¹ Anthony Giddens (1994) remarked that, for some two centuries, socialism was the keenest advocate of “progressivism”, which he defines as the notion that there is a direction to history and that political intervention can

hope; and without curiosity, hope and imagination, the inner motivation for social/democratic actions tends to weaken.

By 1989, the socialist and communist parties either started to follow suit, however reluctantly, or found themselves in a legitimization crisis (in the April 1989 elections in Poland, the Communist Party lost every single seat contested in the Parliament). The Left Alliance in Finland exemplifies these tendencies. It was founded in 1990 to succeed the Finnish People's Democratic League (known as SKDL), which included the Communist Party of Finland. In elections between 1945 and 1966, the SKDL gained more than 20% of votes, and in 1966 SDP and SKDL formed a majority in the parliament, but by 1987 the SKDL share of votes was down to 9.7%. Moreover, the party split, with the two main sides becoming increasingly at loggerheads. The democratic majority of the party had long taken independent stances – for instance, the SKDL was the only party in Finland to condemn the Soviet occupation of Czechoslovakia in 1968 – and was consistently willing to work with the social democrats, whereas the Communist Party was usually loyal to the Soviet leadership, which in turn also supported the party financially (with the accumulated wealth of the party eventually being destroyed in financial speculation). The end and a new beginning came in 1990, when the Left Alliance was founded.

At the level of *ethos*, these kinds of historical developments continue to pose problems to many leftist parties in Europe and across the world. The problem for anyone speaking on behalf of a neoliberalized social democratic party is that the discipline of “free

help speed up the journey toward the desired end-point. Giddens was also among the first to see how Thatcherism captured the notion of progress as a particular response to the economic troubles in Britain in the 1970s, following an era of constructing a democratic welfare state. A key paradox here is that neoliberal intellectuals such as Milton Friedman and Friedrich Hayek were essentially conservatives and advocated a return to what they considered pure classical economic liberalism. “We neither can wish nor possess the power to go back to the reality of the nineteenth century, [however], we have the opportunity to realize its ideals” (Hayek 1944: 240). It is also noteworthy that due to manifold 20th-century twists and turns in the dominant conception of time (from the catastrophe of the First World War to the postmodernism of the 1980s and 1990s), what remained was a techno-commercial version of the belief in linear progressive time that is quite different from the 18th or 19th century metaphysics of improvements and progress (Patomäki 2009: 432-6).

markets” tends to undermine the legitimization principles and industrial relations presupposed by social democracy. In political rhetoric, this contradiction translates easily into a problem of perceived lack of moral character and credibility. Meanwhile, the supposed legacy of the Soviet Union has continued to haunt the more ‘radical’ Left movements and parties, in spite of the fact that a number of Marxian intellectuals, movements and parties had already placed themselves at a critical distance from the practices of Soviet Marxism-Leninism as early as the 1920s and 1930s (with a new round of critical distance-taking occurring after the scale of Stalin’s terror was revealed in the 1950s).² It is also true, however, that many Marxists and communists – including public intellectuals such as Samir Amin and Jean-Paul Sartre – continued to rationalize variations of the really existing state-socialism well into the 1980s, and even beyond.

The Finnish Left Alliance exhibits all these ambiguities in a curious mixture. An alliance of various pre-existing elements of the ‘radical’ Left, the program it adopted in its founding meeting is essentially social democratic. It took part in the coalition governments of Paavo Lipponen (1995-1999 and 1999-2003), consolidating the process of neoliberalization in Finland (the story is told in Patomäki 2007: esp. Chapter 4). As a result, the party was split, with those most critical of the policies of Lipponen’s governments (involving cuts in social expenditure, privatizations etc.) being typically those who had been affiliated with the Communist Party in the 1970s and 1980s. The ambiguity was deep and ironic: those most loyal to social democratic ideals lacked credibility among a wider audience because of their past association with the CPSU, while those allowing for neoliberal ‘reforms’ risked losing credibility in relation to fundamental leftist values such as social justice and democracy. Moreover, recurrent attempts to foster unity by means of internal repression and exclusions worsened the situation, and further undermined credibility. Similar developments occurred

² For instance, Habermas (1987: 116) summarizes the early history of the Frankfurt School: “Critical Theory was initially developed in Horkheimer’s circle to think through political disappointments at the absence of revolution in the West, the development of Stalinism in Soviet Russia, and the victory of fascism in Germany. It was supposed to explain mistaken Marxist prognoses, but without breaking Marxist intentions.”

again in 2011-2013 when the Left Alliance participated in Jyrki Katainen's (conservative) coalition government. In 2019, the party joined Antti Rinne's (SDP) coalition government (in the wake of a postal strike, Sanna Marin became prime minister on 8 December 2019).

Over time, collective memory shifts. With new generations, the composition of an audience also changes. Old memories become blurred, and new layers of memories evolve. Thereby also the conditions of credibility change. Like many other similar leftist parties in Europe and elsewhere, the Finnish Left Alliance advocates red-green ideas and culturally liberal values (representing 'postmaterial values' in terms of Inglehart 1977; 2018). In that regard it competes not only with the social democrats but also with the Greens. Meanwhile it has lost a large part of its traditional working class voter base. Blue collar workers form an ever-decreasing proportion of the workforce, and, moreover, many of the remaining members of this demographic have moved ideologically toward populist nationalism. Surveys indicate that a majority of unemployed also place greater trust in the Finns Party than the social democrats or the Left Alliance. Especially in larger towns, the Left Alliance has become a party associated with young educated females. Social policy, identity politics and green issues have become the main focus of the party. Popular assessments of the moral character of the party and its representatives continue to be affected by the party's ambiguous past, but in gradually altering ways. In spite of manifold changes both within and in the overall context, the Left Alliance's popularity has remained at the relatively low level of 7-9%, and its potential voters are confined to those close to its ideas (i.e. voters of social democrats and Greens). It is not geared up to lead national politics.

The role of emotions and populist pathos

Electoral speaking, the most successful leftist parties have recently emerged from social movements and various party fragments. Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain were formed in this way, and gained wide popularity during the euro crisis of 2010-2015. Syriza was formed in 2004 as a coalition of several parties

and left-wing groups. It rose to a broader awareness with the euro crisis, and won the parliamentary elections in January 2015 in Greece with a near-majority of parliamentary seats (149/300). Podemos was founded in the aftermath of extensive demonstrations in 2014 and succeeded in gathering 350,000 members in a short period of time and gaining 25% support in Spain. Both have exploited the populist idea of ‘people’ as a morally good force versus the corrupt ‘elite’. One of the essences of populist politics is that it is rhetorically capable of uniting a wide range of people and groups to resist a common enemy. The goal is to constitute a ‘people’ that can be set against the ‘dominant elite’. This was not difficult in Greece or Spain during the high point of the economic crisis: Troika and the old parties were the elite, austerity the main enemy.

As new parties, Syriza and Podemos did not carry the historical baggage of the past (moreover, the recent pasts of both of these countries involved right-wing military dictatorships). They were anchored in civil society and spontaneous political movements, which rose to oppose the EU and the Troika’s austerity policy. Both parties were consciously left-populist, but in a way that is in part based on reflexive political theories developed in the academic world. As Dan Hancox explains in an article published in *The Guardian*:

Syriza built its political coalition in exactly the way Laclau prescribed in his key 2005 book *On Populist Reason* – as Essex professor David Howarth puts it, “binding together different demands by focusing on their opposition to a common enemy” (Hancox 2015).

The *raison d’être* of *pathos* is to induce a sentiment and judgement about what must be done and what must be changed. The two most successful European leftist parties of the 2010s were thus able to give emotional meaning to stories explaining problems and insecurities of everyday life in terms of the actions and policies of the “elite”. But in both cases the success was short-lived. Syriza’s attempt to persuade EU leaders as to the irrationality of the rules of the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU), austerity policy and privatization failed (the story is told in great and illuminating detail by Varoufakis 2017; the EU leaders were stuck to the rules). In a

sudden turn, as in a classical tragedy, amidst a deep economic crisis Alexis Tsipras ignored the results of the Greek referendum and surrendered to the Troika. Yanis Varoufakis resigned, and soon the party was split. Syriza and Tsipras remained in power after the September 2015 elections, but from that point on they started to implement the program of their former “enemy”. In the July 2019 elections, Syriza lost to the centre-right New Democracy party, although it was able to secure its position as the main opposition party with 23.8% of the votes.

In a remarkable feat at the Spanish election in December 2015, Podemos achieved 20.65% of the vote and became the third largest party in the Spanish parliament. And yet it could have fared even better without the July 2015 debacle in Greece, on the one hand, and alleged connections, especially with Venezuela, on the other.³ Rather than being inspired merely by Laclau and political theory, Podemos had also connections with the leftist-populist governments in Latin America. A significant proportion of the funding for their TV broadcasts and 2015 electoral campaign came from consultancy work for those governments (Badcock 2015). Although a lack of funding is a major problem for any new party, and although Podemos has been strongly anti-corruption, these kinds of connections were widely perceived as a problem of moral character. The “people” versus the “dominant elite” story loses part of its emotional appeal if the representatives of the “people” appear to be enmeshed with “elite” practices either in one’s own country or elsewhere. Nicolás Maduro’s Venezuela is unlikely to be an appealing target destination for the direction to be taken in Spain or any other European country. Also the escalation of the conflict in Catalonia has complicated things for Podemos. It is the only Spain-wide party that favours a referendum on self-determination in Catalonia, straining its relationship with the Socialists and many voters. Internal quarrels have further weakened Podemos’s appeal. At the

³ Wikipedia reports that the party lost much support in the polls during the final months of 2015 when elections were approaching (sinking to 13%), whereas during the election campaign it experienced a huge rise in support in the polls – of up to 20% of the vote – just days before the election, still falling short of earlier figures in polls, however, which were close to 28%.

general election in April 2019, it lost 29 seats in the parliament, and a further 7 at the general elections in November the same year.

Populism also has limits on its own normative terms. The identity politics of recent decades have often been about defining friends and enemies, albeit mostly peacefully, or at least non-violently. From a democratic leftist perspective, this can be interpreted in the spirit of Laclau and Mouffe in terms of agonist politics, in which the adversary and the enemy and their existence are also respected, allowing for democracy, not just confrontation. However, the only confrontation of populist rhetoric is not between the “people” and the “elites”. Experience also shows that Right-wing populism and the Left can relatively easily fall into the same steep confrontation. The line between agonistic and antagonistic politics is thin, and populist identity politics have repeatedly amounted to mere hate speech/writing upon social media. Moreover, this possibility has been systematically exploited by many right-wing nationalist-populist groups, organizations and states.

There are obvious alternatives, but not without problems of their own. Whereas Syriza and Podemos emerged with the promise of something radically new – of reforming politics itself in addition to opposing austerity, etc. – the established leftist parties have usually resorted to defending and trying to renew the achievements of social democracy. Given the way political concepts remain temporally organized in the 2010s and 2020s, this boils down to a past-oriented political rhetoric. Jeremy Corbyn’s Labour in the UK and Bernie Sanders’s case for socialism in the US rely on this kind of framing of the political situation and possibilities. After decades of neoliberalism and rising inequalities in both countries, the younger generations have started to find the idea of national social democracy (with a dose of leftist internationalism) attractive. Following on from spontaneous protests – “we are the 99%” – and turning toward concrete policies and institutional proposals, the more leftist Democrats – similarly to the supporters of Corbyn’s Labour – have often turned their eyes to the achievements of the universalist social democracy in the Nordic countries. The problem is that they have not paid sufficient attention to the causes of the decline of social democracy and rise of neoliberalism in Sweden, Finland, Norway and Denmark. The idea that emancipatory, globally oriented

political action is a condition for anything resembling the Nordic ideals and ambitions to be realized and further developed under new conditions was already being argued two decades ago (Patomäki 2000).

Even though something like Laclau's theory of populism might well help to increase popularity and build a wide coalition, it does not guarantee a successful government or economic policy, let alone an ability to change EU or global policies. While Laclau's theory is liable to over-politicizing everything, it also tends to see everything in terms of discourse. In a well-known debate with Roy Bhaskar in 1998, Laclau struggled to systematically explain how different causal mechanisms and processes produce effects in the open systems of nature and society. It is impossible to conduct a good and successful economic policy unless one has an adequate understanding of how political economy mechanisms and processes work. An inability to identify those real constraints that a (small) EU member state faces, both in the EU and in the intertwined world economy, may be equally fatal for any left-wing political project.

Logos as rational understanding of the situation: Some preliminary considerations

The fate of Syriza reveals how difficult it is to make even a moderate and cautious turn towards a more social-democratic direction (not to mention more ambitious goals) unless there is a broader transnational, European or worldwide movement behind it. Many citizens across the globe have become disillusioned by national politics. The latest rounds of globalization have contributed to the appearance of a post-democratic bent among many national parties (Crouch 2004). This has given real grounds for 'people' vs. 'elite' framings. Syriza's fate was not simply an example of how Michels's law of oligarchy works. More importantly, the Greek debacle of summer 2015 is an illustration of the power of creditors over debtors in the world economy and the lack of equitable rule of law in worldwide financial relations. Since the early 1980s, a large number of countries in the global south have gone through similar experiences. These experiences are precisely what gave rise to global

debt campaigns in the 1980s and 1990s (for an overview of the movement, see Reyes Tagle and Sehm-Patomäki 2007).

The feasibility of policies depends on trans- and supra-national power relations. This is a key reason for the future of the Left being bound to the ability to understand the broader context of political action. Taking Syriza and Podemos as models is short-sighted unless one can reflexively relate the conditions of one's own actions and successes to the constraints imposed by the processes and mechanisms of the EU and world economy (including systems of its governance). Will and power are connected (as explicated by Deutsch 1963). To have narrow power means that one does not have to give up, but can force others to do so. EU leaders and the IMF were capable of exercising narrow power over Greece. When such power exists, there is no need to learn. The position of EU decision-makers was simply that the Greek government must give up and retreat from its electoral program – and preferably organize a new referendum (unexpected result in July 2015) or election (succeeded in September 2015) – to cancel the mandate given to Syriza in January 2015 elections.

The narrow power of the EU leadership or organizations such as the IMF is not the only obstacle to successful leftist policy. From the point of view of economic policy, the essential totality is not the state but the world economy, of which the EU is but a part. The interdependence between the parts and the whole works, for example, through effective aggregate demand and the multiplier effect. A significant part of the impact of the expansionary economic policy flows abroad. This also applies to the EU as a whole, assuming that it would pursue its own fiscal policy. The difference is that, for most member states, the ratio of exports to GDP is 40-90%, but for the EU as a whole this figure stands at around 15%. Thus, a key problem is the absence of EU fiscal capacities. In the absence of systems that would ensure a sufficiently high level of actual demand for the goods and services produced, politico-economic developments tend to lead to overcapacity and unemployment. What matters is whether potential consumers and investors can afford to buy goods and services. Propensity to consume tends to fall as income increases. Therefore, effective demand also depends on income distribution.

It is up to public authorities to ensure full employment and to promote and direct investment and growth. The problem is that the more intertwined economic activities are, the wider the effects of state economic policy will spread. In addition, individual state actors always look at things from their own limited point of view, and often commit the fallacy of composition. The fallacy of composition generally stems from the assumption of what is possible for one is possible for all (or at least many) actors at the same time. For example, if many states try to move their economic problems abroad by increasing the volume of exports relative to imports through internal devaluation and competitiveness policies, their economic policies are contradictory, with the result tending to be detrimental to all (or at least most) of them. Our fates are irreversibly intertwined.

Keynes (1969) argued that the world economy is characterized by contradictions in trade and finance that can – and must – be overcome by better common institutions (see Markwell 2006). In the absence of adequate common institutions, and faced by the fear of a spiral of downward developments, states tend to engage in counterproductive policies that are aimed toward at maximizing economic growth through competitiveness. ‘Differences in competitive power, whatever their origin, [can easily] set up a spiral of divergence’ (Robinson 1980: 39). Short-sighted and contradictory methods of responding to problems of the world economy are both the cause and effect of additional problems. The process tends to reinforce itself, partly because dynamics lead to political changes within and across states, often deepening and entrenching myopic self-regarding orientations. In the context of re-territorialized competition between states, super-states and blocs, the dynamics of the system can thus lead to securitization, enemy-construction, new alliances and an arms race. The paradox of (neo)liberal globalization is that, in the end, it will instigate the closing of the mind and borders. The de-globalization triggered by the COVID-19 crisis is historically deeply rooted in these processes.

Many leftist movements and parties have favoured sovereign-state-based policies and institutional arrangements. A number of leftist scholars have focused on revealing “the myths” of

globalization and exposing the ways in which they have been mobilized for specific political purposes. This critical project can take a variety of forms. A careful look at recent developments shows that there is, in fact, a variety of capitalisms that can be successful (Hall & Soskice 2001; Clark 2016). What is needed is smart globalization, not hyper-globalization (Rodrik 2011). The state can be reclaimed and the social-democratic project resuscitated. The state is more autonomous than usually assumed, although the full realization of its sovereignty may require institutional changes, for instance exit from the eurozone. On the other hand, even those committed to ethical cosmopolitanism may start to see such an exit as the only option in the face of supranational powers-that-be. For example, in spring 2015 Varoufakis and James K. Galbraith started to prepare for a Greek exit from the euro, as nothing else seemed to help (reported in Galbraith 2016). This attempt ended abruptly with the result of the July 2015 referendum.

Currently perhaps the most popular variant of this autonomy thesis is based on Modern Monetary Theory (MMT; for a popular introduction, Wray 2012) and the idea of monetary sovereignty (Mitchell & Fazi 2017). This claims that if a state can finance its expenditures in its own currency, it faces no budgetary constraint in normal situations. States are sovereign, or at least they would be, if they were to emancipate themselves, at least to a sufficient degree, from the 'self-imposed' constraints now operating through various international organizations and legal arrangements. Austerity is not only irrational; it is also unnecessary. A central claim of MMT is that valid money is state-authorized and essentially related to its capacity to tax. Assuming a system of floating exchange rates, a government that is sovereign in monetary terms – that has its own currency and central bank – can, and should, use fiscal policy to achieve full employment, creating new money to fund governmental expenditure. A government that has the power to create its own money cannot default on debt denominated in its own currency. The power of transnational ideas, international organizations and international law that currently determine states' public policy are, according to MMT, obstacles that can be removed.

It is beyond the scope of the current paper to go into the details of this theory and its problems.⁴ Suffice it to say that MMT is right in claiming that a central bank can be used to finance public deficits more easily than is conventionally assumed (the unconventional monetary policies of Fed and ECB can be taken as proof of something similar to this, see e.g. Marcuzzo 2017). Nonetheless, viable economic policy cannot be built on merely on the capacities of a national central bank. A large portion of the impact of expansionary economic policy will be external. Differences in production capacities and competitive power cannot be reduced to fiscal spending alone. Current account deficits can cause problems. The world economy is tightly interconnected also at the level of investment and relationships relating to production. Moreover, although the quantitative theory of money has failed time and again to provide a general explanation of inflation, it does not necessarily follow that increasing public spending by creating money would not reduce trust in the economic policy of the state and give rise to inflation.

In open systems, the same phenomenon can be manifested as a result of different causal processes. For example, several post-Keynesians regard inflation as being an outcome of an unresolved distributional conflict, with such socio-economic conflicts

⁴ For a popular discussion on the MMT and its merits and problems, see Patomäki (2020). In contrast to what MMT purports, not all money is debt and not all debt is money (except by way of tautologically defining money as debt and vice versa, however counter-intuitively). The acceptance of something as money is a matter of social positioning, and, amongst other things, requires trust, which is always a matter of degree (Lawson 2018; 2019: Chapter 6, "The positioning and credit theories of money compared"). Moreover, although the quantity theory of money is wrong, and although state finances are not as such dependent on (international) bond markets, it is not true that there is no budgetary constraint until the level of full employment of all resources is reached. Existing resources are never fully in use; and in a world of continuous and nested, looped and overlapping processes, forces of production are changing all the time. It is these dynamics that matter (e.g. Kaldor 1972). Moreover, in an interdependent economy with many sectors and complex input-output relations (often spanning the globe), local bottleneck sectors are likely to emerge, starting to speed up inflation. The inflationary process is historical and path-dependent, and evolves through the interdependence of different sectors and positionings in the world economy. It is also related to and affected by habits, class structures, trust and legitimacy (Shaikh 2016: Chapter 15). Thus "central bankers must always have Argentinas on their minds" (ibid.: 690).

usually being seen as conditioned by the institutional context (e.g. Burdekin and Burkett 1996). In an open social system, any concrete inflationary process is path-dependent, and evolves through the interdependence of different sectors, actors and policies. In many situations, the problem of inflation could best be solved through new institutional arrangements, such as democratizing the 'economic' (on the implications of reflexivity, see Patomäki 2019b). In addition, the problem of instability of global finance does not go away just by increasing the degree of national monetary autonomy. Finally yet importantly, a sovereignty-centred leftist project could also co-contribute to the closing of minds and borders, over time giving rise to import-substituting strategies and similar tendencies. This closing can have cumulative and potentially fateful consequences, due to the interconnectedness of global political economy.

The future of the Left and the global Double movement

A possible way of making sense of many of recent politico-economic developments is through Karl Polanyi's (1957) thesis about a historical 'double movement'. In his *Great Transformation*, Polanyi argued that the 18th and 19th century construction of a self-regulating market led to (often anxious) political responses advocating social self-protection and decommodification. The self-regulating market has social effects that evoke society to protect and reassert itself against the commodification of land, labour, social relations, and many natural things. One of the possible syntheses of a variety of related responses led to the development of the democratic welfare state, which constituted a historical novelty. It re-embedded markets in social relations and ethico-political considerations, and decommodified aspects of society (e.g. health and education), but by a different method than had previously been witnessed with the mediaeval guilds or the absolutism of the mercantilist state.

The process of developing democratic welfare states continued for several decades. Relatively soon, however, the twin processes of economic globalization and neoliberalization started to fashion a new round of the 'first movement'. A new process of commodification and extension of self-regulating markets began to gain

strength. Assuming that Polanyi's scheme holds true also in the 21st century, we should expect society to rise once again to protect itself from the present-day version of the 'stark utopia' of self-regulating markets. During the process, the relevant spatial scale has changed (in the 1940s, the world economy was in an exceptional state of disintegration as a result of the dual catastrophes of the Great Depression and the Second World War). The most plausible explanation for the rise of neoliberalism is that it emerged from the discrepancy between the world of territorial states and spaces of the globalizing capitalist market economy, and became a self-reinforcing process.

The global 'first movement' started with the collapse of the Bretton Woods system in the early 1970s. The absence of adequate common global institutions set the context for the unilateral decision of the Nixon regime to set the US dollar on a floating exchange rate system and to deregulate finance. Other standard explanations of the change of the era include: (i) a turn to 'modern' free-market economics was a 'rational' response to the problems caused by Keynesianism such as inflation (mainstream economics); (ii) changes in the relationships of production toward post-Fordism led to neoliberal globalization (French regulation school); (iii) neoliberalism is an attempt to restore the position of upper classes (David Harvey); (iv) neoliberalism is an attempt to restore the position of the US and the UK in the world economy (Peter Gowan). None of the standard explanations is categorically wrong, but each covers only limited aspects of the causal complex.

As there are many different economic theories, why was the standard neoclassical framing and response to inflation and unemployment adopted so widely? For example, many post-Keynesians had anticipated the problem of inflation decades before it actually occurred. 'Post-Fordism' is more a result of neoliberalization than its cause, although it is not reducible to it (and also information technologies, globalization, etc. matter). Growing inequality is in part a result of neoliberal economics and has clearly motivated some actors, and yet the Lockean (capitalist) sense of justice has always been a part of the capitalist market society. While the US and the UK have been active players, the key choices – although alternative paths could have been taken – have been structurally conditioned.

The explanatory hypothesis presented here is that the general tendency towards the prevalence of free market orthodoxy becomes stronger when: (1) the economic developments seem favourable in the world economy, i.e. when there is stable growth and high employment, at least in the centres of the world economy, and inflation is increasingly seen as the main problem (and thus demands for monetarism and for financial de-regulation and liberalization, etc., arise); and (2) the position of private capital becomes more secure in terms of structural power and/or political positioning. The key condition explaining the shift toward more secure capital concerns the discrepancy between (a) the limited reach of territorial states and (b) an increasingly open liberal world economy. The origins of neoliberalization lie in the struggles over income distribution, competitiveness and power in the context of this growing discrepancy.⁵

Already in the 1960s and 1970s, some actors had begun to exploit this discrepancy in struggles over income distribution and power. As this project has succeeded in transforming national, European and global institutions, it has further deepened and consolidated the underlying discrepancy. For the Left, this discrepancy is an obstacle that must be overcome; and it can be best overcome by globalizing democratic-socialist politics. While the first Polanyian double movement was instituted through the modern national states, the first phase of the new 'double movement' has thus far been largely realized via systems of regional and global governance. Will the second phase be equally globalist? This raises the question of transformative agency. Robert Cox wrote in 1996:

[...] a protective response at the level of global society has yet to take form. Yet the elements of opposition to the socially disruptive consequences of globalization are visible. The question remains open as to what forms these may take, as to whether and how they may become more coherent and more powerful, so that historical thesis and antithesis may lead to a new synthesis. (Cox 1996: 528)

⁵ For more details, Patomäki 2008: Chapters 5 and 6.

Following the rise of a global civil society and alter-globalization movement in the 1990s, the turn of the new century saw the creation of a self-consciously political expression of global civil society in the form of the World Social Forum (WSF), inaugurated in June 2001 with an international meeting of 12,000 activists in Porto Alegre, Brazil. This was a critical response to the World Economic Forum (Davos). The logic was the same as in Polanyi's 'double movement': from a self-regulating market to the protection and development of the social. In the years that followed, such global meetings grew larger, and regional meetings were spawned, providing a rolling series of vital platforms for interchange and networking among diverse civil society actors. However, the WSF has suffered from an internal contradiction between its promise to facilitate the transition to a better world and its central organizing principle of simply providing an open space. Political agency requires transformative capacity, which a mere open space for discourse lacks. Because the WSF has remained hesitant to move into the realm of action, interest has waned, leaving the WSF's future fragile and uncertain – and increasingly confined to Brazil. In 2019, with the rise of Jair Bolsonaro and his proto-fascist regime in Brazil, the WSF seems all but finished. While it continues to exist, with the next WSF being set to take place in Mexico in 2021, the enthusiasm is gone (the 2021 WSF was eventually organised only virtually).

Even when there is a need and opportunity for something, 'whether or not [the actors] take it is up to them' (Cox 1996: 533). What is more, there are also limits to understanding history through the basic Polanyian scheme (more detailed discussion in Patomäki 2014). Because of Polanyi's highly idealized and abstract concept of the market, his lumping together of all forms of 'social protection', even when the protection may serve the purposes of, say, large landowners' specific interests or militarist nationalism, was somewhat misleading. The curtailing of the market may also coincide with an assault upon the rules, customs and institutions that protect labour rights, as in Nazi Germany or Soviet Russia. Contra Polanyi, it is also possible that an enlightened capitalist may realize that healthy, highly skilled and motivated workers are better for production than miserable slum dwellers with barely any substantial know-how or skills (in the OECD world, the

latter have been largely replaced by machinery). In other words, there is no singular 'thesis → antithesis → synthesis' movement. Rather, the reality involves complex multi-path developmental processes that can be interwoven or contradictory in numerous ways. Also for this reason it is thus clear that the new double movement will not come about semi-automatically, but can only be realized through transformative praxis. The argument here is that the future of the Left is dependent on whether it can develop this kind of global transformative praxis: the process that began in the 1990s may well take several decades.

The new 'great transformation' of remaking the market society is spatially more extended and institutionally more entrenched than in the 19th century. An unprecedented way of seeing and constituting society as a market – understood through the categories of neoclassical economics, rational choice theory and business studies – has not only become prevalent but is now largely taken for granted in numerous everyday practices. Interpretations of episodes such as Brexit and the rise of Donald Trump to the US presidency in terms of the double movement are thus problematic: it is not evident that populist–nationalist movements and parties in Europe or elsewhere are trying to protect themselves 'from the predatory nature of market fundamentalism' (Pettifor 2017: 127), but rather, many, perhaps most, of these movements and parties have adopted market fundamentalism as part of their platform, albeit in a somewhat ambiguous manner. Largely as a consequence of the rise of Trump, 'a lack of consensus even on what a liberal order is' has emerged (Leonard 2017). There is a growing perception and global commentary that the era of Western liberal dominance is ending, and that a post-Western world order is dawning. At the same time, to the extent that a Polanyian double movement is in motion, right-wing ideological manifestations are increasing in dominance, and may be paving the way not only to trade wars, but also to a global repetition of the 20th century catastrophes.

Socialism and the rational tendential direction of World history in the 21st century

Leaving the sphere of intimacy aside, in capitalist market society where marketization prevails, people relate to one another instrumentally (as means to other ends such as profits), through the commodity form and by buying or selling labour power, which is the basis of relations of power within the firm, and in work-related organizations more generally. Socialism started to lose its power to inspire when it accepted marketization – even if only in a qualified form – as a desirable (or at least necessary) direction under the current circumstances, including the collapse of ‘true’ state socialism, economic globalization, decreasing numbers of blue collar voters, increased consumerism and the prevalence of individualism. Especially within the OECD world, GDP growth has slowed down, while the overall developments have primarily benefitted the wealthiest. Alternative indicators tell us that GDP is becoming increasingly disconnected from sustainable welfare or wellbeing. Unemployment has of late been, on average, higher than it was during the social democratic (and state socialist) era, and conditions of employment have become ever-more precarious (Patomäki 2018).

A sense of disillusionment and hopelessness is widespread. The more deeply the world has become neoliberalized, the more commonsensical neoliberalism has become. The language of everyday practices at home, school and the workplace borrows increasingly from the prevailing discourses of corporations and media, even if sometimes only ironically. Overwhelming evidence seems to support the idea that neoliberalism is ‘the only game in town’. It has become a culture that is being reproduced through self-fulfilling expectations.⁶ In this process, actors increasingly lock

⁶ The idea of culture as a self-fulfilling prophecy is that actors act on the basis of beliefs they have about their environment and others, which tends to reproduce those beliefs and mutual expectations. From a sociological perspective, the most interesting situation is one in which the self-fulfilling prophecy is, in the beginning, a false definition of the situation but evokes a new behaviour which makes the originally false conception come true (Merton 1948: 195). Ethnic and racial prejudices provide a good example of this: The belief that others (members of some out-group) are inferior or untrustworthy sustains practices of exclusion and/or unequal treatment that tend to reproduce the expected qualities and provide

themselves into particular epistemic positions, which may also become constitutive of their mode of being and agency. Over time, this process may lead to pathological learning to the extent that it involves a reduction in collective learning capacity – less openness to surprises and discoveries – and a narrowing of power and hardening of the will (as briefly explained above).

In the course of this self-reinforcing process, various layers of illusion, such as narcissism of the collective memory (actors only see themselves and their own unique success or suffering in the mirror of history) and a Manichean dualism of good and evil (neoliberalism defines what is good and deviations from it are seen as approaching evil to a more or lesser degree), also begin to play an increasingly important role. Two things happen simultaneously. For a hardened neoliberal will, the more there are recurring problems and apparent threats as well as differences, resistance and conflicts, the more there are reasons to impose one's will – vision of a free, efficient and just market society – even against resistance. For the discontent masses, there remains the option of populist identity politics. Instead of hope, action is motivated by hatred of 'X', which is allegedly responsible for the current problems. 'X' denotes an abstract social position that can be filled in principle with anything (X could also be seen as an empty signifier). Whereas the basic populist antagonism faces off the 'people' and the 'elite', in contemporary 'developed' world contexts the guilty others and associated groups usually also include refugees, immigrants, Islamists, Greens and leftists, political and cultural elites, and the 'mainstream' media.

A sense of hopelessness should start to disappear once powerful reinterpretations of contemporary conditions demonstrate that alternatives do, in fact, exist. Syriza and Podemos have sought inspiration from left-wing populism in theory (Laclau) and in

evidence for the original belief. Similarly, many neoliberal practices and institutional arrangements are based on neoclassical economics, theories of rational and public choice, and related theories of organizations (e.g. New Public Management) that impose an economistic logic upon a variety social situations strongly encouraging (if not enforcing) behaviour in line with the atomistic and amoral logic of *homo economicus* that informs those theories in the first place. For discussions about the performative role of economics, see MacKenzie et.al. (2007).

practice (in Latin America). A number of leftist intellectuals have invoked Polanyi not only to explain what is happening but also to give reasons for being hopeful about a different future. The idea is that from Polanyi we know that society is bound to protect itself against the market; and it seems certain that one change will be followed by a different one. But this is very abstract. Expressed as a conviction in inevitable historical development or in mechanical metaphors such as the pendulum, the 'double movement' interpretation of the current conjuncture can all too easily be criticized as a mere dream or desire. The vision of MMT is more concrete, which is probably the reason for its gaining popularity among leftist politicians. It can be read as a concrete utopian exercise, aiming at pinpointing a real, but non-actualized, possibility inherent in modern capitalist states, thus inspiring grounded hope to inform emancipatory praxis (cf. Bhaskar 2010: 84). But it also has a utopian side: the power of the central bank to create money emerges almost as a kind of *deus ex machina* making national social democracy possible again. Paradoxically for a socialist vision, however, the good is equated with more money in a capitalist market society, even though this money is intended, first and foremost, for public spending.

If socialism is to regain its power to inspire, its fundamental principles and conceptions must be rearticulated in relation to the conditions of 21st century world politics and economy. Axel Honneth's *The Idea of Socialism* (2017) is a step in this direction. The concept of social freedom entails that individual freedoms can be made to coincide with the requirement of coexistence in solidarity. The idea is to free the human subjects as bearers of progress from dependencies and mere external negative determinations, and to enable them to reason freely and together on the subject of their aims in an autonomous manner. The question of how to best realize social freedom in various spheres of social life, including – and especially – the 'economic', can be based on experimentation with different combinations of institutional arrangements and mechanisms.

While we must fundamentally exclude any certainty about the final state of the process, 'we must welcome all proposals that are somehow committed to freeing producers from constraints and

dependencies, thus enabling them to view themselves as free contributors to the task of equally satisfying the needs of all members of society, a task that can only be fulfilled in reciprocity' (Honneth 2017, 69). However, in a functionally differentiated society, social freedoms do not concern only the historically separated field of the 'economy', but, just as importantly, also social freedoms both in the intimate sphere and in the processes of democratic will formation in the wider community. Political community can no longer be merely associated with the nation-state:

The socialist doctrine must therefore progress along with this tendency toward international interdependence by no longer respecting national borders in its experimental search for possibilities of expanding social freedom. And because, as we have seen, the initiative for such experimental explorations must somehow come from the democratic public sphere, this initiative would soon need to be transnationalized in order to be able to stand up to opposing international forces. (Honneth 2017, 100)

The key point is that any 'initiative would soon need to be transnationalized in order to be able to stand up to opposing international forces'. The wider context of situational experimentation with various possibilities of social organization concerns world politics and the governance of world economy. This wider context must be made conducive to experimentation and itself be democratized.⁷ As already argued, in practice it is difficult to make even a moderate and cautious turn towards a more social-democratic direction – not to mention more ambitious experimental goals – unless there is a broader transnational, European or worldwide movement behind it. There is no automatic or mechanical 'double movement'; instead, world history depends on agency, and this on a

⁷ Honneth notes that, given the prevailing consciousness and political economy dynamics, the progressive democratic socialist project is torn between avant-gardism (cosmopolitanism, disregarding many of the prevailing sentiments and identities) and populism (nationalism and various antagonisms, disregarding the real world-historical conditions of increasing social freedoms). He concludes that the democratic and socialist project must be organized on a global scale, but 'socialism must take local action where-ever possibilities for collective action are clearly visible' (ibid.: 103).

global (as opposed to local) scale. The discrepancy between territorial states and global capital is an obstacle that can be best overcome by globalizing democratic-socialist politics. And while, for example, MMT theorists are right in criticizing the orthodox economic theory and prevailing ideas about budgetary constraints, they tend to exaggerate the possibilities inherent in the national money-issuing powers of the central bank and downplay potentials for organizing similar powers on a European or global scale.

There is nothing inevitable in world history: it is both open-ended and dependent on agency. In a given situation, understood in terms of wide historical processes, there can nonetheless be a rational tendential direction: rational because there are good reasons for it, and tendential because some real forces have a capacity to take world history in that particular direction. Three elements of rationality constitute the tendential directionality of world history. The first is truth, involving criticism of falsehoods and attitudes that sustain falsehoods. The second concerns overcoming contradictions through collective action and common institutions, such as those identified by Keynes at the level of the world economy as a whole. Contradictions can be overcome by building adequate common institutions such as clearing unions or tax systems, but the emergent question – *Exactly what institutions would be most adequate?* – involves ethical and political considerations. Thus, the third element of rationality involves normative universalizability and our capacity to resolve social conflicts. The idea of social freedom belongs here, for the idea is that real freedom must be universalizable: everyone has equal concrete possibilities for realizing their aims and each person is, ideally, concerned with the self-realization of others for non-instrumental reasons.

Ethical and political learning concerns reasoning about social rules and principles. The more adequate the cognitive scheme of reasoning is for human cooperation and for resolving conflicts, the better it is. Normatively, a key consideration is the degree of generalizability – indicating acceptability and stability of judgements in differentiated and complex multi-actor contexts – and the related capacity for abstract role-taking. The self learns to assume the role and perspective of others. Higher-stage reasoning is more differentiated (implying a more nuanced understanding of social realities)

and more integrated (implying symmetry and consistence) than that of prior stages.⁸

Cosmopolitan democratic socialism is thus reliant on processes of moral learning, and social contexts can be made be more favourable to such learning. However, these remain fairly abstract notions. To inspire hope, transformative praxis has to be processual, developmental and directional, involving political programs specifying aims and concrete utopias. Its organizational forms must be compatible with these requirements; its means and ends must be consistent.

Conclusions

The basic thrust of the argument outlined in his chapter suggests (in terms of *pathos*) a political narrative. Far from being exhausted as a project, a grand task awaits the Left. Social freedom can be increased. Obstacles can be removed. Existing global political economy contradictions and global problems can be resolved by means of rational collective actions and by building more adequate common institutions. A learning process towards qualitative higher levels of reflexivity can help develop regional and global transformative agency. Thus, collective actions are likely to involve new forms of political agency such as global political parties (Patomäki 2011; 2019a). The Left must be bold and declare that there is a rational tendential direction of world history toward something akin to democratic global Keynesianism that, in turn, will enable processes of decommodification and new syntheses concerning the market/social nexus, in the spirit of social experimentation.

While it is true that the prevailing sentiments and identities and political economy dynamics support populist framings and

⁸ Here I am most indebted to Lawrence Kohlberg (1981), see especially Chapters “From Is to Ought: How to Commit the Naturalistic Fallacy and Get Away with It in the Study of Moral Development” and “The Claim to Moral Adequacy of a Highest Stage of Moral Judgment”. Kohlberg died in 1987, but subsequent research has largely confirmed, method-independently, the existence of a common scheme of development of moral reasoning and judgement, and related social perspective-taking, across a variety of cultural and politico-economic contexts.

antagonistic identity politics, it is also noteworthy that right-wing nationalist populism usually fails to attract younger generations, even when they lack hope and belief in the possibility of a better future. This indicates that there is room for further ethical and political learning. The idea of transformative global agency must make a wide rational appeal across different social classes: 'this is what is reasonable for us to do!'. In addition to the perceptions of shared risks on our small planet, and the acute sense of injustices and asymmetries of power, what is important is that there is also a positive – rational and tendential – direction. This is a left-wing vision that can inspire optimism and ambition about our future possibilities. To truly inspire hope, this vision must involve political programs specifying aims and concrete utopias (with both being subjected to critical debate). A series of feasible and compatible political economy reforms can be put together and forged into a strategy of democratic global Keynesian transformations. Some steps forward can also be achieved at the regional level, such as within the EU, and in specific functional areas.

It would be a mistake to conclude that, because developments are not smooth and linear, and because many developments seem regressive or chaotic, there is no rational tendential direction to world history. The main idea is that accumulation of relatively small ('quantitative') changes in specific areas can lead to ruptures and sudden transformations ('qualitative changes') in others, as issues and processes are linked. After reaching a critical point, changes favouring a particular direction can become mutually (self-)reinforcing, and this should also be their deliberate purpose. As a result one world-historical developmental path will come to be replaced by another. This will be the end of neoliberalism and its increasingly regressive and dangerous aftermath, and the beginning of something better, something that can *both* facilitate new emancipatory experiments pertaining to social freedom across a variety of social contexts *and* make out planetary future more sustainable.

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The rise and fall of the ordoliberal Left in Europe

Abstract

One of the most cherished myths of the 'Third Way' that remains in Britain and Europe is that social democracy had to change and embrace aspects of the neoliberal agenda because supply-side policy constraints laid out by the process of globalization and European integration were insurmountable. Similarly, in the wake of the global financial crisis and the eurozone crisis, this form of the Left embraced austerity, arguing that "There Is No Alternative" (TINA). Another, more sophisticated, branch of the Left looked at the EU as a field of socialist action for the implementation of a full-fledged Keynesian agenda. We challenge these false realisms. We argue that the neo-revisionist Third Way Left has failed on several counts, two of which are important for our purposes here. First, restructuring, and not just being constrained by the new contours of global and national capitalism, has always been an organic part of the supply-side. Second, by embracing the austerity agenda of ordoliberalism – a disciplinary form of neoliberalism put forth by German-Austrian intellectuals and policy-makers – that had been inserted into the EU Treaties by Germany, this (ordoliberal) Left lost its constituency and attractiveness, contributing directly to the rise of the xenophobic Right across Europe.

Keywords: Third Way, neoliberalism, ordoliberalism, Keynesianism, financialization/globalization

Introduction: Flawed realisms

■ For some time now, a well-informed argument has seen the convergence of the Third Way Blairite Left with the neoliberal Right buttressing supply-side economics as follows: the Left adopted all major policy tenets abiding by the constraints of capitalist restructuring and neoliberal globalization because, having no choice, it had to adapt; Keynesian policy instruments could no longer be operational at the nation-state level, hence the realistic adoption of the New Left programmatic agenda of 'rights' and 'freedoms', centred on the 'rule of law', 'promotion of competitive markets and healthy privatizations', 'flexible labour markets' and so on. In other words, social democrats in Britain and elsewhere pursued a sensible neo-revisionist path from the 1980s onwards, when they shifted their strategy from national Keynesianism to the embrace of the new constraints imposed by the new phase of financialized capitalism in Europe and the world. A landmark case in this respect was the famous U-turn of the French socialists in 1983, when Francois Mitterrand, unable to defend the Franc and compete with Germany in the EMS, had to devalue and abandon his nationalization program (Sassoon 1996, 534-71). The Italian Communist Party itself, one of the most precious laboratories of the radical Euro-communist Left in Europe, changed its name and identity in 1989-1991 not because of the collapse of 'really existing socialism' but because of the changing contours of capitalism at national, European and global levels (Fouskas 1998).

The global financial crisis, which trickled down to the euro-zone via the inter-connected transatlantic banking sector (Lapavistas et al. 2010, 1-35), caught the followers of this type of argument, including the reformed Third Way Left, by surprise. As long as the neoliberal financialized model of capitalism in Europe and the world was doing well, the Third Way Left faced no major problems. Once the crisis kicked in, blowing up the entire transatlantic financial system at its core, triggering one of the greatest systemic depressions in modern capitalism, Third Way politics and rhetoric lost their attractiveness. This happened not just because austerity cynically transferred the burden of the

crisis to the poor and the deprived, but also because it began to erode the class privileges and tax breaks of the middle classes, the real political and electoral base of this neo-centrist bi-partisan regime; and, indeed, every capitalist regime, as Marx pointed out long ago in his *The 18th Brumaire* (1852). The effects of the 2007-08 crisis were felt most strongly in the European periphery, as the European banking system of the core transferred its debt onto the taxpayers of Southern Europe and Ireland via a number of bailout agreements, imposing a bondage regime of austerity and discipline unparalleled in the history of the EU (Fouskas and Dimoulas 2012; Fouskas and Dimoulas 2013). As a consequence, large social strata, failing to find expression in the neoliberal Left and hit by austerity, turned to the radical and xenophobic Right, although in some cases (namely Greece and Spain) they extended support to the radical Left. However, the trend of supporting extreme right-wing movements and parties has been much stronger, and is exacerbated by new migration flows coming into Europe from the war zones of the broader Middle East and Central Asia.

Despite the havoc inflicted on societies by the crisis of neoliberal globalization and European integration, one branch of the Third Way Left continues to subscribe to the main tenets of neoliberalism and its harsh austerity policy, seen as the only way out of the crisis. This branch of the Left has participated in government as a reformist force of the capitalist market, serving the needs of neoliberal globalization and the extraction of financial profits, thereby contributing to the creation of the financial bubble just as much as the neoliberal Right.

However, another more sophisticated branch of the Left, at times drawing from the tradition of Euro-communism, re-invented Euro-Keynesianism as a response to the eurozone crisis. What does this Euro-Left realism say? It criticizes the pro-European, Third Way Left *from the Left*, but it also criticizes radical currents of the Left that insist that socialism must first start from one country and then expand whenever possible and feasible, a position articulated by Costas Lapavitsas (Lapavitsas 2018). Euro-Left realism entails: a fiscal union, a banking union, a generous increase of the EU budget – which currently stands at just 1% of

the bloc's GDP – pro-welfare reforms, official issuing of European bonds (debt), in short, the entire leftist Keynesian agenda at the EU level. This type of leftist politics is incarnated by such aggregations as the DiEM25 led by Yanis Varoufakis, or large sections of Jeremy Corbyn's Labour Party in Britain, but also other left-wing forces, not necessarily of a social democratic stock, some of which arguably even draw from the Trotskyite tradition.

This chapter places the above discussion into a differing analytical framework. It shows that the 'realisms' of the Third Way Left and the Euro-Left are constitutive components in the development of a specific neoliberal project in the scope of EU institution-building, a project for which we reserve the term 'ordoliberalism'. Whether during its initial expansion phase in 1940s and 1950s in Germany, or during the great boost it received after the *stagflation* of the 1970s and Mitterrand's capitulation to German hegemony in the early 1980s, or even during its first serious setback when shaken by the eurozone crisis, ordoliberalism has been a stylized form of public policy spearheaded by Germany's establishment and political system and successfully transplanted into the EU. By putting forth this original analytical framework, we show how ordoliberalism preceded Anglo-American neoliberalism, conjured up theory and political practice, and recruited the social democratic Left, transforming it into an organic component of its right-wing project. Neoliberalism and ordoliberalism have a great deal in common; however, the former applies more to Anglo-American contexts and the latter to Germano-Austrian ones.

The first section of this chapter outlines the key developmental phases of ordoliberalism as an intellectual and practical-political movement. The second section lays out its key policy tenets, which, arguably, overlap with those of Anglo-American neoliberalism, not least because the latter stems from the scientific-historical matrix of the former. Lastly, the ordoliberal evolution of the Left in Europe will be examined by focusing mainly on the German and the British Left(s). The conclusion provides a summing-up of a critique to the 'post-Keynesian' position of the Euro-Left, which believes that the Euro-system can be transformed towards a progressive-socialist direction from within the EU's institutional framework.

What is Ordoliberalism?

Ordoliberalism is an intellectual and political movement whose origins can be traced back to interwar Germany and Austria. It formed an attempt to re-invent an inter-disciplinary and all-encompassing model of social and public policy conducive to practical policy application in order to steer the course of government away from the defunct liberalism of the 1920s (Bonefeld 2017; Fouskas and Roy-Mukherjee 2019; Mirowski and Plehwe 2009; Hien and Jorges 2017). Towards the end of the Weimar Republic and after, many sociologists, economists, constitutionalists and other social scientists, not necessarily in contact with each other, began working on theoretical hypotheses drawing on liberal modern traditions of the previous centuries, but aiming to provide a synthesis going beyond those traditions. A notorious group centred around Franz Böhm and Walter Eucken was based at the University of Freiburg, hence the common attribution of ordoliberal thinking to the 'Freiburg School'. The key reference point for ordoliberals, and the politico-economic experience that had to be avoided, was the hyper-inflation of the Weimar Republic and the disorder brought about by its political, nearly anarchic, pluralism. The main aim of ordoliberals in Austria and Germany in the 1930s came to be the formation of a policy proposal that goes beyond the failed classical liberalism, but which is also different from the prevailing paradigms of the 'actually existing socialism' and the vogue of Keynesianism as incarnated in Roosevelt's New Deal. At the same time, the majority of them opposed the organization of the German economy under the Nazi regime, despite the fact that the Nazis substantially improved the country's economic performance; as did Mussolini's fascism in Italy and, indeed, all the dictatorial regimes in Europe at the time. The ordoliberals were liberals but of a peculiar stock: as opposed to the free market/free trade liberalism of the 19th century dominated by England, Austro-German 'neoliberals' / ordoliberals envisaged a social economy premised on *order* and an economic constitution that supports a healthy price mechanism and competition. Some ordoliberals opposed big cartels and monopolies. A view shared by all ordoliberal thinkers was that state institutions and strict legal rules are the mediums for instituting

order, and not the market itself via its spontaneous mechanisms. Markets undermine social and economic order and that is why a *free economy* requires a *strong state* in command and a robust articulation of political institutions and markets; an *Ordnungsgefüge* (objective order constellation), as Alfred Müller-Armack termed it in 1932. This complex institutional nexus between the state and social economy draws on the 'non-political' disciplinarian rule of law, at the centre of which is a de-politicized central bank mechanism structured around an anti-inflation bias. Forms of authoritarian rule are allowed if/when the price mechanism, i.e. inflation, gets out of control and free markets and competition are under threat. This fundamental principle of ordoliberal thinking brought some of them, such as Müller-Armack himself, very close to the Nazi party and Carl Schmidt's theory of the 'state of exception' (Scheuerman 2015).

The ordoliberal reconstruction of liberal doctrines was formalized to some degree in the notorious 'Walter Lippmann Colloquium', or *Colloque*, held over five days in central Paris, from 26 to 30 August 1938. Most arch-ordoliberals, from Friedrich August von Hayek to Alexander Rüstow and from Wilhelm Röpke to Ludwig von Mises, were there (Eucken was invited to attend, but the Nazi authorities did not give him a permission to leave Germany). Along with businessmen, French economists, and philosophers such as Raymond Aron, the *Colloque* launched effectively a *neoliberal international collective*, an effort that the war interrupted, but which was to be re-launched in the Swiss resort of Mont Pelerin in 1947 under the leadership of Hayek (Mirowski and Plehwe 2009, 45-67). With the founding of the Mont Pelerin Society, ordoliberalism/neoliberalism gained prominence simply because it began to directly influence post-war political establishments in Europe and the USA. Milton Friedman attended the opening meeting of the Society, with this attributed with aiding the systematization of neoliberal economics at the University of Chicago in the 1950s, whereas Ludwig Erhard, West Germany's Minister of Economic Affairs from 1949 to 1963 and Chancellor from 1963 to 1966, joined Mont Pelerin in 1950.

Although descriptive and brief, the above discussion demolishes the myth that neoliberalism is an Anglo-American phenomenon

stemming from the theories of Milton Friedman and implemented by Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan in Britain and the USA respectively in the 1980s. Matters are rather far more complex, and many authors have reasonable historical grounds to argue that neoliberalism, in the form of ordoliberalism as it was shaped in interwar Germany and Austria, preceded the neo-classical economics of the Chicago School (Kiely 2018, 35-94). Hence, Anglo-American neoliberalism resulted from the Germano-Austrian matrix of ordoliberalism, and not vice versa. Thus, both movements and policy proposals share many things in common, although ordoliberals tend to place greater emphasis upon the role of institutions and their disciplinarian and de-politicizing capacity via law, whereas (Anglo-American) neoliberals do not see free markets as disruptive and disorderly. For our purposes here that, among others, aim at showing the way in which German ordoliberalism was transposed onto EU treaties over the decades since the Treaty of Rome, the most significant contributions to ordoliberal theory and practice, especially as regards the construction of post-war Germany and Europe, are those of Hayek and Müller-Armack.

In a 1939 essay titled “The Economic Conditions of Interstate Federalism”, Hayek presented a blueprint on how a European federation could work by way of removing impediments to the free movement of “men, goods, and capital”, as he put it (Hayek 1939/1947). As long as a ‘single market’ is in place, Hayek wrote, prices and wages would tend to match production costs across the continent. All that would be needed to achieve a balanced price system without state interference would be a federal regulatory framework whose aim would be to reduce – and even eliminate – state interference, undermining state support for domestic industries and eliminating independent monetary policies. Effectively, Hayek advocated the setting-up of a liberal framework of rules across Europe in order to eliminate the power of nation states, making them instead serve ‘interstate liberal-federal’ rules. From this perspective, national currencies and sovereignties disappear. Arguably, the ‘framework’ envisaged by Hayek adumbrates nothing more and nothing less than the binding neo-ordoliberal Treaties of the EEC/EC/EU, which, in a single market mechanism, eliminate the power of the nation states that signed up to those Treaties. In this

respect, monetary sovereignty is paramount: interstate federal principles dictate that a state's central bank liquidity and interest rate is determined by the federation's central bank that sits *outside* the jurisdiction of that state proper. Clearly, this indicates loss of monetary sovereignty, which is a fundamental aspect of national sovereignty. At the same time, it indicates democratic deficit because the federated central bank mechanism is over and above any socio-political control and check, unassailable by social struggle and political pressures that occur within the modern state. For Hayek and the ordoliberalists, the price mechanism, that is, the control of inflation and the framework of rules within which a competitive order can exist and thrive, was of utmost importance.

In post-war (West) Germany, Müller-Armack was directly involved in shaping economic policy and directly contributing to the European project. He, under the command of the German Minister of Economic Affairs, Erhard, was Germany's chief negotiator in the Treaty of Rome, which proclaims without hesitation "the establishment of a regime ensuring that competition is not distorted in the common market", facilitating an increase in the "competitive strength of enterprises". To this end, state aid, considered a factor that distorts the price mechanism and the market, was to be proscribed by the 1957 Treaty. Having established the basic economic liberties (free movement of people, capital, services and goods), the Treaty constitutionalized the 'social market economy' notion, *Marktwirtschaft*, put forth by the German negotiator already in 1932. Ever since the Treaty of Rome, *Marktwirtschaft* represents the most fundamental aspect of Europe's *acquis*, which is effectively the EU's Constitution, today endorsed by the European Court of Justice and upheld by the Commission and the Council.

To understand *Marktwirtschaft* it is important that one begins to understand society not as an organism divided into classes and constantly permeated by class struggle – in fact, a Marxist would argue that classes exist only *through* class struggle – but as an ontology premised on *competition*, whether individual or entrepreneurial (Peacock and Willgerodt 1989, 16-39). Müller-Armack explained that market is 'social' because it pleases the choices of the consumer and puts pressure, through competition, on enterprises and workers to improve productivity and quality of the

end-product to be consumed. Keynesians and socialists criticized this by counter-arguing that such a postulate undermines social cohesion and solidarity and can be neither 'social' nor 'socialist' (Dardot and Laval 2013, 90-1). Müller-Armack responded by saying that *Marktwirtschaft* is not the same as the notion of a *liberal* economy, because *Marktwirtschaft* is desired by society and represents a collective choice. It is a social machine in need of a regulatory economic constitution, because this type of regulation orders a fair competition between enterprises and checks the price mechanism. In addition, this regulation-institutional interference aims at forming individuals responsible for their actions, not individuals expecting to receive welfare benefits at the expense of the taxpayer. In effect, *Marktwirtschaft* treats the interests of the individual as identical to those of the market and the enterprise.¹ However, individualism is something to be constructed and not left to the spontaneous mechanism of free markets. In this respect, *Marktwirtschaft* directly opposes the Keynesian welfare state and socialist alternatives, as well as *laissez faire* economics. However, because of the embeddedness of the Bismarckian welfare state in Germany, an embeddedness that persisted throughout the Cold War, the ordoliberals had more success in Europe with this policy notion, in the long run, than in Germany itself.

In the beginning, ordoliberals were faced by a couple of serious obstacles in Europe, especially during the 1950s and 1960s. Above all, they had to come to grips with the dominant position of Keynesian policy-making – with all its variations – within the nation states and the virtuous cycle of capitalist development – the so-called 'Golden Age of Capitalism' (1945-1970). Due to the early stages of the process of European integration, ordoliberals had to strike a compromise with the principle of *Marktwirtschaft*, especially with the French who, despite having problems matching the dominant position of the German Mark (D-Mark) in the common market, were extremely hesitant to give away national power without surrendering the D-Mark in an (exchange rate) mechanism

¹ This aspect is analysed brilliantly by Michel Foucault in his pioneering analysis of ordoliberalism as *biopolitics* (Foucault 1979/2010, 33-178).

providing currency stability across the common market.² Nevertheless, the ordoliberals had left an important imprint on the common market and its subsequent governing structures from the very beginning: given that the institutions of the EU did not evolve in response to class struggle and political-social pressures – its life began as a cartel of steel and coal which controlled prices and output by means of an unelected bureaucracy – it enjoyed all the requisites to develop into a governing aggregation of rules and norms at a later stage, resembling the Germano-Austrian ordoliberal model of capitalism. The turning points were the collapse of Keynesianism in the *stagflation* (economic stagnation accompanied by high inflation) of the 1970s and Francois Mitterrand's U-turn in 1983 when, unable to compete with the D-Mark in the EMS, he abandoned his nationalization program and committed France to the single market that adumbrated the Maastricht Treaty (1991-2) and the launch of the Euro in 1999 (2001 for Greece), the Growth and Stability Pact, formalized by the Council's resolution in 1997, which represented a near-comprehensive set of ordoliberal rules.

A few conclusions can be drawn from this before we return to our analyses of the Left. First, it is important to understand that Germano-Austrian ordoliberalism, *as a systematic elaboration of a neoliberal thought collective in continental Europe*, preceded Anglo-American neoliberal thought and practice. This is highly significant, because due to the linkages between ordoliberalism and policy-making, the German model of post-war capitalist development

² It was de Gaulle's France that initially proposed a common currency. This was through de Gaulle's Finance Minister, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, who in March 1964 made such a proposal to his German counterpart, Kurt Schmücker. This came as a surprise to the Germans but this sort of semi-structured and rather secret meeting continued through to the 1970s, when eventually an abortive European Monetary System (EMS) was established. Germany's objection throughout had been that it was unable to give up its currency without first putting in place a political (European) union. De Gaulle's primary aim was to undermine the dominant position of the dollar as a reserve currency, and he further wished to connect Europe with the Soviet Union geo-politically. Henry Kissinger, who could see the dominant economic position (West) Germany was already assuming within the common market, asked de Gaulle how France would prevent Germany from dominating the continent. The General's answer was: "*Par la guerre!*" (Dyson and Featherstone 1999, 131-336; Varoufakis 2016, 20-56).

accommodated a number of neoliberal elements that British capitalism had not yet considered. Neoliberalism triumphed in Britain with the advent of Margaret Thatcher's rise to power in 1979; Thatcher employed a policy similar to a kind of 'shock therapy', destroying the industrial capacity of the country and building a social economy on the dominance of financial services and the banks. In Germany, the transition to a full-fledged ordoliberal-cum-neoliberal process took much longer, it was orderly and did not resort to destruction of the exporting industrial capacity of the country. During the Cold War, there was a constant fight between the dominance of Keynesianism and the advancement of ordoliberalism both in Germany and Europe. Müller-Armack's *Marktwirtschaft* represented an unstable equilibrium of compromises with Keynesian policy-making and the centrality of the welfare state and nationalized industry.

The *stagflation* of the 1970s shattered the Keynesian consensus across Europe. This historical process enthroned ordoliberalism in power, formalized in the Single European Act of 1986-87 and the Maastricht Treaty. The Maastricht Treaty is to be considered a triumph of the Germano-Austrian ordoliberalism at the European level, and represents the structural and dominant power of German capitalism in Europe. From being a surplus state with a stable currency during the Cold War, Germany came to institutionalize its primacy in Europe through a number of Treaties harking the launch of a single currency and a European Central Bank modelled after the Bundesbank. Obviously, the French had miscalculated (Lapavitsas 2018, 5-9): the single currency they proposed in the 1960s turned out to be a camouflaged D-Mark under the watchful eye of a strictly independent and 'de-politicized' European Central Bank, committed to anti-inflation policies – much the same as the Bundesbank. A Treaty commitment was that surplus countries, such as Germany, could not bail-out debtor countries, such as Italy or Greece.

The second major point that needs to be made is that the construction of the EU had been an *anti-socialist* project from the very beginning. Importantly, as the project was unfurled through the establishment of a binding ordoliberal framework of rules and norms undermining state sovereignty – Hayek's blueprint – those signing up to those rules and norms were effectively entering an 'iron

‘cage’ from which it was almost impossible to escape (Ryner 2015, 275-294). Stemming from this, the key policy tenets of ordoliberalism/neoliberalism as they result from our analyses are as follows:³

1. Sound money and anti-inflation policies
2. Balanced budgets and exclusion of bailouts
3. Anti-trust legislation and (fair) competition policy
4. Complete independence of the central bank mechanism
5. Export-led growth
6. Rule of law, social discipline and biopolitics through *Marktwirtschaft*
7. Strong institutional framework (the ‘economic constitution’) embedded in – and ordering – free markets

Having said this, the economic and political Constitution of the EU is but a supply-side Constitution, overturning the demand-led democratic constitutional arrangements struck within the nation states of Europe under pressures arising from social struggle. From this perspective, the EU has always had a ‘democratic deficit’, a drawback transformed into straightforward authoritarianism as soon as the banking crisis appeared upon the horizon (Fouskas and Gökay 2019).

The making of the ordoliberal Left: A bird’s-eye glimpse

Political parties are agencies that always operate within a given set of material-institutional constraints laid out by national and international class structures and interests. At the same time, as active participants of social and political struggle – and this is valid especially for the parties of the Left – they are in a position, at least in theory, to push the boundaries of those constraints, bringing them closer to the class interests that these parties are committed to. The Right has a moral and class obligation to push the boundaries

³ It should be emphasized again that all of these policy tenets represent material constraints and constitutional commitments, and are inserted in the EU Treaties, thereby binding all EU/eurozone national polities to adhere to them.

towards the maximization of profit for enterprises, while holding onto political class power; the Left has a moral and class obligation to push those boundaries towards high wages and social welfare. The question of state power for the Left, a question distinct from that of governmental power, arises always at the level of the nation state when a leftist political party is able to project the interests of the class it represents as broader popular-national interests – the issue of working class hegemony within the broad ensemble of subaltern classes – without relinquishing the primacy of the core class it represents; i.e. the working class.⁴ The question of socialism and state power arises from the moment that the subaltern classes can suppress the bourgeoisie and alter the relations of production (property relations) and the markets corresponding to them. Historically, this issue has been posed only during radical-revolutionary periods in world history (the Russian Revolution, the Chinese Revolution, the de-colonization period, the Cuban Revolution, etc.). Here, we confine ourselves to the case of the social democratic Keynesian Left.

Sadly, the Keynesian Left could not push the boundaries of capital accumulation towards a new balance of power between labour and capital in favour of the former during the post-*stagflation* years. As we know, right-wing parties did succeed in this, pushing towards neoliberal/ordoliberal globalization/financialization, because this was deemed to be the remedy for the falling tendency of the (average) rate of profit. But problems do not end here. The parties of the Left not only failed to push the class boundaries of capitalism in favour of the subaltern and working classes, but also contributed to the shaping and strengthening of those boundaries together with the neoliberal Right *against* the class and popular interests they supposedly represented. Let us take a brief look at that process.

⁴ We accept the distinction between *state power* and *governmental power*. A left-wing party may be in governmental power but without controlling key sections of the bourgeois state power, such as the Ministry of Defence or the Interior Ministry. This distinction was first put forth by Marx and later systematized by such Marxists as Nicos Poulantzas in the late 1960s. Antonio Gramsci also elaborated on the issue of class hegemony in his *Quaderni del Carcere* (Prison Notebooks). The bibliography on these themes is immense.

The German Social Democratic Party (SPD) was not the kind of party that could push class boundaries in favour of the working class and its allies. Bound by its reformist-revisionist tradition of Eduard Bernstein – “the movement is everything, the end-aim (of socialism) nothing” – the SPD in its Bad Godesberg program of 1959 abandoned not just class struggle and nationalizations but, in a significant concession to the ordoliberalism of *Marktwirtschaft*, its program would state most dramatically that Germany needs “as much competition as possible and as much planning as necessary” (Sassoon 1996, 250). German trade unions were incorporated not only into government, but were also placed into boardrooms, “where unionists sat next to company directors, delivering wage restraint in return for power” (Varoufakis 2016, 63). French neo-revisionism, as we briefly stated above, began with the abandonment of the Keynesian program by Mitterrand in 1983. In Britain, matters were more complicated. The Labour Party had laid the foundations of the British welfare state in the 1940s, and the 1960s and 1970s were dominated by Labour governments’ resistance to any type of neo-liberal reform, whether it came through the country’s EEC membership or through internal pressure. It took the party sixteen years from 1979 – when it lost power to Thatcher’s triumphant neoliberal project amid a dramatic economic crisis – to come to grips with its commitment to socialism and nationalizations, abolishing the famous ‘Clause 4’ in 1994 under the neo-revisionist Third Way leadership of Tony Blair. This neo-revisionist act, a direct concession to German ordoliberalism rather than Anglo-American neoliberalism, as we shall see below, paved Blair’s way to governmental power. Effectively, the Labour Party did not simply accept the new constraints imposed by Thatcher’s neoliberal reforms, setting out the new boundaries within which the political and economic game should take place; in the event, it began a journey as an active institutional participant in shaping and strengthening neoliberal financialization from positions of governmental power. Under Blair, the Labour Party became part-and-parcel of the process of the neoliberal financialization, adopting key tenets of German ordoliberalism from the EU, something that Thatcher had fought against.

It should not be forgotten that Britain is a very peculiar case. Historically, it has always stood with one foot in Europe and with

the other in the world as a global imperial power. It preferred to manage German affairs and expansionist designs in East-Central Europe and the Balkans through France and French affairs and designs through Germany. An off-shore balancer, Britain mastered the largest formal empire in history, only to lose its primacy and retreat, like other European colonial powers, after WWII. Because of its geographical position, naval-commercial power and the role of London as the globe's main financial centre, Britain has always had a lukewarm relationship with Europe. Edward Heath, Britain's Conservative PM in 1973 and the most pro-European Prime Minister Britain ever had, managed to overcome French – and inner-party – objections, achieving EEC membership. Labour had had the same internal divides, but the socialist star of Labour politics, Tony Benn, vehemently criticized the European project as a capitalist and undemocratic endeavour. Thatcher herself – although she and the majority of her ruling group were arch neoliberals inspired by Hayek's work – never agreed to concede monetary sovereignty to Brussels and, through it, to Germany. In her final parliamentary speech, on 22 November 1990, she would argue that Europe's future central bank would be accountable to no parliament and that such a bank would be completely undemocratic.⁵

Well, she was right. Not because she had any intention of criticizing the EU from a socialist or social democratic position, as Tony Benn and others were doing at the time, but because her ideological formation and political aim was to sustain a neoliberal project at home under the aegis of Westminster, while re-launching Britain as a neo-imperial power abroad, re-imagining/re-inventing the

⁵ Thatcher answered the question by Alan Beith – a Liberal Democrat – about whether she would continue her fight against a single currency and an independent central bank as follows (before she could answer, another MP interjected: “No, she’s going to be a governor”): “What a good idea”, Thatcher boasted, answering to the interjection. “I had not thought of it. But if I were, there would be no European Central Bank accountable to no one, least of all to national parliaments. Because under that kind of central bank there will be no democracy [and the central bank] taking powers away from every single parliament and be able to have a single currency and a monetary policy and an interest rate policy that takes away from us all political power” (Margaret Thatcher's last speech as Prime Minister, 20 November 1990, available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uF_GX-Mxa-mE).

Empire. There are elements of realism in Thatcher's view. By turning Britain into the globe's financial hub in the era of globalization, Thatcherite neoliberalism aimed to transform Britain into the gatekeeper of financialization and supply chains of global production networks, by-passing Europe, which was already dominated by Germany. However, Blair's Third Way neo-revisionism went beyond Thatcher's Euroscepticism, embracing the ordoliberal agenda comprehensively.⁶

Blair's New Labour assumed governmental power in 1996, in the midst of Bill Clinton's successful Presidential terms, and when the bubble of neoliberal financialization was at full expansion. Wall Street and the City of London had already become the hubs of a triumphant global capitalism, delivering prosperity, low inflation, high financial profits, easy borrowing at tempting interest rates, and all this in an environment freed from any global competitor in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union and its satellite states. It seemed like the 'end of history' was just around the corner. Unimpeded, NATO and the EEC/EU headed eastwards, providing new members with security and neoliberal conditionality: you reform your economy in a free market direction 'becoming prosperous like us', and then you too can join the two clubs. Interestingly, what triggered the bombing of Belgrade and Yugoslavia in 1999 by NATO forces was the refusal on the part of the Yugoslav delegation at Rambouillet to the so-called 'Appendix B' (Fouskas 2003, 13-33), which stipulated, among other things, that Yugoslavia would accept free market economic principles (the other two conditions were that within three years the Kosovo-Albanians should be given the chance of voting for independence and possible annexation to Albania; and that NATO forces should be given permission to deploy not only in Kosovo but anywhere in Yugoslavia). Blair's New Labour was one of the most hawkish advocates of NATO's bombing campaign, a fact that demonstrated clearly that the Third Way lacks any separate foreign policy instrument, as this is nothing more and nothing less than mere neo-imperialism led by the USA in post-Cold

⁶ Today, after the Brexit vote of summer 2016, Blair fights for a second referendum hoping to "withdraw the withdrawal", as the late Stephen Haseler put it in a private conversation (Fouskas 2018).

War conditions. But, in spite of this, did the Third Way have a distinct, progressive economic and social policy?

Tony Blair did not challenge the global neo-imperial role Thatcher envisaged for Britain in the context of neoliberal financialization. However, he perceived that role as being supplementary to Britain's role in the EU. In this respect, he had been Britain's ordoliberal politician *par excellence*. On more than one occasion, and having abolished the Labour Party's constitutional commitment to socialism as enshrined in Clause 4 before he assumed office, he stressed that

old fashioned state intervention did not and cannot work. But neither does naïve reliance on markets. The government must promote competition, stimulating enterprise, flexibility and innovation by opening markets [...] In government, in business, in our universities and throughout society we must do much more to foster a new entrepreneurial spirit (cited in Finlayson 2003, 177-78).

Revealingly, in June 1998, Blair signed jointly with Gerhard Schröder, Germany's Chancellor and SPD leader, a 'working paper' laying out in full the ordoliberal agenda of the Left in Europe (Blair and Schröder 1998). The initiative was sponsored by the SPD's think-tank, the Friedrich Ebert Foundation. The "trademark of this approach", the two leaders argued, is the 'New Centre' in Germany and the Third Way in Britain. And after confirming that both political forces "share a common destiny within the European Union", they go on to assert that "the essential function of the market must be complemented and improved by political action, not hampered by it." Moreover, public expenditure is not an end in itself but must be used in order to "enable people to help themselves". In a direct attack on the welfare state, "universal safeguards" must cease to be the norm, the paper argued; in their stead, what needs to be promoted is the "importance of individual and business enterprise to the creation of wealth". "left-wing" ideas, the paper continued, "should not become an ideological straitjacket" and globalization should be promoted by government actions that "create conditions in which existing business can prosper and adapt, and

new businesses can be set up and grow” by way of boosting “efficiency, competition and high performance”. And, in an attempt to address Europe’s unemployment challenge, which is “far too high” in some countries, the authors revealingly state: “To address this challenge, Europe’s social democrats must together formulate and implement a new *supply-side agenda* for the Left”, setting out a “robust competitive market framework” (our emphasis). This supply-side agenda is essential, as it will put a break on the government’s borrowing requirement, addressing the issue of debt. Deficit spending – one of the pillars of Keynesianism – should be avoided. Further, high taxation on corporations is excluded, because it reduces profits and competitiveness, while jeopardizing jobs. Having a part-time job is better than having no job at all and “flexible markets are a modern social democratic aim”. The joint paper goes on to explain the notions of “human and social capital”, two fields that in a “modern service and knowledge-based economy” mean continuous education and vocational training, while public investment should be well-calculated and “directed at activities most beneficial to growth and fostering necessary structural change”.

Blair openly embraced the agenda of Europe’s ordoliberal Left, embracing all of its postulates. Crucially, both leaders avoided the tackling of perplexing issues, such as the role of the ECB or the constraints imposed on each EU government by the EU’s ordoliberal *acquis*, issues that Thatcher tackled head-on by denouncing close links with the ‘Brussels bureaucracy’ as unaccountable and undemocratic. At times, he – and Schröder, for that matter – conceived of the EU and the regulatory framework it provides somewhat disingenuously, stating that “companies must not be gagged by rules and regulations”, as if they were unaware of the EU’s cumbersome competition policy and anti-trust legislation.

At home, Blair followed a two-prong ordoliberal policy. On the one hand, he conceded operational independence for setting interest rates to the Bank of England in order to keep inflation under control but, on the other, he actively promoted asset price inflation (Kiely 2018, 158), especially in the housing sector, a key feature of the financialization bubble in the Anglo-American world and elsewhere, such as Spain. Thus, when the neo-imperial financialization chain blew up in 2007-08, necessitating the pumping of trillions of

taxpayers' money into the banking sector in order to save capitalism from total collapse, neither Schröder's New Centre nor Blair's Third Way can be considered innocent. They were directly involved in the shaping of neoliberal globalization/financialization by way of not just adopting the ordoliberal book in its entirety, but also by contributing to the writing of its very rules and misleading the public that voted for them.

The punishment, as well all know, did not take long to arrive. One after another, the ordoliberal/neo-revisionist Left parties across Europe collapsed, creating ample space for the emergence of the radical-xenophobic Right, but also for the radical Left. In some cases, such as the British Labour Party under the leadership of Jeremy Corbyn, ordoliberal leftist principles became thwarted from within the party. In others, such as in Spain, new Radical Left aggregations were born, contesting enduring austerity and bondage. In Greece, Syriza, a promising radical party, swept to power in January 2015 on an anti-austerity agenda, only to capitulate, after six months of bitter negotiations with the Troika and after over-turning a popular referendum outcome that voted against ordoliberal austerity. At any event, the eurozone crisis was not just a lesson for the ordoliberal European Left; it represents a lesson for the ordoliberal movement as a whole. For all the safety valves and regulation guarantees offered by the strong hand of the ECB, the Commission, the Council and the European Court of Justice, free market capitalism proved to be an animal too difficult to tame. The ordoliberal Treaties of the EU proved to be useless pieces of paper, not worth the ink and paper used to pen them. The banking sector of the North Atlantic area was extremely intertwined: this is, in fact, one of the key dimensions of financialization. In the end, it required massive cynicism *cum* political anxiety on the part of the European elites to launch an entire operation in which the core surplus states of the EU could displace their banking crisis to periphery states (Ireland, Greece, Spain and Portugal), imposing on them unprecedented austerity measures through bailout agreements offered and imposed on humiliating, neo-colonial terms. Those who aspire to join the EU and the eurozone should think twice before they embark on such a trip.

Conclusion

The trip was predictable. The Euro-sceptic Left had always criticized the movement towards further European 'integration' on the basis of free markets, institutionally engineered by a framework of rules shaped after the interest of the core surplus state, Germany (Fouskas 1997; Gowan 1999; Callinicos 2010). The Euro-sceptic Left put forth a socialist agenda at home first, in particular a program of green development and industrialization, undercutting the power of banks and finance, while boosting demand and welfare institutions (Lapavitsas, 2018). Placing uneven (and combined) development at the centre of its investigation, this Left never believed that the European construction could create a European *demos* of equal states and national societies, where solidarity and amicability prevailed over the class interests of multinational corporations and finance that lay at its core. The European periphery never managed to close the developmental gap with the core, with the introduction of the European Monetary Union (EMU) only serving to widen this gap, completely destroying the competitive capacity of the periphery. Further, the EMU mechanism excludes *external* devaluation, the only apparent option being *internal* devaluation – a polite way to say *austerity bondage*. The euro-zone crisis brought matters to a breaking point, especially with the case of Greece. The saga continues with the Brexit case, although Italy will soon bounce back as 'Europe's new sick man'. Unfortunately, as we have tried to show in this contribution, the European Left has contributed to the rise of this exploitative ordoliberal system and its crisis, and since 2009 it has further contributed to the ordoliberal management of the crisis with a harsh program of enduring austerity. Thus, its electoral power and political influence is on the wane universally. Its fall is an indisputable matter of fact, although its survival and renewal, it should be said, are completely dependent on the success of the austerity program across Europe, albeit possibly under different names, as appears to be the case in Greece and elsewhere.

There is, as was stated in our opening comments, also a sophisticated branch of the Left, the Euro-Left. In its attempt to provide a response to the collapsing ordoliberal Left, this Left sees the

EU as a field of socialist action prone to the implementation of a socialist, post-Keynesian platform at the level of the EU itself. However, there is nothing more misleading than this.

First of all, as we showed earlier, being a member of the EU/eurozone, or even merely pegging your domestic currency to the euro, essentially means that you have already signed up to the policy of enduring austerity as applies across the EU/eurozone. Membership of the EU entails loss of national sovereignty and subscription to the European *acquis*, which is anything but democratic and accountable to any national or European *demos*.

Second, The EU is a hierarchical and disciplinarian structure of states, at the top of which stands Germany, the continent's strongest economy. Germany, with its 'sound money' ordoliberal policy, became the anchor country of the European system, providing it with a firm reference point. By the time the Maastricht Treaty was signed, Germany's monetary policy, i.e. the Bundesbank's anti-inflation bias, was in charge of the situation. The ECB's model is the *de-politicized* arrangement of the Bundesbank. Lapavitsas summarizes this well:

In practice the ECB took the Bundesbank as its model and focused exclusively on maintaining a very low rate of inflation, without any obligation to finance fiscal deficits by member states. The ostensible logic was to ensure convergence of inflation rates across EMU countries, thus making it possible to stabilize international transactions in Europe and to sustain the monetary union. The actual outcome was that the operation of the common currency rebounded in the interests of German exporting capital and the EMU became a domestic market for German industry. (Lapavitsas 2018, 31).

With the Stability and Growth Pact regulating the fiscal performance of the member states, austerity assumed an enduring embeddedness for all of them, insofar as budgets must always be balanced and move within narrow limits, without a 'bailout clause'. But when the crisis broke, even these arrangements were not sufficient. New austerity-oriented treaties, such as the Fiscal Compact and the European Semester program, had to be envisaged,

bringing especially the debtor countries of the periphery to their knees at the very moment when Germany continued to register surpluses, while German and French banks were saved by the Greek and other taxpayers of the periphery, who in turn received bailout austerity packages. But the secret of the German success lies elsewhere. It is to be found in the stagnation of wages from the late 1990s onwards, the peculiarity of its financialized capitalism that allows accumulation of liquidity for massive lending, and the protection of an export-oriented manufacturing sector. The German success is not due to public and private investment in the country (Lapavitsas 2018, 64-5); it is the product of a deflationary policy and, hence, of a low exchange rate due to low nominal wage increases. This protected the German exports in a highly competitive international environment: "In sum", Lapavitsas writes, "Germany's rising competitiveness since the late 1990s has been based less on its ability to raise output per person and more on its capacity to suppress compensation per person" (ibid. 49). Thus, the paramount concern of Germany becomes the paramount concern of the EU: prevent the monetary union from collapsing; defend the value of the euro as an international reserve currency so that EU/German products can compete internationally. Peripheral countries suffer more because their economies cannot compete with the core, especially since currency devaluation is not an option.

Third, the European *acquis* is becoming increasingly cumbersome, reactionary and regressive. Two rulings from the European Court of Justice (ECJ) in 2007, the *Viking* and *Laval* cases, have created impediments to trade union activity in the EU with regard to postal workers. These are workers from one EU country being employed in another EU country but under the arrangements and conditions of the country of origin, usually an Eastern European or Balkan state, which are generally worse. The ECJ found that the trade unions of the host EU country cannot act to protect discriminatory wages, for example, for an Eastern European worker, because such an action would undermine the very premises of the single market. This is highly significant. Essentially, it demolishes the myth of progressive and pro-labour legislation on the part of the EU/ECJ, prioritizing the welfare of the single market, that is, protecting the price mechanism of the *Marktwirtschaft*. In a similar vein, one can look at

the so-called 'Dublin Regulations' regarding refugees, illegal immigrants and asylum seekers, or the despicable agreement between EU and Turkey over the same issue. The core aim of the 'humanistic' and 'pro-solidarity' EU was to protect its *Marktwirtschaft*, allow in as many refugees and immigrants as the system could profitably absorb, whereas all others, (amounting to hundreds of thousands of people), may be left eternally trapped in Turkey, Greece and the Western Balkans. But that is how imperialist powers behave: first causing havoc to entire societies in the MENA region and Central Asia by bombing them and instigating ethnic and religious wars of aggression in order to secure energy-related and other dividends, then attempting to block population movements on the ground as people's lives in their homelands become unbearable.

Having said this, one conclusion seems to be inescapable, namely, that the Euro-Left 'post-Keynesian' project is, at best, utopian and, at worst, a naïve interpretation of the EU Treaties. The Western Balkan states that aspire to become members of the EU, such as Serbia, may well think twice before they embark on such a predictable journey.

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III

The different cases in Europe

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The rise and decline of Left populism in France

Abstract

In the run-up to the 2017 presidential election in France, Jean-Luc Mélenchon who, so far, had been associated with the Radical Left, formed a new movement called *La France Insoumise* (Unbowed France - FI). Mélenchon's populist strategy in launching FI was blatant. This was an attempt to organize the masses along the lines of an agonistic cleavage between 'the people' and 'the elite', as well as to forge a radical break with the collective forms of leadership and action on the French Left. With the demise of the *Parti socialiste* (PS), the gamble paid off as Mélenchon received significant support from segments of left-wing voters in the first round of the presidential election. In true populist fashion, the FI leader has attempted to federate 'the people', and not simply left-wing voters. He has ceased to use the notion of Left altogether. What defines FI's populism is the role and the centrality of the leader. Mélenchon's style, strategy and politics have energized fragments of the left-wing electorate (the young and working-class voters notably) but they have also created tensions with other parties of the Left. Those organizations fear that Mélenchon's 'populist moment' may be detrimental to the future of left-wing politics in France altogether.

Keywords: Jean-Luc Mélenchon, France Insoumise, Left populism, People, Elites, Oligarchy.

Introduction:

The demise of left reformism and the rise of left populism

■ The collapse of the Reformist Left in France embodied by the *Parti socialiste* was sudden and brutal: François Hollande's party held all the power when he was elected president in 2012 (Sawicki 2013, 104-119). The president and the government were socialist; the PS

had a majority in the lower house (National Assembly) and upper house (Senate), it ran most regions and the biggest number of cities across France. Five years of neoliberal structural reforms dilapidated this unique political capital. At the 2017 presidential election, a profoundly disunited party lost both the presidency and the majority in the house. Benoît Hamon, the socialist presidential candidate, only received 6.5% of the share of the vote (Hollande scored 28.69% in the first round of the 2012 election). At the 2017 legislative election, the PS had 29 deputies elected compared to 295 in 2012.

A very unpopular PS seems to have reached a stage of terminal crisis. Since the collapse of 2017, there have been no signs, be they electoral or political, of recovery. The PS is between a rock and a hard place: on the centre and centre-right, Emmanuel Macron has captured and retained ‘moderate’ socialist voters. On the Populist Left, Jean-Luc Mélenchon has appealed to those who felt that the Hollande presidency had betrayed the values and ideals of the Left (Bréchon 2017, 193-203). It seems, therefore, interesting to study the spectacular rise of leftist populism, which has established itself as the main political force on the left wing of the French political spectrum.

Populism and the French left

Populism does not sit well with the French Left. Historically, the left-wing forces in France have rejected populist movements, ideas and leaders. In the original version of *The Internationale*, the anthem of the socialist movement worldwide, Eugène Pottier wrote: “There are no supreme saviours, neither God, nor Caesar, nor eloquent speakers, producers, let’s save ourselves.”¹ Those verses are a clear refutation of leader-centric populism.

From Napoleon III (Marx 2008) to Charles de Gaulle (Mitterrand 1984), in recent times, populism has characterized right-wing or extreme-right regimes or leaderships. It has helped label demagogic policies and the art of exploiting people’s fears and frustration.

¹ Il n’est pas de sauveurs suprêmes
Ni Dieu, ni César, ni Tribun,
Producteurs, sauvons-nous nous-mêmes
Décrétons le salut commun.

Given the near-exclusive association of populism with the Far-Right, the diagnosis of populism often extends to ‘demonization’ (Stavrakakis and Katsambekis 2014, 120). Conversely, the Left in France has always supported collegial forms of leadership and placed an emphasis on collective endeavours. For communists and socialists, populism neglects class struggles because it focuses on an undefined ‘people’ (Blin 2017). Consequently, ‘populism’ and ‘Left’ are arguably incompatible notions because a proper populist strategy can only appeal to far-right voters (Fassin 2017, 81).

It was, therefore, unexpected to hear Jean-Luc Mélenchon, a leader of the Radical Left, declare in a 2010 interview:

“I don’t want to defend myself anymore against the accusation of populism. People are disgusted by the elites. Do they deserve anything better? They should all quit! I’m calling upon the energy of the many against the arrogance of the privileged classes. Am I a populist? Yes, I am!” (Mélenchon 2010b)

Thus, as early as 2010, Mélenchon could be described as a ‘populist’, and he was indeed among the very few politicians in Europe to willingly embrace this characterization (Marlière 2010).

Presidential candidate for the Left Front (*Front de gauche*/FDG) in 2012, Mélenchon ran again in 2017 as an independent candidate supported by a ‘citizens’ movement’ called France Insoumise. He has been called a ‘populist politician’ by many on the Left and Right, not least by some of his close political allies (Clavel 2017; Stangler 2017). What is Mélenchon’s brand of populist ideas and policies? How original is his ‘populist stand’ compared to other left-wing forces which also embrace ‘left-wing populism,’ such as Podemos in Spain? What is his strategy to conquer power?

Populism in theory

Populism is a frequently used yet problematic concept; the term is often ill-defined and randomly applied. The concept is problematic because of its unsystematic (notably pejorative) use in public discourse. The notion of populism is regularly used to denote

anti-incumbent/elite rhetoric or to describe politicians who pander to public opinion. Other authors define populism as a political strategy, and they consider it to be a tool for a leader to seek and exercise power, rhetorically designed to tap feelings of resentment and to exploit them politically (Betz 1993).

There are normally four core values at the heart of populism (Stanley 2008, 102): a) the existence of two broad units of analysis: 'the people' and 'the elite'; b) the antagonistic relationship between the people and the elite; c) the positive valorization of the people and the denigration of the elite, and d) the idea of popular sovereignty.

Scholars suggest that populism is more than rhetoric. They describe it as an ideology, albeit a 'thin' or 'thin-centred' one (Mudde 2004). A thin-centred ideology is an ideology that does not provide a comprehensive programme about how a particular society should function. Parts of existing, more wide-ranging, ideologies can and should be added to the populist core (Marlière 2014). Thus, populism lacks core values and it is chameleonic because the ideological colour it adopts depends on the context and the values of the constituency to which it appeals (Taggart 2000). The lack of a programmatic centre of gravity makes it difficult to speak of a populist ideology (Canovan 1999). In the end, one should reject the idea that populism is an ideology – however thin-centred it might be – and should conceive of it as a 'discursive frame' (Aslanidis 2016).

One might note that mainstream parties have used populist methods and strategies themselves as a response to the challenge of populist actors, leading to the dawn of a populist *Zeitgeist* (Mudde 2004). Thus, Emmanuel Macron led a very personalized presidential campaign in 2017. He shunned traditional political parties and refused to take part in the centre-left primary election. What is more, he argued that traditional Left-Right politics is now obsolete. Although Macron did not explicitly pit the people against the elites, his rhetoric and positioning bore all the marks of populism (Marlière 2017a).

Most political scientists insist on the "plurality of populist hybrids [...] [O]ne should try to strip definitions of any bias and thus effectively de-hypostasize populism" (Katsambekis 2016, 391). By so doing, one comes to embrace Ernesto Laclau's definition (Laclau 1977, 172–3), who construes the notion as a political and discursive

distinction between 'the people' and 'the oligarchy' (or, in certain circumstances, 'the caste' or 'the establishment'). Giovanni Sartori defines populism as a 'cat-dog' concept. The term is used to describe political actors that cannot be placed in a single category (Sartori 1991, 243–57). The lack of a clear definition means that populism is used randomly. This leads to the erroneous inclusion of many actors and movements under the heading of populism (Marlière 2013). Therefore, if populism is not an ideology per se but, essentially, a strategy that divides the political field into two antagonistic sides (the people versus the oligarchy) while using a particular brand of rhetoric, then the case for the populism of the FI can be made.

In the first instance, I shall identify the personal and organizational backdrop of FI, a movement, which was officially born in February 2016. The organization was launched by Jean-Luc Mélenchon, a self-appointed leader and candidate in the 2017 presidential election. The personality of FI's leader is key to understanding what particular type of populism the movement embodies. Mélenchon's and FI's brand of populism will then be closely examined: What kind of populist hybrid does it incarnate? Large constituencies of the French Left have always avoided being associated with populism. Thus, how did FI manage to become the main party on the Left in such a short period of time? Is it a left-wing movement? What are the main ideas and aspects, which make FI a populist movement? Finally, I will try to clarify the extent to which FI's populism did facilitate the movement's electoral breakthrough at the 2017 presidential election and, to a lesser extent, at the subsequent legislative election.

From Mitterrandism to Populism

A mainstream professional politician

Between 1972 and 1976, Jean-Luc Mélenchon was a member of *L'Organisation communiste internationaliste* (International Communist Organization/OCI), one of the Trotskyist parties in France. The OCI has always maintained close links with the *Parti Socialiste* (Socialist Party/PS), *Force Ouvrière* (Workers' Strength/FO), a

reformist union, and freemasonry. Mélenchon joined the PS in 1976. He moved up to the Senate (1986–2000 and 2004–10) and was appointed to the cabinet in the government of Prime Minister Lionel Jospin as Minister of Vocational Education (2000–02). From the early 1990s onward, Mélenchon was one of the leaders of the Socialist Left (*Gauche Socialiste*), a militant left-wing faction within the PS. Having diagnosed that social democracy was a spent force as a progressive organization (Mélenchon 2009), Mélenchon left the PS in 2008 and launched the Left Party (*Parti de Gauche*/PG). He was elected twice as a member of the European parliament (2009–17) and elected FI deputy (member of the National Assembly) in June 2017.

In 2012 Jean-Luc Mélenchon was the candidate representing the FDG in the presidential election. He won fourth place and achieved 11.10% of the share of the national vote. After founding PG and being seen as the de facto leader of the FDG, Mélenchon was the staunchest opponent to François Hollande, and the relations between the two men were always fraught and tense (Berdah 2017).

This being said, Jean-Luc Mélenchon is no standard left-winger. He has consistently argued that he does not belong to the Far Left or the Radical Left (AFP 2017). Mélenchon can be seen as a seasoned career politician who comes from mainstream politics, although he was always on the Left wing of the PS (he was, nonetheless, a faithful supporter of President Mitterrand). This is a major difference between him and other leaders of the Radical Left in Europe, who tend to be younger. They include Pablo Iglesias in Spain, Alexis Tsipras in Greece, and Catarina Martins in Portugal. Only Oskar Lafontaine in Germany has followed a similar political trajectory (from SPD to *Die Linke*).

A break with the left's traditions

This is how Jean-Luc Mélenchon describes himself: “I am a republican, I believe in representative democracy and in elections. That is why I call for a citizens’ revolution through the ballot box” (Mélenchon 2010a). He is inspired primarily by Jean Jaurès’s

democratic brand of socialism, which relies heavily on French republican values and a 'humanist' version of Marxism (Mélenchon 2016a: 45–91). Contrary to most constituencies of the French Left, Mélenchon has, to date, always defended François Mitterrand's entire political legacy (Alemagna and Allières 2012). While the late Mitterrand was still in power, Mélenchon, then a young senator, was a vocal and indefatigable supporter of the socialist president (Mélenchon 2016a: 91–140).

In February 2016, one year and three months before the presidential election, Jean-Luc Mélenchon proposed his candidacy to the nation on TF1, the main private channel in France. By opting for the decision to run without consulting his FDG allies, Mélenchon followed a true populist strategy. First, this officialized the death of the moribund FDG. His decision to go alone was motivated by his contempt for the PCF's electoral strategy throughout Hollande's presidency: although the communists opposed the socialist government's policies in parliament and in the country, they were still willing to make alliances locally with the PS in order to safeguard their electoral positions. Mélenchon is on record as saying that this ambivalence eventually discredited the FDG because Hollande had lost all credibility before the electorate and was, in turn, rejected by the majority of the population.² Hence, Mélenchon's reluctance to use the notion of the Left at present, as he considers it has become an empty and confusing label for the public.

Jean-Luc Mélenchon was deeply hostile to the Left's primary election which was, in theory, open to all factions of the Left (from FDG to PS, as well as *Europe Écologie Les Verts/EELV*). In late 2016, Mélenchon believed that Hollande would run again and would win the primary contest. Had he competed and lost in this Left primary, the FI leader did not want to put himself in the awkward position of having to support a candidate he had fiercely opposed for the past five years (Mélenchon 2016b). left-wing critics argued that the FI leader should have run that risk: if his ideas were so strong and popular, he would have no doubt won the primary election (Filoche 2016). Mélenchon's ambition was to run a campaign "above political

² Ironically, the PG – Mélenchon's party – made similar alliances with the Socialists in the 2015 regional elections. Such tactical agreements enabled the PG to win several seats.

parties". While, in 2012, he had received the support of several left-wing parties and was clearly identified as a leftist candidate (Marlière 2012), in 2017, he ostensibly turned his back on the history, culture and unity of the Left (Marlière 2016). In a typically populist fashion, he sought the support of 'ordinary people'. Unbowed France is not a party, but a 'mass of citizens'. Since then, he has aggressively pursued this tack. His goal is no longer a matter of rallying left-wing forces together (behind him) but rather of replacing them and reshaping the partisan and political landscape.

France Insoumise eventually received the support of PG, *Nouvelle Gauche Socialiste* (New Socialist Left/NGS, a splinter group from the PS), PCF and Ensemble!, another component of FDG. None of those parties played a part in setting up Mélenchon's agenda. The PCF and *Ensemble!* were profoundly divided over the issue. Some argued that Mélenchon was the only credible candidate the radical Left could support. Others were of the view that Mélenchon's candidacy was deeply divisive and dangerous because of its 'populist turn'. Mélenchon speaks of a 'citizen insurrection', an expression which refers to a revolution through the ballot box. In the 2012 presidential election, he targeted Marine Le Pen as his main opponent, and he took on the FN leader in the northern constituency of Hénin-Beaumont in legislative elections which followed. He lost each time. In 2012, the campaign's rallying cry was: "*Qu'ils s'en aillent tous!*" ("They must all go!"): the 'they' referred to the 'corrupt elite' (Mélenchon 2010c, 13). This is a like-for-like translation of "*¡Que se vayan todos!*", a slogan borrowed from the Piquetero movement in Argentina in 2005 (Philip and Panizza 2011). In 2017, Mélenchon referred to '*dégagisme*' (the act of clearing out), an expression coined during the revolutions in North Africa, notably in Tunisia (Andureau 2017). It is worth noting that he had started tapping into the rhetoric and imaginary of various populist movements across the world several years before the 2017 presidential election.

In the 2017 legislative elections, Mélenchon ran in Marseilles. He did not choose a constituency where the FN was strong but one where he had fared very well in the first round of the presidential election, the constituency of Patrick Mennucci, a PS deputy and former comrade in PS's Left wing. It is worth stressing that as early

as 2010, Mélenchon's discursive practice uses a populist pattern: a) its discourse is articulated around the nodal point of 'the people'; b) his representation of society primarily divides the socio-political field into two antagonistic camps ('the people' and 'the oligarchy') (Katsambekis 2016).

What is most remarkable is Mélenchon's change of vocabulary and register after the 2012 campaign. The FI leader wanted to stop using the traditional language and discursive imaginary of the Left. This is, of course, much in line with Podemos's attempt to "spread the ideas of the Left in a language geared toward the common sense of the social majority" (Rendueles and Sola 2015). In true populist fashion, the idea was to rally 'people' from different political and ideological backgrounds against the 'oligarchy'. Thus, Mélenchon banned red flags from his rallies, and he stopped singing *The Internationale* at the end of public meetings. These traditional left-wing symbols were replaced by tricolour flags and *La Marseillaise*. Those changes raised a few eyebrows on the Left as the French national flag and the national anthem have been the emblem of the Right and Far-Right for a long time. left-wing symbols, which are deeply ingrained in the culture of the French Left were deemed too divisive or simply meaningless to the mass of the people FI wished to connect with.

Another important signifier, in the sense given by Ernesto Laclau, is the promotion of a 6th Republic in the place of the 5th Republic.³ Mélenchon and his followers had been promoting a new Republic which would break with the pomp of the current institutions. The 5th Republic does indeed confer on the president tremendous power. The aim is, first and foremost, to address the democratic deficit at the heart of current institutions.⁴ In 2014, Mélenchon conceived and launched the *Mouvement pour la 6e République* (Movement for a 6th Republic/M6R), a loose structure to

³ The constitution of the 5th Republic was adopted by referendum in 1958. The new text was voted shortly after Charles de Gaulle's return to power. It strengthened the power of the executive, notably the president. www.conseil-constitutionnel.fr/conseil-constitutionnel/francais/la-constitution/la-constitution-du-4-octobre-1958/texte-integral-de-la-constitution-du-4-octobre-1958-en-vigueur.5074.html

⁴ The current institutions are often labelled "republican monarchy" by its critics on the left.

promote a 6th Republic. This was his first political initiative outside of PG, his party. At that time, Mélenchon published *L'Ère du Peuple* (The Time of the People), an early attempt to spell out, if not to theorize, the new major cleavage between 'the people' and 'the oligarchy' (Mélenchon 2014a). This essay is an ideological turning point. Mélenchon bids farewell to an interpretation of society and conflicts based on class. He stops referring to the notion of class struggles altogether. This is obviously a major break with Marxist theory and with left-wing politics. Instead of addressing a politically and culturally fragmented proletariat, he argues that progressive politics should seek to gather together 'the people' beyond their class, race and gender differences.

Mélenchon points out that unifying 'the people' is a three-stage process. In the first stage, the people, which he calls *homo urbanus* as they essentially live in urban areas, are the multitude of depoliticized individuals who merely go about their daily routine. In the second stage, there are politically conscious individuals who start taking action and make political claims. In the third stage, a network constitutes itself through collective action. In this scheme, political parties do not get a mention. The future belongs to movements with a horizontal type of organization. Long before the 2017 presidential election, Mélenchon's populist narrative had been formed. It is here interesting to distinguish between Mélenchon's attempt to politically unify the people (in the sense of an active and conscious political community) and Marine Le Pen's homogenizing of the French community along ethno-cultural lines (Geisser 2015). Mélenchon, however, does not give a convincing explanation of how the people, as a multitude, can overcome their divisions and conflicts (class, gender, ethnic). The conclusion that can be drawn from this is that Mélenchon has adopted a resolutely 'interclassist' approach to building a majoritarian bloc. Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain had attempted to follow a similar path earlier, with mixed results, but with steady electoral progress.

Jean-Luc Mélenchon also believes that the era of the party, as coordinator and aggregator of popular demands and expectations and as a vanguard, has passed. The 'movement' has replaced it. The organization should be horizontal and not vertical (as in traditional socialist/communist parties). The question of horizontality refers to

democracy: Who draws up the programme? Who decides the main policy proposals? There are, of course, open procedures (notably on the internet) for FI supporters to make such proposals and it remains to be seen whether they are genuinely democratic and transparent. Critics have argued that despite promoting the creation of a 6th Republic, Mélenchon has fully embraced the very personalized traditions of the 5th Republic, notably by dispensing with political parties and by seeking to create a personal relationship with the French people. Emmanuel Macron and, to a lesser extent, Marine Le Pen have done the same. This bears all the characteristics of a populist stand.

In late February 2017, facing a threat on the Left from the socialist candidate Benoît Hamon, Mélenchon's populist campaign intensified from the Bastille Rally on 18 March (Lago 2017) onward. Jorge Lago, a Podemos cadre who has lived in France, approved of this tactical change. In his view, Mélenchon convinced many doubters by combining a statesman-like discourse, wise and strong, with a populist rhetoric that could appeal to the disenfranchised (the young and the working class): "In short, the idea of obliterating the language of the traditional Left and Radical Left shibboleths, and of banishing red flags and certain references from campaign rallies, was executed really well in my view, albeit perhaps a little late in the day" (Lago 2017).

Eventually coming fourth in the presidential election with a significant 19.6% per cent share of the vote, Mélenchon called on voters to elect an FI majority in the legislative elections of June 2017. He insisted that unlike the Extreme/Radical Left, which allegedly had no intention of winning an election whatsoever, FI wanted to accede to power as soon as possible. This is reminiscent of the claim made by Syriza in Greece (Katsambekis 2016: 398) and Podemos leaders in Spain (Tremlett 2015). In the end, FI fell largely short of an overall majority in the lower house, with seventeen deputies elected in total, but enough to form a parliamentary group (fifteen deputies are required). This was a better result than what the polls forecast after the first round. In the second round, all the opposition parties (including *Les Républicains*) gained from a relative demobilization of the Macron electorate. The PCF won in eleven constituencies and the FN in eight. The PCF also formed its own

parliamentary group, separate from FI, thanks to the addition of five overseas deputies. Since the 2017 elections, the relationship between the FI and PCF leaders has been very tense. The two parliamentary groups lead separate lives and activists on both sides rarely mingle. Further evidence of the tension between the two parties is that for the first time over the past twelve years, Mélenchon did not attend the 'Fête de l'Humanité' in September 2017. This is a political and festive gathering organized annually by L'Humanité newspaper, which is close to the PCF. As soon as the parliamentary session started, FI deputies positioned themselves on the Left, claiming to be the main, if not the only, opposition to Macron and his government. For FI voters and for the public at large, there is no doubt that FI is a left-wing movement. And, like the PCF, FI concentrated on defending the Labour Code⁵ under threat.

Which populism?

Where does Mélenchon's populism come from? Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau have undoubtedly influenced him. Mélenchon met Laclau and Mouffe in Argentina in 2013. The three of them spoke at a conference on populism (Proust 2017). Since Laclau's death in October 2014 (Mélenchon 2015a), Mélenchon has maintained close ties with Mouffe, who can be spotted alongside him at most important rallies or demonstrations. Both have debated further since their first encounter in Argentina. The FI leader has also established contacts with the Podemos leaders Pablo Iglesias and Íñigo Errejón (Chazel 2016). He was also close to Hugo Chávez in Venezuela and Rafael Correa in Ecuador. In the years preceding his ascent to power, Alexis Tsipras was also one of Mélenchon's political friends. The FI leader welcomed him in Paris in June 2014, months before the Syriza leader became Prime Minister. Relations between the two men started to cool in the summer of 2015 after

⁵ The Labour Code incorporates all legislation regarding work relations between employers and employees. Following a controversial law passed by the last socialist government, Emmanuel Macron's new comprehensive reforms of the legislation makes it easier to hire and fire and reduces the power of the trade unions when negotiating with employers.

Greece signed a third memorandum with the European Union. Mélenchon was publicly critical of Tsipras, who was presented as a man caving in under pressure. This prompted Mélenchon to start reflecting on a Plan B. Should he win power in France in the future, he has pledged to ask for a radical revision of the European treaties. If this is not conceded, Mélenchon has said that France, under his leadership, would exit the Eurozone, if not the EU altogether (Besse Desmoulières 2017).

Personal and ideological changes

Chantal Mouffe believes that Mélenchon is no 'communist revolutionary' and describes him as a 'radical reformist' against a 'mounting oligarchy'. According to her, Mélenchon and FI embody the 'populist moment' that Spain experienced with Podemos a few years earlier: people reject 'post-democracy' and "demand a real participation in political decisions". FI aims to federate 'the people' (i.e. the working classes and the middle classes). Mouffe further argues that Mélenchon has recognized the "crucial role of emotions in constructing political identities". The FI leader aims to "bring together the people, to create a collective will around a project of citizens' revolution, in order to write a new constitution that opens up more debate and facilitates the expression of popular sovereignty" (Mouffe 2017). While endorsing Mélenchon's populism quite emphatically, she points to his efforts to make up 'chains of equivalence' between various groups of dominated or marginalized groups in society (whatever the social class they belong to). Mouffe makes a distinction between the Latin American context (societies with powerful, entrenched oligarchies) and Europe (where the Left-Right divide remains key). Given that our European societies are allegedly being 'Latin-Americanized', she advocates an end to the domination of an oligarchic system by way of a democratic reconstruction.

Mélenchon may have come across to some as 'too radical' or 'too subversive' in 2012. But in 2017, his objective was certainly to be perceived as 'wise' and 'statesmanlike'. The word 'humanist' was widely used. In a note published on his blog, he claimed that

“Disobedience is a new humanism” (Mélénchon 2017). This new disobedience has its roots in the history of human emancipation from oppressive institutions (political powers and churches). He insists on the question of freedom of thought. But, true to his French republican credentials, this means for him emancipation from religions. At no point does he contemplate that individuals may emancipate themselves by worshipping a god or by following religious principles. This manifesto reads very much like traditional French republican ideology.

Over the months, language, symbols and communication techniques did, indeed, change. For instance, as a familiar and ‘inclusive’ form of address, Mélénchon uses the expression ‘*les gens*’ (people), which was popularized in Spain by Podemos leaders (*la gente*) (Grijelmo 2017). He has studied what worked in other countries, such as Barak Obama’s and Bernie Sanders’s use of social media in the United States, or the Podemos experience in Spain. The Greek letter Phi (ϕ) has become the movement’s logo, used everywhere, including on ballot papers. The word Phi allows some wordplay: it sounds like FI, the France Insoumise acronym. Phi also evokes philosophy, harmony and love and is unburdened by a political past. It is a symbol of neither Right nor Left, but a neutral marker.

Mélénchon has taken stock of the traditional media’s declining influence. He has worked on his image down to the smallest details (such as the clothes he wears on different occasions, less formal and closer to what ordinary citizens wear). He likes PR stunts, such as using holograms to address two rallies simultaneously. He works very closely with PR consultants and is a professional politician, more than at any time in the past. His economic programme has changed little qualitatively since 2012 (Mélénchon 2016c). It is not anti-capitalist or radically leftist; it essentially promotes a radical Keynesian approach (Dusseaulx 2016) with a far greater emphasis on ecological questions than in the past. He wants to abolish the reform of the Labour Code which was carried out by the socialist government, and he opposes the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) with the United States and the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) with Canada.

Labour issues were indeed at the heart of the Mélénchon campaign, but not social classes as such. He referred to the ‘99%’,

pitting an undefined and far too large population against the richest oligarchs. In truth, the '1%' receives support from lower segments that also benefit from the social and economic status quo. The problem is that the '99% vs. 1%' opposition is not class-based. It is, therefore, simplistic and misleading. The more important and widening gap in Western societies is that between the upper middle class and everyone else. It would be more accurate, thus, to say that the real wealth distinction is between the '80%' and '20%'. Those 20% have a clear incentive to keep the system as it is, although they are not part of the infamous 1%. The growing separation between the upper middle class and everyone else can be seen in access to education and lifestyle. The 20% are more effective at passing on their status to their children, reducing overall social mobility and corroding prospects for more progressive approaches to policy (Reeves 2017).

France Insoumise and the 'Old World'

Jean-Luc Mélenchon's relationship with left-wing parties and the trade unions has been tense. The FI leader has no time for political parties, which, as he puts it, belong to the 'old world'. After Pierre Laurent, the PCF leader, had called for a Macron vote in the second round of the presidential election, Mélenchon sent him an angry text message saying: "It took you ten months to decide to support me, but only ten minutes to decide to vote for Macron. You, communists, are death and nothingness!" (Dodet 2017). His objective is to replace those 'old' parties: they all stand accused of ganging up to block FI's progress (Le Monde 2017). Hence he sticks to a strict policy of non-alliance with other forces on the Left locally. Their decline is not enough for Mélenchon; he actively wants to marginalize them. In this respect, FI's and Macron's *La République En Marche* (LREM) anti-party stances are two sides of the same coin.

This uncompromising stand is the source of extreme tensions on the Left. It raises the issue of a coalition forming to oppose Emmanuel Macron's policies in the National Assembly and outside of it. With about 12–14% of the share of the national vote, FI is far from being in a position to challenge LREM on its own. Yet Mélenchon

refuses to consider any type of alliance with other political forces of the Left and pejoratively describes those negotiations between parties as '*tambouille*' (grubby) (Tronche 2017). Often, he is accused of portraying himself and his parliamentary caucus as the natural parliamentary expression of the struggles that the trade union movement will undertake.⁶ Critics argue that such strategy is the antithesis of unity, and they stress the need to unite all resistance forces at the risk of being defeated by Macron's offensive against workers' social protection.

FI comes across as the archetypal post-modern organization: there is no fee-paying membership, so it is not possible to formally join it. Mélenchon claims that FI is now the biggest organization in French politics on the grounds that over 500,000 internet users have registered on his campaign website by simply clicking on the page as a sign of support for his presidential candidacy.⁷ Since the announcement of his candidacy in the presidential election in February 2016, there has been no leadership contest to elect the FI leader or to elect the party representatives. One cannot join FI as a party of organization but as an individual. This is a major difference with FDG, which regrouped several other parties. In other words, other parties of the Left cannot join FI. Their members have to integrate individually. The party, therefore, loses its name, identity and political orientation. Thus, there would be no room in FI for a French equivalent of Anticapitalistas, a far-left faction in Podemos and one of the founding groups of the new Spanish party. The organization has also highly unusual rules: support groups cannot have more than 15 members and should not coordinate their work with each other within larger geographic zones; there should be no local FI conventions or general assemblies. These rules, which have

⁶ FI organized a demonstration against the Labour Code reform on 23 September 2017, just a week after a similar event had been organized by the trade unions. Mélenchon was singled out and criticized for mingling with unions' traditional business and trying to hijack for his own political gains a collective struggle and endeavour.

⁷ When in February 2016 Mélenchon declared his candidacy at the presidential election on television, he invited the people who wished to support his campaign to click on a page on his campaign site. Since then, Mélenchon has argued that those online supporters are *de facto* 'fully fledged' members of FI.

not always been discussed nor abided by locally, strengthen the authority of the national leadership. FI has a horizontal and informal type of organization on the local level and tight vertical control exerted by the leadership on the national level. The core leadership group is drawn from PG, which is composed of Mélenchon's first circle of allies in FI. Most were previously, like Mélenchon, members of the PS.

A staunch patriotism

For left-wing populists, patriotism is a very positive notion. The Podemos leaders Pablo Iglesias and Íñigo Errejón have embraced it. They have sought to reclaim patriotism for 'progressive ends'. This is a novelty in a country where Franco implemented a fascist regime in the name of the 'patria', its defence and values. Patriotism works here as an empty signifier in order to stir up a 'new national spirit'. For Iglesias, the notion of patriotism is a question that goes beyond Left and Right. This is about behaving in a 'decent' manner (Bassets 2015).

Jean-Luc Mélenchon's traditional brand of republicanism has for long been patriotic. Most of his speeches are peppered with vibrant references to *la patrie*. The FI leader likes to quote, in particular, this famous Jean Jaurès sentence: "It may almost be said that, while a little dose of internationalism separates a man from his country, a large dose brings him back. A little patriotism separates from The Internationale; the higher patriotism brings back to it." Based on strong revolutionary and republican principles, patriotism is largely perceived on the French Left as an acceptable point of reference, although not everyone would agree with it (Philippe 2012). Mélenchon sees the unity of the Republic (France's 'one and indivisible' according to the first article of the Constitution of the 5th Republic) as untouchable, if not sacrosanct. For instance, he inveighs against the European Regional Languages Charter on the grounds that it grants 'specific rights' to people according to their linguistic practice. The then European Member of Parliament argued that this would be contrary to the principle of equality of all citizens before French law (Mélenchon 2014b).

Regarding the position of France in international politics, Mélenchon shows features of a more conservative type of patriot. He sings the praises of France as a global power, spanning all the world's seas and oceans. He wants France to quit NATO, for instance, but, like Charles de Gaulle, in order to better defend its interests and prestige around the world. In line with that, he regards all French overseas territories not as colonized countries, but as fully part of France (Branchi and Philippe 2012). FI does not fight against French imperialism because such a fight is unwarranted. Its approach to foreign policy is not based on an internationalist outlook but a geostrategic one. Its view of the situation in the Middle East relies on an assessment of the relationship between global powers – hence the calls to cooperate with Russia, even if this means negotiating terms with Bashar al-Assad. The same approach of rival global powers can be applied to Europe – so the target becomes Angela Merkel's Germany (Mélenchon 2015b), if not the 'German people', with borderline Germanophobic rhetoric.⁸ Running for the presidency, Mélenchon enjoyed speaking as the country's (future) commander in chief of the French military, whose capacities he wants to strengthen. Although his 'ecosocialism' strongly opposes the use of civil nuclear power, he supports keeping, and even enhancing, nuclear weapons (Rousset 2012). As a result, he has widely been criticized on the Left for his 'patriotic' and 'Jacobin'⁹ stand. And although the FI leader does not embrace Marine Le Pen's ethnocentric conception of nationality, he is keen to stress that French nationality has nothing to do with questions of culture, race or gender, but is related to the individuals' emancipation from those 'particularisms'. A French person, according to Mélenchon, is someone who adheres to the 'national narrative,' made up of French history and its 'great' republican

⁸ In his *Hareng de Bismarck* essay (the subtitle of which is "le poison allemand" – German poison), Mélenchon writes: "Arrogant as never before, Germany uses brutality, blackmail and punishment for those who do not obey immediately the new order which it has managed to impose." (p. 7)

⁹ In France, the Jacobin Society was the most influential political club during the French Revolution. Jacobinism, today, in the French context, generally indicates a supporter of a centralized republican state and strong central government powers and/or supporters of extensive government intervention to transform society.

values, those which stem from the 1789 Revolution. He is, in this respect, a true believer in the republican ideology of the 3rd Republic (Renan 1997). Critics argue that this approach ignores the multicultural and multi-ethnic fabric of the French nation today, and it may even have chauvinistic if not neo-imperialistic overtones when Mélenchon claims that those republican values are not French but 'universal' (Martelli 2016).

Was France Insoumise's populist strategy successful?

Interpreting the electoral sequence

On the night of the first round of the presidential election, Jean-Luc Mélenchon lamented that he narrowly missed the qualification for the second round: about 600,000 separated him from Marine Le Pen, who came second. In the subsequent legislative election, 17 deputies were elected (compared to LREM 309 deputies and 112 Républicains deputies). But how good are these electoral results overall?

It is undeniable that Mélenchon's performance in the first round of the presidential election is good compared to the results of the Radical Left of the past 30 years. This being said, the top three candidates (Macron, Centre, Le Pen, Extreme Right, and Fillon, Right) received a total of over 60% of the share of the vote. The Left was, therefore, largely defeated in this election. One could also argue that Mélenchon's combative campaign (which attracted a significant number of young and working-class voters who normally abstain) managed to regroup traditional left-wing voters and socialist voters who had deserted the PS. Yet he overtook Benoît Hamon (the socialist candidate) in the polls only in mid-March, after lagging behind for several weeks. This happened when it became clear that part of the PS leadership was defecting to support Macron. When the betrayal materialized, the more centrist sections of PS voters also switched to Macron. Their change of allegiance was dictated by two factors: first, they did not relate to Hamon, whom some found 'too left-wing'. Second, their vote for Macron was tactical in the sense that they wanted to prevent the

qualification of Fillon and Le Pen for the second round. When it was clear to everyone that Hamon would not recover from this act of betrayal from members of his own party, he started collapsing in the polls. PS voters with firmer left-wing sympathies turned to Mélenchon, whose economic programme and ideas were largely compatible with Hamon's (Marlière 2017b). This was tactical voting rather than a response to Mélenchon's persona. Benefiting from the support of disgruntled voters in the PS and good performances during the two televised debates, Mélenchon indeed came close to qualifying for the second round.

In short, Macron and Mélenchon were adept at seizing the opportunity that the crisis of the two main parties opened up for them: for the PS, Hollande's late decision not to run, and for the *Républicains*, the corruption allegations against Fillon. The collapse of the two government parties had been long coming: the working classes had long deserted the Left, and independent workers and artisans had turned their back on the Right. Macron's victory could be interpreted as the emergence of a new dominant bloc, a 'bourgeois bloc', which gathered together the middle classes of the centre-left and the centre-right (Amable and Palombarini 2017). It is too early to say whether this new bloc could indeed become the hegemonic bloc, but Macron's deep slump in the opinion polls, as well as the rising opposition to his labour law reforms, augur rather badly in this respect.

At the 2019 European elections, FI received 6.31% of the share of the vote and had 6 MEPs elected. Mélenchon's movement lagged far behind Macron, Le Pen, the Green party and *Les Républicains*. The FI hoped to benefit from Macron's unpopularity and a diffuse but growing Euroscepticism among French voters. But, apparently, this election put an end to the short period of FI's political and electoral hegemony on the Left (Mestre 2019).

FI and 'The People'

Commentators concur that Mélenchon's dynamic 2017 presidential campaign galvanized large constituencies of the electorate which had stopped supporting the Left (the young and the

popular classes). Well-organized and active on social media, FI was built around his charismatic presence and oratory skills, and it made a significant difference. As the FI leader put it in the conclusion of one of the televised debates: “I want people to find the taste for happiness again.” This may sound to some a grandiloquent statement and an unrealistic target. However, this positive discourse mobilized the Left. It gave people new hope after so many defeats over the previous decades (Benbara 2017). The ‘hidden transcript’ in Mélenchon’s campaign (Stavrakakis et al. 2016: 58) was the popular anger at what was largely regarded as the ‘betrayal’ of socialist principles by François Hollande, as well as his broken promises. FI carried out a clever ‘war of movement’ in the Gramscian sense of the term.¹⁰ As a result, it made important electoral gains in all social categories and all age groups with the exception of the retired and elderly. Mélenchon received 30% of 18–24 year-olds, but only 15% of 60–69 year-olds and 9% of the over-70s (Teinturier 2017).

For FI supporters, the difficulty of the task ahead was to federate voters across social groups and generations. Each of them had demands and expectations of a particular type. Some had suggested that the ‘national community’ or *la patrie* (motherland) could prove handy ‘empty signifiers’ which name collectively, unify and represent the chain of equivalence among popular demands that are left unsatisfied by the government (Kioupkiolis 2016: 102). Mélenchon toyed with those notions during his presidential campaign. The narrative was, roughly speaking, as follows: France is a national community based on the principle of solidarity; the motherland protects the poor through the actions of the State. The aim is to produce an alternative type of patriotism, one that is progressive and opposes the xenophobic narrative of the Far-Right (Benbara 2017). FI, like Podemos in Spain, exemplifies a creative version of the ‘politics of the common’ that opens up to ‘ordinary people’, and resonates with “the common sense of social majorities beyond the left-right divide” (Kioupkiolis 2016, 100).

¹⁰ A war of movement is, for Gramsci, the phase of open conflict between classes, where the outcome is decided by direct clashes between revolutionaries and the State. A war of position, on the other hand, is the slow, hidden conflict, where forces seek to gain influence and power.

Conclusion

Mélenchon's populist strategy in launching France Insoumise is blatant. This is an attempt to organize the masses along the lines of an agonistic cleavage between 'the people' and 'the elite' (Mouffe 2018). What is quite remarkable in this unique left-wing type of populism in France is that it was not motivated by external factors, such as social movements, but was manufactured by one person for a specific political purpose – to run a presidential campaign. This is different from the situation in Spain. Podemos was formed in the aftermath of decisive social movements. In France, the correlation with social movements cannot be made easily, except for the strong discrediting of Hollande's presidency amongst left-wing voters. This certainly made Mélenchon an attractive electoral proposition for both radical and moderate left-wing voters.

Can left-wing populism work in France? Can a movement launched by one man to bolster an electoral campaign become a major progressive force? The FI leader wants to federate the people beyond the constituencies of the traditional Left. He has ceased to refer to and to use the notion of the Left altogether. One may ask what 'people' are there to federate in the end. Electoral polls show that FI's electorate match the traditional pattern of left-wing voters: urban, youngish, public sector workers, educated, lower-middle-class. Mélenchon did not attract a significant number of voters from the Right or the Far-Right. He appealed to the young and the working-class voters who normally do not vote (Dubre 2017). The irony is that, despite dismissing the notions of the Left and class, the sociology of Mélenchon's electorate is clearly left-wing and their vote is a class vote against the Right and the Extreme Right. In other words, the FI's electorate was attracted in the first place by Mélenchon's left-wing social democratic programme.

One may wonder whether populism is the best strategy to broaden the Left's electorate. Sociologist Éric Fassin thinks that left-wing and right-wing populisms do not tap into the same culture and do not express the same feelings. On the Left, the anger is directed at free market economics. On the Far-Right, the hatred of foreigners and immigrants is the main motivation. Fassin argues that both

feelings and mindsets are incompatible: the former has a positive mindset, whereas the latter is based on resentment. Therefore, setting aside the Left-Right cleavage is dangerous as it may have a confusing and depoliticizing effect on voters who are less politicized. Fassin also points to the nature of Donald Trump's electorate in 2016: the majority came from the middle/upper classes.

In short, the common hatred of an elusive '1%' and even the profound dislike of neoliberal policies does not suffice to fill the gap between left-wing and right-wing populism. There is, indeed, evidence that an insignificant fraction of Mélenchon's electorate (less than 4%) voted for Le Pen in the second round of the presidential election. Fassin concludes by saying that it would be more beneficial from an electoral and political point of view to appeal to left-wing voters who abstain rather than try to lure right-wing voters who do not share the social justice agenda of the Left (Fassin 2017).

What defines FI's populism is the role and the centrality of the leader. At the end of FI's summer conference in August 2017, Mélenchon declared that the "question of the leadership, programme and strategy was settled" (Mestre 2017). In other words, following his self-appointment as leader of FI, there would not be any debate or vote on the leadership. Laclau argues that the "symbolic unification of the group around an individuality" – be it symbolic or even notional – "is inherent to the formation of a 'people'" (Laclau 2005, 100). Mélenchon identifies with the people, has a fiery character and is seen as a charismatic orator and performer. Those qualities are those normally associated with a populist leader. Mélenchon's model of leadership is closer to Chávez's than Iglesias's. In Spain, Iglesias has never been a lonely leader. Podemos remains fairly collegial: Íñigo Errejón (who has now left Podemos), Carlos Monedero, Carolina Bescansa, Luis Alegre and Pablo Echenique have played prominent roles in Podemos's leadership (Kioupkiolis 2016, 113). In Greece and Germany respectively, Alexis Tsipras and Oskar Lafontaine never played the roles of strong and charismatic leaders to such an extent. In France, no other major figure has, to date, appeared on the front stage. Mélenchon incarnates FI for the public and he is, for the time being, its undisputed leader.

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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 (Pribičević 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 (Pribičević 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 (Pribičević 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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Economic and monetary integration: Theory, practice and experience in the EU periphery

Abstract

During and immediately after World War II, economic integration was conceived by both (neo)liberals and social democrats as the only available antidote to a repetition of such a catastrophe. For neoliberals, market-enhancing economic integration was conceived as the appropriate context for the flourishing of the liberal project. For social democrats, on the other hand, market-embedding integration was viewed as a precondition not only for peace but for development. The chapter traces the intellectual origins and rationale of both perspectives. The European Economic Community emerged out of a compromise of those contrasting views on economic integration, and has evolved through time, especially since the inception of the European Monetary Union (EMU), into an entity that very much materializes the (neo)liberal expectations and the social-democratic fears. This chapter assesses that evolution, in general. It finally considers, in particular, the experience and prospects of being in the EU and the EMU of a peripheral country: Portugal. *Keywords:* economic integration, political integration, Hayek, Myrdal, Portugal

Introduction

■ In 1946, when Winston Churchill called for the creation of the United States of Europe, he was expressing a widespread sentiment and belief nurtured by the devastating experience of two world wars, both with Europe at their epicentre: European unification was urgently needed to avert a future repeat of the tragedy. Many among those who had participated in the anti-fascist alliance and were then engaged in the reconstruction of the continent shared Churchill's opinion.

However, despite the agreement on the overarching goal of unification – securing peace – there were stark differences in respect to both the ways and the ends of the process of European integration. Unification should be political *and* economic, but the articulation of the political and the economic in the building of a united Europe and the roles of the markets and government in the process were far from consensual.

This chapter recalls those seminal disagreements to shed light on the evolution of the European Union (EU), with a focus on the developments of the post-Maastricht and the post-euro crises, and the current political possibilities, namely those of the Left, in that framework. It evokes, in the first section, two early contributors to those controversies – Friedrich Hayek and Gunnar Myrdal – as exponents of contrasting (neoliberal and social-democratic) blueprints for a United Europe. In the second section, devoted to the discussion of the articulation of the economic and the political in the process of European unification, Nicholas Kaldor's more recent contribution on the prospects of monetary unification is brought to the fore to highlight his prescient anticipation of the failings of the existing monetary unification. The third section inquires which of the rival views on European unification came to materialize in the hybrid entity that emerged out of the 'European project' constraining the development path of the EU and the political possibilities in its frame. Finally, before concluding, the case of Portugal is presented and briefly discussed as an illustration of the prevailing constraints on the possibilities of the Left in the current European Union framework.

Hayek and Myrdal on economic and political integration

During the Second World War, Friedrich Hayek engaged with other fellow neoliberals, namely Lionel Robbins and Luigi Einaudi, in the development of a liberal argument for federalism (Masini 2017). They thought economic and political integration should be sought after the war not only as a safeguard to peace but as a context providing the conditions for the flourishing of a liberal order.

Hayek (Hayek 1958, 255ff) referred to "a federation" without any indication of location or geographical scope. For him, economic

integration, the free flow of commodities and capital within this federation would preclude what he called planning. It would constrain the capacity of national governments to pursue independent economic and social policies and restrict the possibilities of collective action of trade unions and other associations. In the frame of the federation, an industrial policy on the national scale would be ineffective due to the freedom of movement of goods and services, independent monetary policy would be severely constrained, most probably a common currency would emerge, taxation would be inhibited by the threat of exit of capital to more favourable locations within the federation, and fiscal policy would be limited.

According to Hayek, the transfer of the political power lost by national governments to the scale of the federation, advocated by rival socialist federalists, was certainly to be feared and counteracted but he believed 'planning' at the scale of the federation was in general unlikely due to the fact that the institutional diversity and the different levels of development across nations within the union would preclude consensus on market-constraining public policies.

This, Hayek believed, did not mean that the federation would be deprived of power. On the contrary, it would have the *negative* power to do away with impediments to the free flow of commodities and capital, but it would lack the *positive* power of meddling with market mechanisms. It would have market-enhancing capabilities while lacking the market-embedding ones.

Gunnar Myrdal, while arguing in favour of enhanced economic cooperation and integration on behalf of peace, believed, instead, that planning at the national and international level was a basic prerequisite for balanced and successful economic integration. As the executive secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe between 1947 and 1957, Myrdal actively engaged in the design of a system of international organizations that would coordinate various economic policies following an international plan (Appelquist and Andersson 2005). He had in mind a progressive system of international planning to coordinate national full employment policies which was antithetical to Hayek's blueprint for federalism.

His research on economic integration had led him to believe that the free circulation of capital, goods and people within economically

integrated areas would, without planning, tend to aggravate previous social and economic inequalities. Interregional inequalities were countered in the modern national states by a “most complex network of regularized public interferences [...] which have the common purpose of counteracting the blind law of cumulative social change, and hindering it from causing inequalities between regions, industries and social groups” (Myrdal 1957, 25). If divergence was to be avoided within economically integrated multinational areas, the same or similar “public interferences” should exist on the international scale.

Myrdal’s conclusions were derived from the principle of cumulative circular causation, which he had developed with Nicholas Kaldor based on previous contributions made by Thorstein Veblen, Knut Wicksell and Allyn Young (O’Hara 2009). In contrast to neoclassical equilibrium analysis, this principle is a multi-causal approach which emphasizes negative and positive feedback effects in the processes of capitalist accumulation. Applied by Myrdal to the study of development, the principle of circular cumulative causation suggested that, left to the market, more productive economic activities would tend to cluster in certain locations and regions to the detriment of others. The expansion of economic activity in certain locations as a result of historical advantage or even fortuitous events has tended to trigger positive feedback effects detrimental to locations left behind. Far from countering the positive feedback effects, the free movement of labour, capital and goods within an economically integrated area would accelerate the cumulative process of divergence between rich and poor regions. The expansive regions would attract labour, depriving the depressed regions of their active population. Capital would seek locations where income, demand and profits are superior, leaving behind underdeveloped regions where investment opportunities are scarce. Industrially developed regions, operating in increasing return regimes, would reinforce competitive advantages, leaving behind rural areas.

Myrdal did not exclude the possibility of counter-tendencies within the processes of circular cumulative causation preventing the continuous deepening of inequalities, namely *spread effects*, technological and other, from the developed to the underdeveloped regions, or external diseconomies countering growth in developed regions. However, he believed that those counter-tendencies were in general weak and, therefore, that inequalities could only be mitigated by public

policies subsidizing poorer regions left behind in the process of development with resources from the common purse (Myrdal 1957).

Although sharing the concern of securing peace through economic integration, Hayek and Myrdal differed in most other respects. While, for Hayek, the federation was desired because it precluded 'planning', both on the national and international scale, for Myrdal, planning was a precondition of successful integration. The same diversity and inequalities that, for Hayek, were instrumental in preventing the exercise of *positive* (market-embedding) powers at the scale of the federation were, for Myrdal, hindrances to international cooperation to be removed by the exercise of a redistributive (positive) power by upper-level instances of government.

The precedence of economic over political integration and its consequences

Against the expectation of federalists like Altiero Spinelli, who argued in favour of launching the European Union by a constitutional act leading to political unification, the view that economic integration should precede and prepare political integration came to prevail. Robert Schuman's declaration in 1950 – "Europe will not be made all at once, or according to a single plan. It will be built through concrete achievements which first create a de facto solidarity" – has set in motion a gradualist process that would come to shape the path of integration up to the present, and define its fate.

The precedence of the economic over the political would mark all stages of European integration, with each treaty, for example Maastricht, which enacted the European Monetary Union (EMU), representing not a small step but a great leap forward.

Long before Maastricht, in 1971, Nicholas Kaldor discussed and broadly anticipated what might come out of such a clumsy leap forward. In 1969, the heads of state and the governments of the European Economic Community (EEC) gathered in Hague and agreed on the project of advancing towards the setting up of a single European Monetary Union (EMU), delegating the prime minister and minister of finance of Luxemburg, Pierre Werner, the task of drafting a plan for that purpose.

Published in 1970, the Werner report (Council of the European Union 1970) proposed a decade-long road map for the EMU that would start with the coordination of economic policies, extend to the elimination of the fluctuation of exchange rates and culminate in the setting up of a single currency “which would guarantee the irreversibility of the undertaking” (Council of the European Union 1970, 26). Evidencing awareness of the political significance of the step forward towards a monetary union the Werner report stated that the “economic and monetary union thus appears as a leaven for the development of political union, which in the long run, it cannot do without” (Council of the European Union 1970, 26).

In his comment on the Werner report, Kaldor (Kaldor 1971) agreed that the European Community, as it then stood, was not a viable system. To subsist the Community should either advance towards full integration in a political union or relax the rigidity of its agricultural policies and exchange rates. However, the full integration, which Kaldor did not discard, could not be obtained in a political void by the gradualist method proposed in the Werner report.

Explicitly referring to Myrdal and circular cumulative causation, Kaldor predicted that within the monetary union, fast-growth regions would acquire a cumulative competitive advantage in respect to slower growth ones – an effect that could only be countered by public policies and inter-regional income transfers. The fatal contradiction of the Werner report, according to Kaldor, consisted in transferring fiscal policy to the Community without transferring, simultaneously, the responsibility for revenue and expenditure. The absence of a community budget would preclude the ‘harmonization’ of the public service provision within it. Such harmonization could only occur with similar tax rates and if member countries were similarly prosperous and grew at the same rate. Otherwise, to ensure the same level of provision of public services across the Community – which Kaldor assumed was one of the goals of the common market – the tax rates would have to be higher in the less prosperous countries, to the detriment of the economic competitiveness of those countries, thus triggering a vicious cycle involving increasing tax rates, less growth and smaller fiscal proceeds. A system operating on these lines would rapidly increase inequalities between the different countries and would be bound to break down in a relatively short time (Kaldor 1971, 205).

The objectives of the EMU could not be achieved without “a Community Government and Parliament which takes over the responsibility for at least the major part of the expenditure now provided by national governments, and finances it by taxes raised at uniform rates throughout the Community” (Kaldor 1971, 205): that is, without the United States of Europe. In such a United States, Kaldor admitted, “the prosperous areas automatically subsidize the poorer areas [...] [t]he cumulative tendencies to progress and decline are thus held in check by a ‘built-in’ fiscal stabilizer which makes the ‘surplus’ areas provide automatic fiscal aid to the ‘deficit areas’” (Kaldor 1971, 205).

Without a Community budget, the EMU would be “like the house which ‘divided against itself cannot stand’”. Monetary union and Community control over budgets would prevent a member country from pursuing full employment policies on its own – from taking steps to offset any sharp decline in the level of its production and employment, but without the benefit of a strong Community government which would shield its inhabitants from its worst consequences (Kaldor, 1971, p. 206).

Kaldor concluded, therefore, that “it is a dangerous error to believe that a monetary and economic union can precede a political union” (Kaldor 1971, 206) or that it can be a “ferment” to its creation. A monetary union and Community control over national budgets would generate pressures leading to the collapse of the whole edifice, precluding advances towards a political union without which the monetary union, as admitted in the Werner report, could not subsist.

Political possibilities within the EU and the EMU

The precedence of economic integration over political integration and the small-step approach that would lead to a political union out of necessity would come to shape the European Union and the EMU as a hard-to-characterize hybrid entity in respect of other spaces of economic and/or political integration. The European Union is neither the United States of Europe of Kaldor nor a pure Hayekian order. However, the precedence of economic over political integration induced a bias in the European integration process that makes it look very much like the liberal federation devised

by Hayek in 1939. (Anderson 2009, Höpner and Schäfer 2012, Scharpf 2012). The nature of this bias has been discussed and analysed since the 1980s by authors such as Scharpf (1988; 1997; 2006; 2011; 2012), Höpner and Schäfer (2012) and Streeck (2014).

In 1988, Scharpf coined the concept of the *joint decision trap* to denote the deadlocks and inefficient compromises within the EEC. Assuming that, in matters of institutional reform, the governments of member countries represent not only their constituents' interests but their own institutional interests, Scharpf noted that although governments may acknowledge that problems in their territories can no longer be solved with autonomous political decisions, reluctantly accepting, thereby, to delegate some prerogatives to higher-level institutions, they will, nonetheless, try to influence as much as possible the decisions taken at the union level. They will, therefore, defend their veto power, or at least the requirement of qualified majorities. Consequently, given the diversity of interests, the decision made will tend towards minimal common denominators.

The joint decision trap partly explains the asymmetry signalled by Scharpf (Scharpf 1997, 2012) between the positive and negative aspects of integration: that is, the prevalence of negative over positive integration.

The requirements of negative integration – 'undistorted' competition and the removal of barriers to the free circulation of goods, services, capital and workers – were enshrined at the outset in the treaties and accepted by all the member states. The architecture of the treaties, along with a set of decisions of the European Court of Justice, allowed the Commission to expand continuously the scope of negative integration in complex legislative processes without the express consent of national governments (Höpner and Schäfer 2012; Scharpf 2012). The building of the 'internal market' – the progressive removal of 'distortions' to competition and barriers to goods, services and capital flows – could thus proceed, regardless of any distractions arising along the way.

However, at the same time, the treaties have kept large policy areas, which might be denoted as market embedding, namely social policy, within the scope of national governments. Positive integration – the institutionalization of market-embedding policies at

the scale of the union – would be possible only to the extent where national interests converged and were subject to complex legislative processes involving the inter-governmental level and subject to high consensus requirements.

Despite the convergence of interests in some areas, the potential for conflict due to differences in the levels of economic development – with implications regarding competitiveness – and differences in the institutional set-up – with implications for the cost adjustment to a single model – was always large enough to preclude advances. The diversity in respect to welfare regimes and competitive capacity existing at the outset among the founding members increased substantially following the various enlargements. Consequently, already in 1997, Scharpf signalled that the possibility of a positive consensus allowing for the transfer of market-correcting policies to the level of the union was greatly diminished.

The combination of incapacity by national governments to pursue autonomous market-correcting policies within a space deprived of attrition to flows of capital, goods, services and workers, and a political void at the scale of the union, would induce competition among regulatory regimes which, “may well turn into a downward spiral of competitive deregulation and tax cuts in which all competing countries will find themselves reduced to a level of protection that is, in fact, lower than that preferred by any of them” (Scharpf, 1997, 1).

The downward spiral of competitive deregulation clearly recalls the notion of deprotection, both anticipated and desired by Hayek. In fact, the causal mechanisms of asymmetrical integration identified by Scharpf in the real existing European Union seem to replicate those delineated by Hayek in 1939. In the light of real developments, Hayek’s text stands out today as prescient, and the EU is much closer to Hayek’s desires than to Myrdal’s plans (Amderson 2009; Höpner and Schäfer 2012; Scharpf 2012; Streeck 2013).

Frustrated, but not less prescient, was Kaldor’s appeal in 1971 against Werner’s blueprint for monetary unification. The EMU was created precisely in the manner Kaldor tried to avoid, and it may come to collapse due to the operation of the mechanisms he described. Taken to the verge of collapse by the impact of a financial crisis originating in the USA which triggered, in Europe, banking and

external account crises which were latent, the UEM currently merely survives with the assistance of the 'unconventional' monetary policies of the ECB. Divided between creditors and debtors, subject to deflationary pressures and large migration flows from poorer to prosperous regions, the EMU, and the EU itself, resembles more and more Kaldor's house which "divided against itself cannot stand".

The crisis of the EMU during the Great Recession is often described in public debates using the metaphor of a river being crossed by travellers when a storm raised the flow to the point of almost drowning everybody. The situation between the two riverbanks is precarious. Seeking safety, the travellers should either cross to the shore of political union or retreat orderly to the common market, sacrificing the euro.

Joseph Stiglitz (Stiglitz 2013, 2016) elaborated on this metaphor when he placed the EU facing a choice between saving the euro or saving the EU. Saving the euro, according to Stiglitz, would require: a) the setting up of a real banking union; b) some form of debt mutualization, such as Eurobonds; c) industrial policies to enable the laggard countries to catch up; d) a central bank that focuses not only on inflation, but also on growth, employment, and financial stability, and e) the replacement of anti-growth austerity policies with pro-growth policies focusing on investment in people, technology, and infrastructure. None of this, Stiglitz believed, could be taken for granted. The agenda to save the euro was dependent on solidarity that might make politics work. Lacking solidarity, "the euro may have to be abandoned for the sake of salvaging the European project" (Stiglitz 2013).

Events would show that the river-crossing metaphor was misleading. Stiglitz's agenda to save the euro – with a real banking union, a treasury, Eurobonds – would amount to creating the United States of Europe and a federal government with the capacity of taxation and redistribution (Höpner and Schäfer 2012, 430). Political conditions for the setting up of what has been coined a 'transfer union', which were scarce before the euro crisis, even among the relatively homogeneous founding countries, have, since then, further eroded. As predicted by Kaldor, the crisis of the euro simply depleted the derisory stock of 'solidarity' that existed before the crisis, leading to a state of permanent procrastination.

A transfer union would require an agreement on the type of welfare regime that would replace the national ones: a costly transition from regimes existing at the national level to a new single regime, and large income transfers within the federation. The risks of disarticulation of welfare regimes during the transition to the single model, combined with those of loss of coherence of the various institutional domains within each national political economy, would be paralyzing. Adding to those risks the costs of redistribution impinging on the more prosperous regions and member countries of the EU, we understand why the EU, or the member countries of the EMU, were unable to overcome the joint decision trap and move forward, beyond proclamations, towards a European social model.

To the reasons that, in the past, precluded the crossing of the river to the shore of the federation now accrue those resulting from the transformation of diversity into fragmentation by virtue of the euro crisis and the punitive 'adjustments' imposed on the peripheries of the EMU in the process of salvaging the euro. In the house which divided against itself cannot stand, an agreement for the reconstruction of the EMU along redistributive lines, or even small steps forward in that direction, is to be vetoed by net contributors.

Comparable difficulties haunt the alternative retreat from the euro. Replacing the euro with national currencies would call for either the redenomination of debts, private and public or their restructuring. Otherwise, subject to devaluation, debtors would become insolvent. Abandoning the euro is, therefore, resisted by creditors of public and private debts, the governments of surplus countries, and their constituencies exposed to new bank bailouts. The governments of debtor countries and their constituencies, fearing a balance of payments crisis, also have resisted drastic steps, most of all a unilateral withdrawal from the euro.

The EMU, and, by extension, the EU, are indeed in the middle of a raging river with no safe bridges to carry them to either shore. But this situation, although possibly the worst of three worlds, may well be a lasting one (Scharpf 2011, 30).

On one shore – the monetary system preceding the EMU – the member states were subject to constraints, but they still had instruments of macroeconomic policy which they could use to smooth the economic and social consequences of downturns. In

that context, the space for autonomous economic and social policies and the democratic choice of policy alternatives, although constrained, existed.

On the other shore – the Kaldorian federation – national governments would be subject to a uniform monetary policy, possibly unfit for their needs. They would, however, benefit from fiscal transfers in the case of asymmetrical shocks. The federal space, endowed with positive powers, might provide space for democratic political competition and the exercise of choice.

In the middle of the river, however – the EMU that resulted from the crisis of the euro – national governments, deprived of relief in the case of macroeconomic imbalances and unemployment, are subject to absurd rules and discretionary decisions of high-level institutions and bureaucracies.

The new EMU, rehearsed during the Greek, Irish, Spanish and Portuguese bailouts, differs from the previous one in that policy areas previously attributed to national governments were surreptitiously transferred to the Union. The structural reforms associated with the bailouts have been, since then, formally or informally inscribed in the stability and growth framework encompassing most policy areas, from labour relations to the judiciary, including health, education, pensions and social security. As this surreptitious transfer of sovereignty has become institutionalized in EU policies, the union has acquired, especially in respect to peripheral countries, quasi-discretionary powers.

The order that has emerged out of the state of exception of the euro crisis amounts to a hybrid federalism characterized by executive and legislative powers committed to negative integration and shielded from democratic control, which will seek permanent adjustments to the requirements of expanding markets and businesses ventures across all spheres of provision.

Especially for peripheral countries, mere survival in that space hinges on the possibility of attracting external demand and seducing capital with permanent wage deflation and fiscal inducements, which compress the fiscal space and weaken social protection regimes. As Hayek anticipated, the absence of conditions for positive integration will foster the commodification of labour and social protection, and constrain further the space of democratic politics.

Desired by Hayek, the expansion of markets and market-type relations in society, unconstrained by politics, has long since been deplored as a dystopian undemocratic pursuit of a market society that never existed, nor may ever come to exist; one which, when aspired to in the nineteenth century, especially under the gold standard, led to crises, fascism and war (Polanyi 1944).

A major lesson of the twentieth century for our time is that people detached from communities, left defenceless in the face of the vagaries of expansive markets, tend to seek security wherever they find it on offer. All attempts at unleashing markets, disembedding them, have tended to put in motion counter-movements seeking self-protection. Most importantly, those counter-movements are vague and ambiguous at the outset, and politically indeterminate. They emerge in various forms. As perceptively put by Polanyi, we can only recognize their most pernicious forms in symptoms like “the spread of irrationalistic philosophies, racialistic aesthetics, anticapitalistic demagoguery, heterodox currency views, criticism of the party system, widespread disparagement of the ‘regime’, or whatever was the name given to the existing democratic setup” (Polanyi 1944, 246).

Recent developments in the EU have vindicated Hayek – economic and financial integration does constrain public policies aimed at embedding markets on the national and federal scale to a point where markets come to rule over politics – but they also vindicate Polanyi – the unleashing of markets tends to put in motion social, cultural and political processes that may degenerate into authoritarianism, factionalism and racism.

Economic integration in the periphery of the EU: The case of Portugal

The Portuguese experience of integration in the EU, especially under the EMU, has disappointed the high expectations of the 1980s. After a period following the accession in which EU membership secured for Portugal considerable growth, the country experienced, under the euro, a decade of stagnation which was followed, since 2008, by a deep recession and an EU-troika intervention.

While the membership in the Euro-zone secured abundant capital and low interest rates stemming from the banking systems of the central Euro-zone surplus countries, such abundance of capital did not translate into productivity-enhancing investment and less external dependence, but rather into an expansion of household mortgage credit, and investment abroad or in sectors sheltered from external competition with low contributions to the current account. The result has been the indebtedness of the national banking system, firms and households, and a huge external account deficit.

In 2008, cut off from capital flows allowing for the rolling over of debt, the Portuguese banks became insolvent – a burden for public finances that the Treasury could not bear. This entailed insolvency – a crisis which was a debt crisis but emphatically not a public debt crisis – and a bailout by the IMF, the EU and the ECB, which addressed it with austerity and internal devaluation, which shattered the foundations of Portuguese society and put in motion a cumulative process of regressive change in the sectoral structure of the economy and demographic decay that persists.

What happened in the crisis of the euro was that the ECB and the EU chose to bail out the core European banks exposed to peripheral debt by shifting the burden of adjustment to the citizens of southern Europe. The consequence was a so-called adjustment that lasted until 2014, with a cost of 6% in GDP, a loss of 385,000 jobs, half a million emigrants and a twofold increase of the public debt.¹

In 2015 the right-wing coalition that presided over the troika's 'adjustment' was defeated in elections and a socialist government supported by left-wing parties was set up. This government attempted to square the circle by combining an alleviation of austerity, mainly through the reversal of cuts in pensions and wages of public servants, and fiscal consolidation, meeting the targets of the EU Stability and Growth Pact.

The case of Portugal has been presented since then as evidence of the possibilities of political alternatives within the current EMU framework. The socialist government, with left-wing support,

¹ Data taken by the author from Statistics Portugal, National Accounts (GDP and employment), Demographic Statistics (immigration) and Bank of Portugal (public debt).

served well the purpose of breaking the impetus of the regressive reforms put in motion by the troika's intervention. However, by the end of its mandate, tensions resurfaced exposing the limits of the squaring of the circle exercise. Despite the recovery of employment, wages remained stagnant. The new employment had been created in low-pay sectors associated with a boom in tourism and new investment clustered in real estate, fuelling a bubble in the country's two major cities. The burden of debt and a fragile banking sector kept absorbing large amounts of public funds. Public services, namely the health services and infrastructure, were degraded.

New elections in 2019 renewed the socialist majority but not the agreement with the Left. The tensions, meanwhile, have seemed to mount. Fiscal constraints in the frame of the stability and growth pact preclude the recovery of the capacity lost in the public sector, the labour law enacted during the troika's bailout has not been reversed, emigration and demographic decay have not been contained. A socialist government is experiencing the limits within the structures of the euro, and finding it hard to deliver its own promises and to respond to the expectations raised.

Conclusion

European unification emerged during and immediately after the Second World War as a project common to a large section of the social and political forces, which constituted the antifascist coalition. This broad coalition converged on the idea that peace could only last if the European nations agree to share sovereignty engaging in a process of integration that would be economic and political and necessarily lead to a union or federation.

However, this convergence was merely containing antagonistic declinations of the articulation between the economic and political in the integration process, and disagreement in respect to the type of society that ought to prevail in the union.

While in the neoliberal perspective of Hayek, the federation offered a context favourable to the 'liberation' of the economy and the subordination of politics to the spontaneous dynamics of the markets, that is, for disembedding the markets, in the

social-democratic perspective, international cooperation and integration ought to pursue the opposite goal of re-embedding the markets on a transnational scale, leaving room for diverse political choices at the national level.

The divergent views on the articulation of the economic and the political would come to practically impinge on choices regarding the building of a united Europe, opposing, for instance, the small step strategy of Robert Schuman and the foundational constitutional act of Altiero Spinelli.

However, the precedence of the economic over the political would come to prevail in all stages of the process of integration, with the Maastricht Treaty and the EMU representing not a small step but a great leap forward. The precedence of economic integration shaped the process of European unification. In general, it translated it into the predominance of a negative integration over a positive integration. The consequence, especially after Maastricht, has been a race to the bottom, with special incidence in labour relations and accrued fiscal competition benefiting capital over labour. Kaldor's premonitions in respect to cumulative inter-regional inequalities and the resulting impediments of advances towards political unification became especially salient in the new frame of monetary unification.

The European Union is at a crossroad. Salvaging the euro requires, or so we are told, 'more Europe'. However, the fragmentation of the European political space created by the same euro and accentuated by the austerity pursued for the sake of salvaging the common currency has led to the emergence of tensions that preclude the political leap forward towards political union needed for a functional currency.

The intentions of the founding fathers of the EU may have been the best; despite the absence of a political will for a founding constitutional act, through economic integration and out of necessity, a political union would emerge. However, we find, today, such intentions were flawed. Between the two, a hybrid federalism has taken shape, constraining the space for political alternatives and democratic choice. For the sake of salvaging the euro, a reconfiguration of European institutions has taken place by stealth, which is

aggravating fractures, replacing subordination for cooperation, and nurturing pathological political counter-movements.

In this light, the crisis of social democracy is no mystery. It is the crisis of a political movement that embarked in the globalist and federalist impulse of the 1980s, only to discover that, in the process, it was giving away the capability to materialize its political program, either on the national or the international scale, exposing the working classes to the vagaries of markets and alienating them to demagogues offering protection.

Does the crisis of social democracy mean that the Left is dead? I do not think so. But to successfully counter the coming authoritarian drift of neoliberalism and open up democratic possibilities, it must get rid of delusions concerning the possibility of, in the current state of world affairs, embedding free-trade and capital movements in a global (or European) democratic governance framework. It must, instead, restore its commitments to the working classes, uphold democracy and social progress on the national scale, and internationally strive for peace and cooperation for the common good among independent states.

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Social Democracy and Radical Left in the European South: Strategic and governmental experimentation in the cauldron of the crisis

Abstract

During the crisis, the Radical Left, especially in the European South, accelerated its course from marginality to mainstream, while social democracy found itself trapped in its previous strategic orientations. We propose to examine the two political families from a relational and comparative perspective, focusing on the interaction of Social Democratic and Radical Left parties as they have evolved in a series of national cases (Greece, Portugal and Spain) and, in particular, during the political and electoral cycle of 2015-2017 – with a special focus on the emblematic Greek case and the stunning rise of SYRIZA. The strategic responses of these parties to the critical juncture of the crisis, characterized by converging or deviating paths between the two ‘enemy brothers’, shed light on their political-ideological transformations and adaptations.

Keywords: Crisis, European South, Social Democracy, Radical Left, Government formation

Introduction

■ The economic crisis has, in many ways, been more pronounced for the countries of the European South. It has also been multi-dimensional, as it simultaneously manifested itself in economic, financial, social and political fields. The relationship between national politics and European integration has been called into question. It was inevitable that social distress would sooner or later be translated into tectonic changes in the party system and then, at the level of governance, into an ‘electoral’ and later ‘governmental’ epidemic (Bosco and Verney 2016).

In all three countries of Southern Europe that we are discussing here, namely Greece, Portugal and Spain, a complex conflict structure emerged, shaped by struggles over austerity, Europe and political renewal. In Portugal, an economic Left-Right/welfare-economic liberalism dimension lies at the epicentre of the political debate, whereas in Greece, the pro-European/Eurosceptic contention is most crucial. In Spain, a complicated central-regional political cleavage, combined with a series of corruption scandals, set the parameters for political conflict (Hutter, Kriesi and Vidal 2018). Given the divisions within the three countries, their respective political systems were destabilized, and government formation was seriously affected throughout the period spanning 2011 to 2020, leading to a series of incongruous coalitions between both established and new, mainstream and 'challenger' parties of both the (Radical) Left and the Right (Hutter, Kriesi and Vidal 2018).

In this chapter, we focus on the two main political families on the left side of the political spectrum, considering that, at least in the countries of the European South, the relationship and interaction between the Radical Left and social democracy has acquired new interest during the crisis, both at the level of relations of political power and at the level of governance. The Radical Left emerged as a 'challenger' political force, modified its status from 'pariah' into 'participant' (Bale and Dunphy 2012), acquiring electoral visibility and eventually threatening the mainstream social democratic centre-left. On the other hand, social democracy faced the spectre of '*pasokification*' and the dilemma of 'renovation or resignation' (Bailey et al. 2014; Arndt and van Kersbergen 2015). We have, elsewhere, described their interaction which, since 2008, has been significant, as a relationship of 'competitive symbiosis' (Balampanidis et al. 2019). The interaction has gained additional interest, as it has also been expressed quite differently at the level of governance in the three countries.

We therefore propose to examine the respective social democratic and Radical Left parties and the different ways in which they responded to the crisis and to the disruption of electoral competition, as well as to investigate whether their reorientations have created the conditions for convergence in a project of governmental formation.

Table 1

Electoral epidemic					
GREECE	2012 (2)	SPAIN	2011	PORTUGAL	2011
	2014 (2)		2014		2013
	2015 (2 +		2015 (2)		2014 2015
	Referendum)		2016		2016 2017
	2019 (2)		2017		2019
			(Referendum)		(European
			2019 (2)		and national
					on 6/10)

Challengers / Party system fragmentation

GREECE

Older challengers: **SYRIZA**, Communist Party

New challengers: ANEL, POTAMI, DIMAR, Golden Dawn, Enosi Kentroon

SPAIN

New challengers: **Podemos**, Catalan independentists

Older challengers: Ciudadanos, Basque nationalists

PORTUGAL

Older challengers: **Bloco**, **PCP**

Varieties of crisis

GREECE	SPAIN	PORTUGAL
Austerity / bail-out programme	Bank bail-out / property bubble / corruption / Catalonia	Austerity / bail-out programme

Through an empirical comparative analysis, we aim to put forward the hypothesis that the diversity of political polarities in each country has conditioned the coalition strategies of both traditional and new/challenger parties, generating unusual governmental coalitions and unexpected outcomes following their entry onto the scene. In this context, we regard the Radical Left and social democratic parties as ‘neighbours on the Left-Right scale’ (Luebbert 1983), which adopt different office-/policy-/vote-seeking tactics (Müller and Strøm 1999) in their endeavour to gain coalition or governing potential (Sartori 1976).

Reorientations

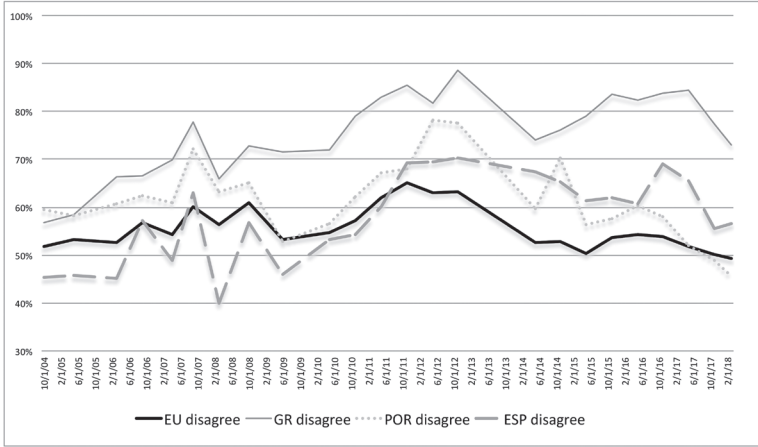
The story is well-known: the dual economic-political crisis and the emergence of challenger parties (new parties or mobilizers, as termed by Rochon (1985)) destabilized the bipartisan systems in which the Socialist parties of the once radical 'Mediterranean' socialism had been one of the two pillars in Spain, Greece and Portugal since the democratic transition of the 1970s. Social democracy was in power when the crisis hit, and had to pass austerity measures and bail-out packages in Greece (Papandreou) and Portugal (Sócrates), or manage the real estate bubble in Spain (Zapatero).

On the other hand, the Radical Left, mostly adopting a populist discourse, took advantage of this window of opportunity and participated wholeheartedly in social protest (*Aganaktismenoi* in Greece, 2011; *Indignados* in Spain, 2011; 12 March movement in Portugal, 2011) and presented itself as the new political actor against the old political elites and, in particular, against the Socialists who had initiated the austerity measures.

Another key factor is that these tectonic shifts in the European South occurred against a common backdrop of increased Euroscepticism (albeit usually soft rather than hard) (Szczzerbiak and Taggart 2008) as the increasingly politicized European public sphere triggered an unprecedented crisis of political and institutional distrust at the national level from 2010 onwards; not only a distrust of supranational representative institutions (such as the European Commission and the European Parliament) but also, if not primarily, the demand for strong representation of national interests in the European political arena (Balampanidis 2019). What was at stake was the country's voice to be heard in the intergovernmental game, especially in the countries of the South where, in the first phase of the crisis, a feeling that 'our voice does not count in the EU' had become widespread.

In this political and social landscape, the long-lasting electorally unequal relationship between the two players was questioned. The decline in the vote share of social democratic parties, and the corresponding rise in support for the Radical Left, seemed to bring the two players onto an equal footing.

Figure 1
“My voice counts in the EU”: disagree (Greece, Portugal, Spain, and EU average, 2004-2018)



Source: Eurobarometer

One of the main factors in the relative rise of the Radical Left in the European South was that it reinforced its anti-systemic profile against the mainstream (social democratic) parties in office, which were blamed for having dissolved the organic ties between government and society (Ignazi 1996), breaking with their previous, more moderate and reformist character (e.g. SYRIZA in relation to his party ancestor, the Left Coalition of the 1990s, or Podemos compared to the post-Eurocommunist *Izquierda Unida*). Also, as ‘challenger parties’, they shared an ideological ambiguity or elasticity that enabled them to intersect with the major cleavages (Left-Right, establishment-anti-system, Europeanism-Euroscepticism) or otherwise impose new ones alongside those already present, such as: ‘old’ versus ‘new’ (Deschouwer 2017). At the same time, the Radical Left delivered a strong populist message against both austerity policies and the political elites of the *ancient regime*; a stance oscillating between soft and hard Euroscepticism (such as SYRIZA’s ambiguous intentions to break with the Troika). It thus developed a new political style, more compatible with the social distress of the crisis era, which was adopted by a new generation of political

personnel and a new type of leadership (Tsipras, Iglesias), hand-in-hand with slack “network” organizational structures.

In this way, the Radical Left claimed from social democracy the ownership of a number of critical issues related to the crisis: austerity, redistribution of wealth, economic justice, national sovereignty, the ‘European question’, etc. Social democracy was clearly less compatible with the style required by the turbulent times of crisis, as it had years before turned into a mainstream social-liberal power-political entity, too consensual *vis-à-vis* the conservative/(neo-) liberal Right (Cronin et al. 2011), and also too post-materialist for a time when particularly materialist issues were predominant: namely, the economic crisis and austerity.

This was the starting point and the basis for the electoral rise of the Radical Left. But when the shift had been achieved (to varying degrees in each country), the Radical Left moved towards more pragmatic positions, moderating its anti-systemic Eurosceptic profile that aroused an expectation of populist anti-austerity measures. It soon became clear that such a strategy would not be feasible, particularly within the complex institutional edifice that is the EU, the alternative being to embrace hard Euroscepticism, which was not the case: no Radical Left party, at least in the South, chose to cross the Rubicon and reject European integration in principle. SYRIZA’s pragmatic shift/compromise was a demonstration of the limits of the previous anti-systemic strategy, as was Podemos’s inability to hit the target of a historical ‘*sorpasso*’ over the Socialists in the context of a national crisis (the Catalonia referendum).

So, although in the first round the radical profile lent political and electoral weight to the Left in its competition with social democrats, the anti-systemic profile was later inevitably bent in favour of pragmatism. As the relatively stronger parties of the Radical Left were transformed from policy-seeking parties to parties that exhibited a growing interest in electoral success and governance (office-/vote-seeking), it was inevitable that a protest-party profile (which was a common trait of the Radical Left in the 2000s and also the catalyst for its rise at the beginning of the crisis) was no longer sufficient when they had to deal with the question of power (Balampanidis 2018).

In this context, their forces developed at the governmental level, as we shall see below, methods of cooperation or cohabitation with the Socialist 'enemy brothers'. Even an orthodox communist party like the Portuguese Communist Party (PCP) proved to be comparatively pragmatic in downplaying identity issues (Euro-scepticism) to support a coalition government with the Socialists in Portugal. In Spain, *Unidos Podemos* and the Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE), having gone through phases of mutual rejection and flirtation, and having cooperated with each other to expell the Rajoy government on the grounds of corruption, finally found an understanding in support of the PSOE's minority government after the parliamentary elections in December 2019. In this respect, Greece is an exceptional case: not only has there been no governmental cooperation of any kind but, on the contrary, there has been open rivalry as the Greek Socialist Party (PASOK) simply fell apart, becoming the first victim of pasokification, a process that was named to describe a new cycle of decline of social democratic parties throughout Europe and the rise of nationalist and left-/right-wing populist alternatives. Consequently, its former voters, along with various party members, moved to SYRIZA. However, following the signing of the third memorandum, SYRIZA increasingly began to flirt with social democracy, primarily at the European level (as an observer at the meetings of the European social democrats), thus seeking to attract PASOK as a potential ally and partner (Balampantidis et al. 2019).

It seems that the debacle of social democracy does not lead to convergence (as is the case in Greece). Inversely, when social democracy shrinks in relative terms, and the Radical Left is gaining strength, a certain equalization of their electoral appeal paves the way for tactical convergences (as in Portugal and Spain), which, however, ultimately seems to benefit the social democratic forces – as the Radical Left either secures a 'relevant' position in the party system (Portugal) or reaches the limits of its strategy and retreats to a weaker position (Spain).

On the part of the Socialists, the 'electoral epidemic' caused a series of internal shocks. After decades, they found themselves again threatened by their enemy brothers in the context of a more general feeling that the mainstream governing parties were

demonstrating limited responsiveness to emerging social dynamics (Mair 2013). They were, therefore, obliged to reflect on their previous strategic paths and introduce modifications to maintain a governing potential – a project that proved to be successful in Portugal and Spain, but totally unsuccessful in Greece.

As we have seen, in all three countries, the Socialists were at the helm when the crisis broke out and they, accordingly, suffered the consequences of the crisis management in its first phase. Later, they attempted a programmatic shift towards the left, defending the welfare state and opposing economic liberalism. But they continued to support a number of rigorous budgetary policies. Their convergence with neoliberal economics and adoption of Third Way policies thus came to an end without a clear break, and the identity crisis continued (Bremer 2018).

As for Spain, from 2015 onwards, a polarization on the Left-Right economic divide was observed, with the PSOE moving to the left, criticizing corruption and clientelism (Hutter et al. 2018: 12). In Portugal, after 2012, Socialist MPs increasingly voted against the Coelho government's draft legislation (the Socialist Party – PS – voted against the government about 40 percent of the time in the period between 2011 and 2014), developing political and parliamentary convergences with the Radical Left on critical issues (Lisi 2016). Antonio Costa, the leader of the PS, chose to break with the Socialists' tradition of not negotiating to their left, and formed a government backed by Bloco and the PCP. Still, the PS under Costa, for all its Europeanism, professed sharp scepticism towards the EU's economic and fiscal rigidity.

After the electoral rise of the Radical Left, the question was posed as to how social democrats could retain political hegemony in alliance with right-wing parties. In Greece, there was a PASOK-New Democracy (*Nea Dimokratia*, ND) coalition government until 2014. In Spain, the PSOE had decided to abstain from the investiture vote that would bring the Conservative Party (*Partido Popular*, PP) to government in 2016. In various ways, they opted out of collaborating with or supporting right-wing parties with the aim to maintain their relevant role – examples of this strategy are the PSOE's filing of a vote of no confidence against the PP in Spain or the rejection motion against the Social Democratic (SDP)/Christian Democrat (CDC)

government in Portugal. Another motivation is that of maintaining a coalition potential, as in Greece, where the centre-left seems to have moved away from its strategic collusion with the Right, while still maintaining a clear distance from SYRIZA.

It is no coincidence that in most cases there has been fragmentation or even splits at the leadership level (as in Spain with the clash between Pedro Sánchez and the PSOE's old guard) and/or in organizational forms, of which the most striking case is in Greece, with its nebula of parties and initiatives implicated in the venture of reconstructing the centre-left in the wake of its collapse in 2012. Nevertheless, as we shall see in the next part, the choice of *rapprochement* with the Radical Left has proved fruitful, as it helped the Socialists to recuperate as a major governing power in at least two of the three countries under discussion here.

Complex government coalitions

Coalition and minority governments in post-war Europe are nothing exceptional, but in the case of the South there are some peculiarities worth mentioning. For example, in Spain, since the democratic transition, there have been no coalition governments. When a party has failed to obtain an absolute majority, minority governments have been formed. In Portugal and Greece, coalition governments have been the exception to a norm of strong one-party governments (with the exception of 2002-2005 in Portugal and 1989-1990 in Greece). The particularity in question lessened during the crisis, under the impact of the electoral and governmental epidemic, which led to new forms of symbiosis/competition emerging between social democrats and the Radical Left at the level of governmental formation as well.

Greece

In the case of Greece, to begin with, the pattern moved from multi-party oversized coalition governments (2011, 2012) to a minimal winning coalition (2015). Historically, as indicated, coalition

governments have not been a feature of the Greek political scene, but the crisis brought about a paradigm shift in the culture of forming governments that manifested in what has been called the *Metapolitefsi* (the period that began with the democratic transition in 1974).

The breakthrough into the new phase came in November 2011, with the formation of a government backed by three parties under the leadership of Lucas Papademos, former Vice President of the European Central Bank and former Governor of the Bank of Greece. This multi-party oversized coalition government signified a full integration of both the former major players of the bipartisan system of the *Metapolitefsi* (PASOK-ND) into a uniform 'pro-memorandum' camp, in collaboration with the far-right party LAOS. Unsurprisingly, only a few months prior to this, in the spring of 2011, Greece had reached the zenith of social unrest with the social movement of the *Aganaktismenoi*.

The 2012 'double electoral earthquake' (namely the consecutive critical elections of May and June 2012: see Voulgaris & Nikolakopoulos 2014) marked the radical reshuffling of the decades-old stable bipartisan system, especially with the pasokification of PASOK (whose share fell from 43.9% in 2009 to 12.3%) and the stunning rise of SYRIZA to become a potentially governing party (going from 5% in 2009 to 26.9%). This massive shift of the party system's tectonic plates led to the creation of another multi-party oversized coalition government in which ND and PASOK cooperated with the smaller reformist pro-European left-wing party DIMAR, as New Democracy had not garnered an absolute majority of seats, despite coming first in the election. This was a government of the so-called pro-European forces that accepted the memorandum (though with an intention to renegotiate) as opposed to the anti-memorandum forces of SYRIZA and the Independent Greeks-National Patriotic Alliance (ANEL) that were designated nationalist-populist. The government of 'national responsibility', as it defined itself, was based on a declaration of cooperation. According to the joint 'Declaration of the government of national responsibility', which was published shortly after the elections of June 2012, the main objective was "to manage the crisis, to pave the way for growth and to revise the terms of the loan agreement without jeopardizing the country's

European course or continuing participation in the euro". On 11 June 2013, ND and Prime Minister Samaras decided, without the consent of the other two partners, to shut down public broadcasting, prompting DIMAR's departure from the government and the formation of a new cabinet with an upgraded role for Evangelos Venizelos, president of PASOK, as Vice President of the Government.

The double elections of 2015 (January and September) were marked by the victory of the anti-memorandum camp and the first and second SYRIZA-ANEL coalition governments. As a result of the crisis of a polarized or incomplete bipartisan system, SYRIZA did not obtain the 151 seats required to secure a parliamentary majority. So, almost immediately after taking over the mandate to form a government, Alexis Tsipras and the far-right Independent Greeks' (ANEL) leader Panos Kammenos announced the formation of what, in the literature, is termed a minimal winning coalition (without a programmatic agreement: see Riker 1962; Leiserson 1966). The same governance pattern was repeated at the September 2015 elections, after the referendum and SYRIZA's shift, when it signed a third memorandum.

The government alliance was not one between 'neighbours on the scale'. Proximity on certain major political issues of the crisis period, as opposed to ideological cohesion, seems to have played the most decisive role – in particular the memorandum/anti-memorandum division which vertically traversed the entire political system (the two parties of SYRIZA and ANEL being major representatives of the anti-memorandum sentiments of a large part of Greek society in the period 2010-2015, positioned on the left and right ends of the political spectrum, respectively) as well as a *de facto* osmosis of the two different partners, who coexisted and interacted in the framework of two critical moments of social mobilization, namely the *Aganaktismenoi* movement in 2011 and the July 2015 referendum organized precisely by the SYRIZA-ANEL government. In any case, ideological adjacency does not guarantee governmental stability; according to certain approaches, in the formation of a coalition government, what matters is familiarity on certain major issues of a historical conjuncture and not the proximity of ideas (Taylor and Laver 1973; Franklin and Mackie 1983). After the

elections of September 2015, however, the memorandum/anti-memorandum division was subordinated and a 'new versus old and corrupt political system' division emerged.

Gradually, the European U-turn of SYRIZA, and in particular of Tsipras (which also led to the Prespa Agreement in 2018 that resolved the name dispute with the neighbouring country of North Macedonia), came to foreshadow the eventual rupture between the two partners. For the nationalist party ,ANEL, the losses were greater than the benefits to be expected from government participation. SYRIZA, for its part, sought to restore a Left-Right divide, flirting openly with European social democracy, and less openly with PASOK, which had adopted a sceptical stance: on the one hand, it kept its distance from its previous strategic alliance with the Right from the period 2011-2015; on the other, it maintained a political front against SYRIZA, seeking to regain a dominant role on the left side of the political spectrum. But in spite of SYRIZA's defeat, the 2019 elections confirmed that it is the major player on the left of a new bipartisan system (with the equivalent position on the right being occupied by ND). PASOK, by comparison, risks becoming an irrelevant political force.

Portugal

Portugal moved from a connected coalition (2011) to 'contract parliamentarianism' in 2015 (Giorgi and Santana-Pereira 2016). From 2009 onwards, the PS minority government under José Sócrates began to adopt austerity measures imposed by European institutions. Three Stabilization and Development Programmes were voted on in 2009-2010, relying on the votes of the PS and the centre-right Social Democratic Party¹ (PSD). The government's failure to vote in favour of the fourth programme in March 2011 led to the resignation of the prime minister and the call for elections.

These elections brought to office a coalition government of the PSD and the Christian Democrat/national conservative parties (CDS-PP), led by Pedro Passos Coelho. Negotiations between the

¹ Which contrary to its current name is a conservative-liberal party, as reflected in its original name, the Democratic People's Party (PPD).

ruling parties and the Troika in spring 2011 led to the signing of another memorandum in early May. The following four years had major implications for the legitimacy of the political system (Freire 2016). Eventually, in the 2015 election, the right-wing coalition Portugal Ahead (PàF, a coalition of PDS and CDS-PP) came first but failed to form a majority.

Following Coelho's inability to form a government, the mandate passed to PS chief Antonio Costa. The parties of the Radical Left (Left Bloc, PCP) held separate consultations with the PS. Projected cooperation was based on written agreements signed by the PS separately with the Left Bloc and the PCP, as well as with the Green Party. On this basis, the left-wing parties decided to back the PS minority government in parliament in exchange for a minimum joint programme; a confidence-and-supply agreement.

This was an unprecedented development for the Portuguese political system (March 2011). For the first time since the transition to democracy in 1975, the Radical Left voted in favour of a PS government programme (Lisi 2016). For the first time too, members of leftist parties participated in the Council of State, an advisory body to the President of the Republic, traditionally composed of members of the mainstream governing parties.

The agreement with the PS gave the leftist parties the opportunity to advance their own agendas, but also to impede the implementation of austerity policies to which they were ideologically and programmatically opposed (policy-seeking). The PS chose to work with the Left to form a minority government in order to gain maximum access to state resources (office-seeking). For the Left Bloc, the motivation seems to have been the avoidance of the repetition of the 2011 downturn when, along with the right-wing parties, the Left Bloc brought down the Sócrates socialist government. For the PCP, the frustration at its inability to turn part of the electorate's dissatisfaction to its own advantage was strong. Both leftist parties acquired an opportunity to show that they would not shirk governmental responsibility. The PS, on the other hand, experienced a shock from the fact that the right-wing coalition was able to emerge as the primary force in the elections despite having implemented a harsh austerity program. Fears were expressed of a pasokification of the party.

Thus, a convergence has taken place despite different points of view on the crucial issue of Europe. While the PCP is a party of hard Euroscepticism, Bloco expresses a soft Euroscepticism and the PS is essentially a Europhilic party (Taggart and Szczerbiak 2008). All three have, nevertheless, been pragmatic, as their coalition is not ideology-based as a classical hypothesis would predict (de Swaan 1973), but rather embodies *ad hoc* cooperation on the basis of a specific issue: overcoming austerity policies, something that was also in line with each party's efforts to safeguard its internal consistency (Luebbert 1983; Maor 1998; Gianetti and Benoit 2009).

Spain

In Spain, the successive elections of 2011 to 2016 weakened the PSOE-PP bipartisanship dating from the democratic transition of 1977 (Rodon and Hierro 2016). In 2011, as unemployment rates soared and were compounded by economic stagnation, the PSOE, under the leadership of Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, suffered its worst-ever defeat in a general election. The PP won a historic majority, with 186 out of 350 seats (the largest obtained by a party since 1982). The Zapatero government was among those punished in the first phase of the crisis.

The emergence of the soft Eurosceptic and populist-anti-system movement Podemos was an outcome of the venture of politically representing the social unrest as expressed by the Indignados movement (Ramiro 2016). But the PSOE continued to be the hegemonic progressive party. At the 2015 regional and national elections, Podemos jumped to 20.68%, compared to 22% for the PSOE, a result which, nevertheless, aroused ambitions of a historic *sorpasso*.

The elections marked a transition from a two-party to a multi-party system. Spain was unable to form a government, as neither the PP nor the PSOE were able to garner enough votes to secure a majority. In the 2016 election re-run, Podemos formed *Unidos Podemos*, an electoral coalition with the United Left and other left-wing parties, leaving aside the positions of the *erejonistas* (the party's wing under Podemos number 2 Íñigo Errejón) who insisted that the party should also be open to the PSOE. The Socialists, for

their part, fought on two fronts simultaneously; against both Podemos's anti-systemic rhetoric and the PP's conservatism.

At the end of October 2016, Mariano Rajoy, leader of the PP, succeeded in his investiture attempt, thus ending the 10-month political deadlock. The PP formed a government with the support of the new challenger party of Ciudadanos and the Canarian Coalition, with the PSOE abstaining. Fifteen PSOE MPs chose to break the party line and vote against Rajoy. Meanwhile, the leader of Unidos Podemos, Pablo Iglesias, attacked the Socialists for their 'capitulation' and claimed 'the hegemony of opposition' for his alliance.

Rajoy's term was marred by the Catalonia crisis and a series of corruption scandals. In PSOE, Pedro Sánchez returned to the leadership in 2017 against the old guard of the party and then tried to build a consensual profile to the Left. PSOE then adopted a more openly progressive programmatic agenda, proposing anti-cyclical and anti-austerity policies and – as a sign of eventual convergence with the Radical Left – a permanent committee for dialogue with Unidos Podemos was established.

Another turn occurred in mid-2018 when, after a no-confidence motion against Mariano Rajo, Pedro Sánchez formed his government on 7 June, with Podemos providing a parliamentary vote of tolerance. The 2019 election marked the 'total recall' of the PSOE, which not only came first in the election, but also returned to a position of dominance on the left wing of the party system. The party's turn to the left has been as successful as anyone could expect, and Podemos now found themselves in a phase of introversion (and of internally splitting with the *erejonistas*), as they appeared to be losing ground against their enemy brothers, having reached the limits of their radical-populist strategy. A new general election was held in November 2019 as a result of the failure of government formation negotiations after Pedro Sánchez's failed investiture voting in July. Both PSOE and Podemos were hit by minor electoral losses, which led to PSOE ruling out a grand coalition with the PP and to PSOE and Podemos finally announcing an agreement for a full four-year coalition government; this was to be the first coalition government since the transition to democracy. All things considered, it seems that the strategy of careful convergence for both parties has all but failed.

Conclusions

In the countries of the South, the crisis has modified the well-established dialectics between the Radical Left and the social democrats. In some ways, they have come closer, while in others, they have moved further apart. Competition has coexisted with symbiosis and divergence with convergence.

The Radical Left took advantage of a window of opportunity of social distress and the 'electoral epidemic' caused by the crisis with a view to increasing its political visibility and electoral support. It proposed a radical, anti-systemic and, in some ways, populist means by which to give political representation to social mobilization, promoting an anti-austerity agenda and a soft Euroscepticism that was in tune with the prevalent social sentiment. It thus reinforced itself at the expense of social democratic parties. Its radical message was, however, weakened when it turned from protesting to governing, perforce adopting more pragmatic policies, moderating its anti-systemic Eurosceptic profile and seeking alliances with Socialists at the national (Portugal, Spain) or European (Tsipras and SYRIZA) level.

The Socialists/Social Democrats were also obliged to break, to a certain degree, from their own previous strategic orientations (dating from the Third Way era) for the purpose of staying in power and recovering from punishment for the way(s) in which they had managed the crisis in its first phase. As a strategy, this has proved successful in Portugal and Spain, where the Socialists have repositioned themselves through an anti-austerity agenda combined with a mild scepticism about the EU's crisis management, as well as through sharpening their delineation from the Right. These were the elements of a strategic reorientation that was missed or pursued ambiguously in the Greek case; a failure that helps to explain the inability of the centre-left to reconstitute itself, allowing a consequent loss of the hegemony game to SYRIZA.

Certainly, the tectonic shifts caused by the crisis and the electoral-government epidemic in the European South are not the norm for the whole of Europe. There is a major divergence between Southern Europe and Northwestern Europe, where the challengers lie mainly on the populist Right and the parameters of the

conflict structure are conditioned by cultural and post-materialist questions. By contrast, in the European South, the politicization at the time of the crisis was elaborated through a new Left-Right and anti-austerity divide (Hutter et al. 2018).

In any case, following the political and electoral regrouping on the Left, the government epidemic brought about historically unprecedented changes in the political culture of the three countries from the era of democratic transition up to the time of the crisis. Spain followed the tradition of minority governments, but with new political players, eventually breaking with its own tradition in view of the first coalition government, Greece, from 2012 to 2019, only had coalition governments, while Portugal was an intermediate case. New and old challengers have played an important role in governmental formation, directly or indirectly. The Radical Left has acted as a minor partner in Portugal and Spain, and a key government partner (but in a paradoxical collaboration with a far-right party) in Greece. The respective parties have gained a relevant place in the political system while, however, not always being protagonists.

One critical factor that differentiates the experience of each of the three countries is the respective divisions and the varieties of crisis that emerged and became predominant (see Table 1). Austerity policies have certainly been a common backdrop, but the intensity of particular factors (the memorandum and Europe in Greece, corruption and the national crisis in Spain, the economy, Europe and the anti-right orientation in Portugal) has had a decisive influence on the parties' alliances.

At the level of governance, the hypothesis of the minimal winning coalition is not always confirmed. The most important factor seems to be ideological proximity (in Spain and Portugal) and political osmosis in a particular conjuncture (leading to the heteronymous SYRIZA-ANEL alliance in Greece). However, it seems that the traditional parties, both right-wing and social democratic, remain the dominant players in governmental formation. The exception is, once again, Greece, where a "relatively new challenger" (Deschouwer 2017), namely SYRIZA, managed to occupy the political and electoral space traditionally occupied by PASOK.

Most interestingly, it seems that the Left-Right axis, which appeared to be undermined at the beginning of the crisis, seems to

be reconstituting itself as a fundamental cleavage in the political system (even in the case of Greece, after the exceptions of the PASOK-ND and SYRIZA-ANEL governing alliances), albeit in new forms. At least as far as the Left is concerned, having social democrats alone in government is not the norm at present; from the minority government of PSOE with Podemos' backing and the straightforward coalition government of 2019 to the cooperation of Socialists and the Radical Left in Portugal, and then to the Greek case, where the Right's dominance after the 2019 elections may put SYRIZA and post-PASOK in a process of reflection and mutual convergence. In any case, the game between the Socialists and the Radical Left today seems to be more open than it has been for decades. The ideological and strategic transformations of one side are in a dialectical relationship with those of the other.

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Post-Dayton (im)possibilities for the Left in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Abstract

This paper aims to analyse the political environment in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in an effort to look for both the reasons for the failures of establishing a new political and social alternative to the ethno-determined narrative, and also the possibilities for overcoming it. Could Bosnia and Herzegovina's Dayton-constructed reality provide a chance for the emergence of a new, radical Left, or does it rather pose the main obstacle to it? Finally, what are the leftist alternatives to the current state of division, a situation that is advantageous to ethno-elites in their position as the new political and economic classes? Where – and what – is the Left in contemporary Bosnia and Herzegovina?

Keywords: Bosnia and Herzegovina; nationalism; ethnopolitics; Left

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“The Left repeats itself like a broken record and the Right serves only as a fist for self-gratification”

Dubioza Kolektiv, Tranzicija (2013)

Introduction

■ Largely as a result of widespread “ethnocentric interpretations and mythologies produced in the face of the conflicts in former Yugoslavia” (Tarabusi 2020, *cf.* Huntington 1993, Kaplan 1993, Nicholson 1994, Winchester 1999, Fields 1999), the region of the Balkans, and primarily that of the post-Yugoslav countries, is mostly depicted as a space of violence, eternal hatred and conflict in public discourse. Respecting our turbulent past – as if no others’ pasts are equally turbulent – this assumption has more to do with the

oversimplifying Western *colonial setting* of the Balkans in general and the localized *auto-colonial reflections* (Hasanović 2021). In her influential book “Imagining the Balkans”, Bulgarian historian Maria Todorova sees the use of Balkans and its variants such as *balkanization* or *balkanizing* as *Schimpfwörter* at the beginning of the 20th century: “At the same time that ‘Balkan’ was being accepted and widely used as geographic signifier, it was already becoming saturated with a social and cultural meaning that expanded its signified far beyond its immediate and concrete meaning” (Todorova 2009, 21). Richard Holbrooke further commented on the political power that such imaginary perceptions held in the 1990s, leading to a misreading of the Balkans, and influencing political actors to perceive the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina as an *incandescence of ancient hostilities*, leaving the impression that such a war was inevitable (Holbrooke 1999, 22-24).

Nevertheless, earlier, and in the time of the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) in particular, Bosnia and Herzegovina was perceived as the very opposite of this. Due to its multiculturalism and diversity, it was often imagined beyond fragmentations and antagonisms, as the “little Yugoslavia” or the “Yugoslavia in little”, embedding the ideology of *brotherhood and unity* into its very identity.¹ Since it is beyond the scope of this chapter to question how such narratives changed, and under which circumstances such a vision radically shifted from the previously inclusive one, let’s term it here as *leftist*, in opposition to the conflictual and excluding *rightist* perspective. Here, the aim is to re-actualize the possibilities for overcoming this current view, and to open theoretical and practical spaces for new, counter-hegemonic narratives.

Within the dominant narrative of *eternal hatred and conflict*, Bosnia and Herzegovina is perceived as a paradigmatic case study for research on ethnic tensions, post-conflict realities and divided societies, being both a *scientific safari* for (mostly) Western researchers professionally dealing with such issues, as well as a *golden goose* for international encounters. Instead of the external

¹ Even the republican flag of Bosnia and Herzegovina within Yugoslavia was represented through a plain red background with a small Yugoslavian flag in the upper-left corner.

attempts at understanding the post-conflictual reality, which are largely aimed at maintaining the status quo as a political artefact for scientific observation, it has to be problematized within the very social context of *why* these narrations exist and are being produced. Therefore, how the current, post-conflict shaped Bosnia and Herzegovina can provide a canvas for the Left, and why it does not, must be problematized.

From Brotherhood and Unity to the State of Constituent Peoples

In 2018, two overlapping events took place; the 75th anniversary of the ZAVNOBiH Proclamation² and very dynamic general elections. Being a guest upon a special program for public radio to commemorate the first occasion, I was asked a question about what does the country, i.e. Bosnia and Herzegovina, represent for me personally. My statement, in a very Marxist-like way, that it is, like all other nation states, a result and outcome of class conflict is the perfect starting point for understanding the context this paper attempts to address by trying to provide answer(s) to its main question.

During the anti-fascist resistance, Yugoslav Partisans (the People's Liberation Army), led by the Communist Party of Yugoslavia were establishing their forms of governance upon liberated territories. One of such institution established in occupied Yugoslavia was the State Anti-Fascist Council of the People's Liberation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (ZAVNOBiH), as the highest state organ of the anti-fascist movement in Bosnia and Herzegovina, with three sessions being held, in the form of constitutive assemblies composed of all working peoples of Bosnia and Herzegovina: workers, farmers, teachers, intellectuals, even religious authorities, with men and women equally represented. As Bosnia and Herzegovina had previously been the subject of nationalistic territorial claims and pretensions of both Serbian and Croatian collaborationist regimes and

² *Zemaljsko antifašističko vijeće narodnog oslobođenja Bosne i Hercegovine* – State Anti-fascist Council of the People's Liberation of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

movements, the Resolution of the first ZAVNOBiH session from 25 November 1943 provided a counter-narrative for the future understanding of Bosnia and Herzegovina.³

Responding with an *extra-national concept*, the Partisan movement stated that Bosnia and Herzegovina was to be understood as “neither Serbian, nor Croat, nor Muslim, but Serbian and Croat and Muslim”, as a *brotherhood community*. The confirmation of the statehood of Bosnia and Herzegovina was thus materialized through the ability to think beyond the mono-national frame, overcoming this by means of *socialist revolution* and *anti-fascist resistance*. Although this kind of *social contract* would prove to be too avant-garde for SFRY further down the line, opening up different and fuzzy issues regarding the understanding of *national question(s)* in the Federation and its setting within the new emerging socialist sphere, the political subjectivity of contemporary Bosnia and Herzegovina was inherently formed within a leftist, anti-fascist narration, being a strongly bound negation of ethno-national territorial pretensions based upon the concept of *blood and soil*.

In the context in which the ethno-national identities were used and banded about to fulfil the quisling goals of the then bourgeoisie, the formulation of the “*neither nor nor, but and and*” concept was the only possible social answer; one which politically illuminated the fact that the idea of a unified Bosnia and Herzegovina cannot rest on its territorial unity alone, but more on the unity of its peoples. In other words, every ethno-mapping of Bosnia and Herzegovina goes beyond anti-fascism. This became obvious in the 1990s, when delegitimizing Yugoslavia in its essence implied not only delegitimizing its self-managing socialist program, but its anti-fascist legacy as well, reviving anti-antifascist projects and ideas as

³ Aggregating their projects of great states within the frame of Nazi-fascistic collaboration, Croatian and Serbian national projects both negate the political existence of Bosnia and Herzegovina, splitting it between their (geo) political imaginaries. At the same time, a segment of the class of wealthy Muslim landowners, intellectuals and remains of old Ottoman bourgeoisie established – with the aid of Hitler’s personal intervention – a Muslim-led SS division combating both Chetniks and the Yugoslav Partisans, the latter being led by the Communist Party of Yugoslavia.

national-independence programs of the post-Yugoslav countries.⁴ Thus, the failure of Yugoslavia loomed heavily over the fate of Bosnia and Herzegovina – trapped in the vacuum between the resurrection of great nation-state projects and dissolution, it is no wonder that the bloodiest projection of *spatializing mono-ethnic identities* was manifested on the very territory upon which it was initially overcome.

In a complex and perplexing series of happenings, the people, *self-managing workers*, were converted into warriors, with their ‘sides’ largely determined along ethnic lines. In an atmosphere in which one nationalism fed another and thereby produced yet newer ones, at the same time, the emergent ethno-national elites were jointly flying the flags of their *imagined communities* at the dawning of the first multi-party elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in a bid to fight against the legacy of the old socialist regime. In the background of those revanchist inspirations, the legacy of the social parentage of goods was contained manifestly.

Simultaneously, while the self-managing workers were at their new workplaces, i.e. the battlefields, sustaining a conflict that would result in ethnic cleansing, mass killings, rapes, and genocide, another conflict was developing, hidden away in the field of *economic relations*. This conflict was against the mutual enemy of the ethno-elites: the socialist program of common ownership of goods that had to be eliminated for once and for good. Hence, in the midst of the war, the *Law on the Conversion of social ownership into state ownership* was silently passed simultaneously by all sides of the conflict.⁵ Under such circumstances, nationalization in the *state of war* as the *state of exception* could only mean an accumulation of wealth in the hands of those in power, deconstructing the Yugoslav and ZAVNOBiH order, while at the same time creating a new one. Within this framework, the road for the later, suspicious and corrupt privatization processes was paved – investors and entrepreneurs,

⁴ For instance, the relationship between historical revisionism and nation-building see: Radanović 2015, Markovina 2016, Jović 2017.

⁵ In the area at the time under the control of the Army of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, such a law was adopted in 1994, the same year as for the area controlled by the Army of Republika Srpska (see: Sl. list RBiH 33/94; RS 4/93, 29/94, 31/94, 9/19, 19/95).

either closely related to the official political structures, or actually a part of them, contributed to the accumulation of both political and economic power in the hands of both themselves and warlords.

Not only did the Dayton Peace Agreement of November 1995, shaped under international patronage, bring a halt to the conflict while maintaining the architecture of war as the new reality of peace, but it also legitimized its wider legacies. Summarized, this meant two things. Firstly, violence and horrific crimes were legalized through the internal administrative and territorial organization of the country. The boundaries of the conflict created by emptying and homogenizing territories through ethnic cleansing and genocide making them *de facto ethno-territories*, which were were institutionalized as an integral part of the existing reality. Secondly, maintaining the wartime reality through the political structure produced a fruitful political environment for the preservation of those political actors and narratives that rose to the fore in the 1990s during peacetime. Breaking from ZAVNOBiH's "neither nor nor, but and and", and turning instead to a mere "and and and", it extracted the socialist concept of *equality of nations* and placed it firmly within a new context.⁶ In this way, Bosnia and Herzegovina became an object of its, now formalized, *constituent peoples*. A *democracy without demos*, a form of rather deeply class-divided ethnocracy, was established. The question of the Left thus has to be examined in the context of such a *topos*.

Mapping the Left in a Post-Dayton reality

It must be underlined that the economic *transition* from self-managing socialism to free-market capitalism went hand-in-hand with war, further strengthening the logic of ethno-determinism.⁷ The neoliberal attitude towards self-management as a

⁶ See, for example, Lenin's understanding of the national question (Lenin 1960), which became a model for the concept of "equality of nations, nationalities and working people" in Yugoslavia, used more recently to legitimize the right to self-determination. The nation existed and was recognized, but solely as a form.

⁷ For an in-depth overview of this issue, see the first chapter of *Welcome to the desert of post-socialism*, edited by Srećko Horvat and Igor Štikš (Horvat and Štikš 2015).

failed economic system of a failed regime was crucial to the ethno-nationalistic idea of decomposing socialism. The consequences of this were especially noticeable in the context of Bosnia and Herzegovina, where a significant proportion of Yugoslavia's heavy industry was located, leaving deindustrialization, corrupt privatizations, unemployment and poverty, together with the political mapping of religiously and ethnically achieved divisions. This indicates that those divisions are to be perceived as deeply rooted in class-based phenomena, transferring the ownership of the *means of production* from the workers to the hands of new political elites. By being constituents of a new political order, their individual political subjectivity was reduced in comparison to their ethnic identities, *compensating it* by using state services and public sector as partocratic and clientelist mechanisms of the elites in rewarding loyalty, securing social peace and maintaining the *status quo*.

In this sense, it is without doubt that the current context of Bosnia and Herzegovina's post-Dayton reality produces an agenda for the Left, while at the same time reducing its potential to offer alternatives. Leftist thinking, thus, is inextricable from thinking *beyond the system*, placing itself heretically over the exclusionary Dayton reality and being aware of the consequences it may face. In other words, it is to think against the current politico-administrative landscape of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the hegemonistic narratives legitimizing the heritage of war by all sides of the conflict. It is therefore also to challenge both the *polemocratic logic* of peacetime and the (often marginalized in public debate) *economic relations* as spaces mutually feeding upon one another by reproducing the narration of war, thus maintaining the conditions of primitive accumulation of capital made possible in the 1990s. It is within this context that the necessity of answering the question of *Where and what is the Left in Bosnia and Herzegovina?* lies. For a more precise understanding, the Left here is going to be understood on two levels: the *Social Left* and the *Political Left*.⁸

⁸ However, the inner pluralistic ideological content, as well as an overlap of actors between both categories, is to be assumed and respected, thus

The Social Left

The Social Left emerges *from the bottom*, mostly as part of an activist scene beyond official political institutions. It is to be mapped within civil society by different organizations, movements or initiatives (legal or illegal, formal or non-formal, organized or *ad hoc*), groups of people (workers, unions, academics, artists, students, minorities, etc.) or individuals. These organizations' purpose is not only to accomplish progressive aims but also to deconstruct the existing reality and provide a critical dimension towards it. In the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina, alongside demands or statements resting on essentially *leftist agendas* such as democratization of society and economy – empowering labour and minority rights, environmentalism and struggles for public space while promoting equality and solidarity together with anti-fascism, anti-capitalism and anti-nationalism in general – there are several, albeit mainly side-lined and broadly insufficient, actors that could be subsumed under the notion of a 'Social Left' as such. Rising out of partial activities dealing with specific or current issues, the form of the Social Left is being shaped primarily through different forms of political and social engagement and activism either within existing organizations, problem-oriented projects, or spontaneous *ad hoc* grassroots activities.

Despite the *various areas* the Social Left has shaped over recent years through organizations, events and projects, or different spontaneous protests and mobilizations, it has remained ineffective in ensuring any further social and political continuance and consolidation. Two paradigmatic examples⁹ could be mentioned here: The first of these was the Unique Organization for Socialism and Democracy (*Jedinstvena organizacija za socijalizam i demokratiju* – JOSD), active from around 2009 until 2013, which was dedicated to building a socialist and democratic system and its structures and institutions, defining itself as “a revolutionary anti-capitalist organization”. The second example of the articulation of leftist ideas in a

exhibiting an awareness of the possible shortcomings and weaknesses of such an arguably coarse and unforgiving categorization.

⁹ Information has been retrieved from the official web pages of the actors, which are listed in the references.

bottom-up manner was the Open University (*Otvoreni univerzitet*), which functioned from 2013 to 2017, and was designed as a joint activity of several organizations, by which a platform was provided for open debates, social engagement and interactive education, with the aim of overcoming the “closure in the post-Dayton debate” and an “inactive intellectual and academic public” bringing together local, regional and international activists, public figures and intellectuals.

Currently, there are only a few subjects that openly state their leftist standpoints, while others show their critical preferences indirectly, contextualizing them casually or primarily through the aims of their activities. While acknowledging the risk that I unknowingly and unintentionally omit somebody, the most prominent actors¹⁰ that I primarily refer to when describing a Social Left are: Front of Freedom (*Front Slobode*), which promotes an anti-fascist tradition, social activism and public goods as “methods against the dominant ethno-nationalist rhetoric”, the Workers’ University (*Radnički univerzitet*) initiative aiming to provide a space for the active participation of citizens in economic and political life, *Association for Culture and Art – Crvena*, openly claiming to be a “feminist and left-oriented organization” whose work is “to create, advance and maintain the conditions for progressive social change through developing self-governing skills” among others. Despite its declared ideological plurality, the web portal *Prometej* also recently became an important virtual space articulating new critical and leftist thought in Bosnia and Herzegovina.¹¹

Despite multiple individual efforts and significant contributions, the Social Left in Bosnia and Herzegovina remains mostly localized, particularized and defragmented. Being narrowly oriented and quantitatively small, it lacks the mapping of a wider contextual background, structural cohesion and references within the systemic relations producing the contentious conditions that it has to deal

¹⁰ Information has been retrieved from the official web pages of the actors, which are listed in the references.

¹¹ This does not mean that there are not other actors, unions for instance, dealing with issues that are to be classified as *leftist*. However, since they do not self-identify as subjects of the Left, they are not listed as such here, although it is important to note their existence as well.

with. With the deficiency of joint activities and solidarity, while at the same time being *exclusivist*, being limited to mostly urban and well-educated (young) people, their activities are not able to produce a massification, often looking as miserable and infertile gatherings of *frustrated individuals* or *political marginals*. Focusing on visibility and performative action rather than on political processes, they have thus far failed to gain greater political influence and contribute to progressive political change.

Therefore, the Social Left is more present through the needs existing within the social realm than through its own autonomous subjectivity. The general rise of the Right is indisputably strengthening and self-complementing within the political context of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Local hegemonistic narratives of post-conflict nation-building are being tensioned by the recent increase of regressive and oppressive elements within society. However, their more seductive presence within is blending the still-ongoing construction of national identities with the context of historical revisionism, and this is combined with immigration and emigration crises, struggles for public goods, intense economic instability and yet more phenomena, thereby further increasing alterpolitical responses from bottom. These lasting occurrences, despite their ephemerality, difficulties and failures, and hence being marginal in the political, could provide the potential not only for consolidating, but, more importantly, for articulating the social platform for the Left in the first place, making it more political and capable of producing applicative critics, instead of depending on project-oriented activities.

It became obvious that every attempt to produce counter-hegemonic narratives, no matter how marginal they were, or even not 'Left' at all, was greeted with strong and aggressive opposition from the dominant system's positions of power, even extending to an exaggeration of their real importance.¹² The strategy used to demonize them as being betrayals or national threats – mostly in

¹² In 2016, a descriptive, thinned-out political declaration of a joint initiative between the civic political parties, individuals, NGOs and intellectuals called the *Jahorinska deklaracija* was immediately decried as *leftist* and labelled as a "cheap reprise of the Communist International" (Begović, 2016) by nationalist propaganda media like *Stav* – in spite of having little to do with the Left either in terms of content or (several) signatories, with its aim instead simply being to use civic nationalism to combat

correlation within polemocratic *we-them* representations – is not just dangerous, but also important for illuminating the ideological instruments that maintain the vitality of the present order. Also, it highlights precisely which values legitimate the reproduction of the post-Dayton reality. It may appear that the system was somehow capable of keeping the social uprisings and mass protests in 2013 and 2014 under control, but the responses to the most recent protests – occurring simultaneously in Sarajevo and Banja Luka – merging the cases of Dženan Memić and David Dragičević, two young men who died under controversial circumstances, into a wider context, point to how they could jeopardize some of the key elements whose reproduction feeds the vitality of the current order (see: Hasanović 2020).

Since the Social Left in Bosnia and Herzegovina is not organized but particularized and defragmented, potential lies both in the needs and contradictions the system is inherently producing, as well as within *individual engagements*. It is without question that there are pro-Left individuals, either unorganized or engaged in different project-oriented initiatives or NGOs. Nevertheless, since they are unable to identify themselves within the existing, sporadic and *diluted leftist attempts*, on either a social or political level, it is not unusual that many show a preference for maintaining a passive stance, or limit themselves to being active individually within regional and global leftist platforms and activities rather than attempting to consolidate and organize in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Next to the bogey of performative activities, this also creates *an impenetrable wall* of distraction from politics, disabling efforts to deal properly with solving social and political problems. Instead of infertile theocratizations and attractiveness in dealing with big global questions, it is high time to simultaneously start with the production of a new, critical and applicative theory that clashes with the reality and *vice versa*. In other words, the political atmosphere of political subordination and stillness must be addressed and challenged in order to overcome it.

ethno-nationalism – thus being left virtually dead in the water and amortized by the existing context and neoliberal economic policies from the offset.

Political left

Both the protests in 2013, triggered by a problem with the issuance of ID numbers for newborn children, and the 2014 February workers' protests appeared as hazy possibilities for openly thinking critically *over* the post-Dayton reality for first time since the end of the conflict of the 1990s, imaging alternate forms of political representation (cf. Arsenijević 2014 as well as Štiks and Horvat 2014, Murtagh 2016, Sejfića and Fink-Hafner 2016, Belyaeva 2017, Kurtović 2018). Across various microspaces, forms of *direct democracy* were established through plenums, acting as a form of *heterotopia* emanating from the dominant ethno-political structures. However, ignoring numerous controversies, the positive appearances of alternative political spaces soon vanished, leaving no further political materialization in any form.¹³ Faced with this situation, one must question the position of the Left in such circumstances. Unorganized and weak, the Social Left failed to penetrate into the political, by grasping the momentum the events were producing, while on the other side, the actors understood to compose the Political Left were (together with their coalition partners) occupying important political positions at that time.¹⁴ Being discredited, instead of achieving social justice and equality within a new political frame, the IMF and World Bank, backed by the European Union, imposed a set of reforms as a neoliberal response to the social requests that the Left failed to fully articulate. The political outcomes of the 2014 *failed revolution*, in the Benjaminian sense, led to a noticeable conserving of the

¹³ Despite their political importance that this chapter makes reference to, it is important to stress that there are still matters of dispute and controversy surrounding the protests that may have served to set back the progressive impulse they began to create, disabling further politicization of social change. However, on a symbolical level, the protests illuminated the suppressed frustrations relating to the current post-socialist regime, exposing the degree of alienation of citizens from the state.

¹⁴ The Social Democratic Party of Bosna and Herzegovina was in power in 3 of the 4 cantons in which the protests were most intense, holding two Prime Minister positions. Likewise, with the position of Prime Minister in their hands, the social democrats also led the government of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

societal *status quo*, reinforcing the polemocratic elements, with the new ethno-national government acting as their legitimizing base and strengthening it as an ideological tool for discrediting political opponents.

With a total population of 3.5 million, it is estimated that there are approximately 150 officially registered political parties in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Radio Sarajevo 2018). Conventionally, the Political Left is mostly understood as a highly fluid subject, rejecting the ethno-political dimension while embracing Yugo-nostalgia and favouring a civic nature of Bosnia and Herzegovina, while at the same time maintaining social sensibility over economic relations, rarely ever questioning them from a radical perspective. However, the logic of the state's political architecture was subordinated to ethno-entity lines, shaping and being shaped by the most dominant political parties, while omitting ideological polarization from being the main marker upon which political parties are – or could be – organized, making it incredibly difficult to map them from a purely ideological perspective.¹⁵ Is it then even possible to be 'Left' in post-Dayton Bosnia and Herzegovina?

Indeed, there are political parties who try to challenge the dominant ethnic party system by underscoring their civic and multi-ethnic frame as the main doctrinal divide upon which their political position is based.¹⁶ Still, a civic or multi-ethnic character alone does not simply imply being 'Left', in the same way that claiming to be 'Left' does not imply sharing a civic or multi-ethnic vision of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Moreover, reducing the Left along these parameters can ultimately be highly dangerous for it. Lacking a clear ideological standpoint, it exposes the Left's inefficiency and vulnerability in reacting to structural problems at their roots, and a failure to seriously question the relationship between economic realm and ethnic nationalisms

¹⁵ More on party pluralism and multi-ethnicity in Bosnia and Herzegovina see in: Huruz 2019.

¹⁶ As seen for example when, in 2019, the Bosniak SDA adopted a Declaration at their Party Congress, favouring the civic concept of Bosnia and Herzegovina, after the American Special Envoy to Western Balkans, Matthew Palmer, issued a statement claiming that all countries in the Balkans should be civic, instead of ethnic.

of the 1990s. Ignoring the material conditions by which the post-Yugoslav social and political context is being sustained is not only ultimately counterproductive, but also a trap that is sucking the Left toward the dominant rightist framework of the Dayton Agreement-imposed reality, under whose predicaments the Left now operates.

Being so far the most organized multi-ethnic party, with allegedly 50,000 members, according to their official website, and claiming openly in their program to be a “Party of the Left” the Social Democratic Party of Bosnia and Herzegovina (*Socijaldemokratska partija Bosne i Hercegovine* – SDP BiH) is to be considered as the most influential organ on the Political Left. Defined as the legal and political successor of the Social Democratic Party of Bosnia and Herzegovina of 1909 and the Communist Party i.e. the Union of Communists of Bosnia and Herzegovina, it embraced the *Third Way* at its 3rd Party Congress in 1999 as the “third way for Bosnia and Herzegovina [...] after the path into communism and path into nationalism” (Lagumdžija 1999, 6). After the 7th Party Congress in 2019, the SDP announced that it would take a more radical shift to the Left, noting the importance to “follow democratic socialism in America, which is at its strongest in the last 50 years and Corbyn’s new path in England” (Faktor 2019).

In addition to the SDP, there are several other political parties that can be nominally considered as part of the Political Left. Foremost among these are parties that are considered ‘Left’ due their civic, non-ethnic platforms, such as Democratic Front (*Demokratska fronta* – DF), Citizens’ Union (*Građanski savez* – GS) or Our Party (*Naša Stranka* – NS). On the other hand, there are political parties that are clearly ethnically determined and nationalist, such as the Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (*Savez nezavisnih socijaldemokrata* – SNSD) or the Socialist Party (*Socijalistička partija* – SP) which allude to the Political Left only in name. While DF defines itself as a “party of social democracy” and GS as a party of the “civic left”, both spawned from the SDP. Additionally, NS defines itself as “socio-liberal”. On the other side, in 2012, the SNSD found itself excluded from Socialist International due its nationalism and extremist positions, while

SP acts in such a way as to accept the ethno-determined reality, advocating “Republika Srpska statehood”.¹⁷

Thus, the Political Left in Bosnia and Herzegovina must be understood as being composed of (self-)declared leftist political parties, primarily determined as being *social democratic*-oriented. However, those identities are shaky ones, not only with respect to contemporary developments on the global left, but also because of its *ideological illusiveness*, causing serious political consequences, as will be further elaborated upon in the next part of this chapter. Here, several indicators could be highlighted: Instead of using the parties as important parliamentary political means for suppressing the dominant structures or achieving radical and progressive demands, their emancipatory potentials are oftentimes sacrificed in favour of short-term interests. Privatizing their resources in this way, the nominal, mainstream Political Left in the partocratic, post-socialist ambient underestimates its already-softened ideological profile. Within a predominantly right-wing environment, the Political Left is split between adapting within the coordinates of such a topos or being in direct opposition to it. Of course, it is not an *or – or* dilemma. As much as the positions between *adapting* and *opposing* shift between electoral cycles and levels of government, they also interpenetrate, leading to the cementation of cryptopolitical practices as the means by which politics works, giving rise to political affairs and scandals, thereby compromising the Left while reducing it at the political level to merely being “just the same as every other political party”.

Therefore, the class antagonism between the professional political elites and the common – neglected, manipulated and horizontally divided people hardens even more. Whether acting merely as an employer creating an obedient clientele for itself, both in the public and private sectors, or being fragmented as a result of the emergence of new parties,¹⁸ in both cases, they are behaving more like interest groups statically conforming to the

¹⁷ Information has been retrieved from the official web pages of the political parties, which are listed in the references.

¹⁸ Mostly due to inner disagreements and wrangling among party cadres, or being a satellite party of a larger political subject, commonly from the

existing political landscape in favour of gaining political benefits that are at loggerheads with their statute and programmatic orientation – presenting the political and party market as a normality into which the nominal Political Left had to merge. Fitting into the partocratic framework of Dayton facilitates the performative personnel rotation from Right to Left and back again, enabling the formation of wider and looser coalitions based on interest calculations instead of programmatic principles. As a result, the possibility of clearer and firmer ideological positioning is even further weakened, the liability that lies in mainstream parties' deflections of and overcoming these practices increases.

Hereof, despite being sporadically publicly and verbally concerned about social issues, parliament members from the mainstream Political Left, for instance, openly advocated a *cheap labour force* as one of the national competitive advantages,¹⁹ favouring the interests of employers or big businesses – which they are mostly part of – over those of workers or other vulnerable groups that should be their primary voting base; instead of joining the marginalized and opening a united front against the oppressive political order and its actors, they showed themselves to be a part of it.²⁰ The space within which workers – or the suppressed in general – can be equally politically represented in their struggle for common interests and protection of their rights is, in short, narrowing and being prevented from achieving any progressive or subversive political goals from within.²¹ Therefore, taking into account the importance of

Right, with the aim of diluting votes at the expense of other, wider and more influential political party from the Political Left.

¹⁹ Parliamentary question put forward by Denis Bećirović to the chairman of the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina from 20.04.2017, no. 01-50-1-15-44/17, available on: <http://parlament.ba/oquestion/OR-QuestionDetails?contentId=833>

²⁰ Furthermore, it is not unusual that prominent members of the Political Left express and adopt conservative and nationalistic views and stances.

²¹ Their marginalization was evident from, among other things, the election programs for the previous election cycle, which highlighted the importance of tax reforms and the creation of a positive economic environment for attracting foreign direct investments, focusing their economic policy on “freeing the economy from impositions coming from the state” (Plan 10 2019, 7).

different material conditions, it is naïve to expect that shifts and claims, such as that of SDP of following democratic socialism, will ever be achieved within the current, obedient party nomenclature. This shortcoming is evident even in the very process of building the narrative of *democratic socialism* in praxis and materializing it, for instance, through (a lack of) massification of the party, mobilization and involvement of a huge number of young people, while openly calling for policies such as redistributive justice, progressive taxation and basic income, or advocating more democracy and less privatization, giving preference to public services as public goods deprived of political influence, which would all undermine their own means of political existence.

Two conclusions arise from the circumstances of the current Political Left. Having in mind the global decline of social democracy, combined with its ideological, extreme centrist dryness in facing the challenges of contemporary capitalist society, as well as its local failures to produce any significant political alternatives, even to a certain degree being an active actor in the reproduction and fortification of the current *status quo*, it is questionable whether the Political Left that exists in Bosnia and Herzegovina is to be understood as 'Left' at all. Considering this, it is hard to expect any further political affirmation in the direction of the democratization of the economy or wider society, vulnerable and politically marginalized social groups, or the use of sensitive issues, like class, sex and gender, as *ideological fuel* by the Political Left within the both conservative and steeped-in neoliberalism context of the Dayton-framed society. Offering politically nothing but ceremonial performances and declarative statements, the Political Left is turning society apolitical, shattering the voter base among different political actors, or turning to ethno-constructed identities favouring ethnically delineated parties, which are becoming closer to the common people than the increasingly elitized and technocratic parties of *the (self-)declared left*, all the while providing existential reliance for their own cadres.

Although private interests and clientelism within political parties are not necessarily inherently linked to nationalism or to

the political architecture of the country, it is undeniable that they were made possible through such a political environment, in the search for political power. Put succinctly, such a link was forged in order to achieve political support not by materializing their ideas, but rather their interests. Therefore, focusing on untying the knot between the consensual ethnocracy created by the Dayton Agreement and its economic base is crucial for the positioning of the Left. Torn between being providing an alternative by simply being 'non-Right' and offering similar agenda to the Right encouraged by familiar narratives, the actors on the Political Left are accepting the logic of the system, instead of challenging it. Moreover, they are becoming a part of it.

Overcoming the Left as an *Empty Signifier*

Assuming the absence of a possible electoral fraud, with 47% abstention and 6% invalid or blank ballots, the winner of the 2018 General Election was the coalition of *political abstinence* and *agony*, a silent protest showing not only the belief that elections can systematically change little, but also acting as a stark reminder of a *silent majority* that feels that there is no party credible enough to earn their support. This belief was legitimized by a highly turbulent post-election period of coalition-forming and majority-finding. While there is an evident statistical decline of the *founding fathers of Dayton* (SDA, HDZ, SDS and SNSD today) this does not mean that the dominant framework is being distorted in any way.²² Giving a chance both to the non-rightist opposition of yesterday and new political actors that became involved in the meantime, those who voted did so not only because of parties' policies but also due to the mixture of desperation regarding the inefficiency of the previous government and party splits having led to revocations of

²² Numerous new parties spawned from preexisting ethno-nationalist parties at the dawn of 2018 General Elections. However, these largely retained the same political stance and key protagonists from the previous parties, and were rather an outcome of personal animosities and vanities as opposed to any attempt to offer an alternative program.

memberships and clientele. Not only does the political environment remain firmly *rightist*, but *non-rightist* actors contribute to this by bringing forward confrontations within the field of nationalism, using predominant narratives to emphasize the *political* over the current *ethnic* concept of nationalism, while taking up *mainstream positions* by favouring a business-oriented climate and attracting foreign investors in terms of *economy*. In this vein, it is possible to understand the SDP's flexibility in forming a coalition with the extreme Right (HSP) and conservatives (NiP), and also the SNSD's embrace of nationalism or the nationalists' co-conspirators on the Left (such as DF, GS or, of late, Social Democrats).

Such an enchanted circle that squeezed the Left out of the political space of Bosnia and Herzegovina, dialectically speaking, contains the sparkle of self-denial in itself, on which the Left has to catch on. This is precisely the reason that any notion of the 'Left' must be diluted, even pluralizing civic parties within which it can emerge, so reducing their voting base, or even monoethnicizing them.²³ There is therefore a need to provide alternate understandings and a comprehensive framework for repositioning politics beyond a *polemocratic* and conservative ethno-determined set of values and *peripheral neoliberalism*, which profits from them as its vital yardstick of legitimation. This would be the point where the Social Left and Political Left must meld and combine, instead of harbouring dangerous delusions of one another as threat, rejecting solidarity and joint action due to competing claims of 'ownership' and 'exclusiveness' over and within representation of the Left.

It seems that the main problems emerging from the current political space can hardly be overcome without the very same conditions from which they arise. Problems such as the Sejdić-Finci case, questions on the Election Law, the House of the Peoples of Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, or the endangering of constituent people in general are the problems of the system itself,

²³ One of the main challenges for the Left in promoting a civic and multi-ethnic character and advocating an entity-free Bosnia and Herzegovina is to be recognized and gain electoral support in areas with a Croat or Serb majority.

and therefore the logic behind their solutions is deadlocked, deeply conditioned by the framework in which they occur. Politics has narrowed its scope down to exclusively dealing with such issues, while demands rising out of society as a whole are not only ignored, but attempts are also made to subordinate them to such issues, presenting them as wider and vital interests for the people. Although a social peace fabricated on the ethnic level still sustains, recent protests by war veterans of the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Croatian Defence Council, accusing the Bosniak and Croat political establishment of being responsible for their unbearable living conditions show that the dominant narrative could be loosened by increasing class consciousness.

As a global consequence of the collapse of real-socialism and the process of a kind of *de-sovietization*, the rise of ethnic nationalism has acquired the material conditions by which to become the dominant idea in the local historical experience through the embrace of neoliberal market capitalism. Thus, it has been possible for the political subjects of the previous order – the workers – to, at least nominally, be de-subjectivized through the looting and nationalization of social property, turning them into warriors, whereby such a *nominal syncretism*, as Roland Barthes would underline, acts as a bourgeoisie technique making conspicuous the ambition of hiding the essential differences and disparities within (Barthes 1991, 138). The manifestation of “converting the workers into warriors” is more than a phrase, a fact that bears tragic consequences. The economic *transition towards the restoration of capitalism* went hand-in-hand with war, and therefore it is not surprising that the legacy of this is an indispensable legitimizing factor for the Right, nationalist establishment to preserve the *conditions of primitive accumulation* of capital. Together with dismantling the legacy of the previous political system, new power – economic and political – has been accumulated through the construction of new political communities. This reflects Agamben’s (1998) nearness of the camp and sovereignty, the production of life and death in which factory halls became concentration camps; once producers of the future, now death factories and mass graves for a future that was once believed in.

Missing an opportunity to subvert the ethno-political scope²⁴ by symbolically nominating Svetozar Pudarić as their presidential candidate instead of Denis Bećirović, the SDP has officially sealed its absorption within the ethno-determined structure, failing at principal deflection and persistence in articulating a different political concept to the existing one.²⁵ On the contrary, through an extreme fetishization of the state and its symbols, the SDP's campaigning has deepened the theoretical and practical vitality of nationalist narratives within the Political Left.²⁶ In putting forward a candidate for the Bosniak member of the collective presidency, it further underlined the civic concept as merely a monoethnic political aspiration, underlining the ideological inconsistency within the party and its confusion between being a multi-ethnic political alternative and a party that predominantly appeals to the Bosniak voter base. A similar template was present among other parties nominally understood as

²⁴ The European Court of Human Rights proved the discriminatory power-sharing provisions of the Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina regarding the arrangements on the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which prescribes that only Bosniaks and Croats from the territory of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbs from the territory of the Republika Srpska can be elected as Members of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina. To act in accordance with this judgment would call into question the very geometry of the Dayton reality.

²⁵ Being a Serb living in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and thus systemically discriminated against and proscribed from running as a candidate for the tripartite presidency, SDP would have pulled a powerful political move by insisting on proposing Svetozar Pudarić as their presidential candidate. As he was prevented from standing for election due to his place of residence, Pudarić filed a lawsuit against Bosnia and Herzegovina, which, in late 2020 resulted in the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) confirming the claim that Bosnia and Herzegovina violates the rights of its citizens and discriminates against and between them (Hina 2020). The importance of this lawsuit, compared to previous ones, lies in the fact that institutional discrimination affects not only minorities, but all citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

²⁶ Avoiding the interpretation of a large swathe of media content and electoral propaganda it is important to extract the statist elements from his speech opening the SDP's election campaign in Zenica. Wholly unifying people within the "proud state of Bosnia and Herzegovina", he was looking for the victory of the "state of Bosnia and Herzegovina", at the same time seeing "barriers to foreign investors" as its main threat, ending his speech with the wish that "our mother, the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina lives forever" (Bećirović u Zenici, 2018).

'Left', such as the SNSD's presidential candidature of Milorad Dodik espousing extreme Serbian nationalism.

Soon after the elections, the strength of Dayton was confirmed anew, when three main non-Right parties (SDP, DF, NS), made a post-election coalition called *BH Blok* to act as an alternative that would oppose the ethno-nationalist parties, despite the political environment remaining predominantly rightist. It quickly resulted in DF joining an ethno-national-led coalition (SDA, HDZ, SNSD) on the state and entity level, justifying this as a "state-building decision" (Oslobođenje, 2019), even laying claim to "Bosniak seats" in the distribution of ministry departments, thereby officially positioning itself as a Bosniak political actor within. A further impact of the DF joining this coalition was its contribution to the ousting of the cantonal government in Sarajevo Canton in late 2019. This was also fuelled by an ongoing conflict that simmered over in summer 2019 in Tuzla Canton, whereby the SDP branch in the canton and the Party leadership clashed regarding entry into the SDA-led cantonal government. Tuzla, formerly a traditional bastion of social democracy, is now burdened by SDA and the Movement of Democratic Action (*Pokret demokratske akcije*- PDA), a local-oriented political party newly formed by members excluded from the SDA in 2018, with the two combined winning 41% of the vote – or 16 seats in the cantonal parliament – in comparison to SDP's 23% (10 seats) in the 2018 elections. The conflict ended in splitting the local, pro-SDA fraction from SDP and establishing a new party: the Social Democrats (*Socijaldemokrate* – SD).

With the exception of rare individual interventions from the Social Left, a worrying lethargy has emanated from the bottom, with a lack of any serious initiatives that would direct or advise the position of the Left today. The announcement of the desire of *numerous people* "concerned about the idea of social democracy" to form a so-called Social Democratic Movement, just brought to light the depth of porosity in the understanding of the Left in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Although their goals were publicly presented through empty rhetoric of "integrating the fragmented Left" or "returning to the basic principles of social democracy" lacking what is substantially meant by it, references

to the economic structure or class relations were also omitted from the entire document establishing the “Social Democratic Movement of Bosnia and Herzegovina” (Slobodna Bosna 2019).²⁷ The visible shift towards mainstream narrations instead of exposing their ideological background while focusing on economic issues, forging new ideas, or addressing repressed topics, underlined their alienation from the common people and their issues. Having no ability to identify with common, oppressed or progressive structures within the society, this merely continued to reproduce a familiar agenda within the same hegemonistic discourse.

What has to be consciously recognized here is the empty ideological space on the Left into which rightist ideas are attempting to penetrate. Being closely related to the political structures of the existing system, as well as drawing from political legacies from the 1990s, it is hard to argue that “ideological commitment and free-thinking” of the main protagonists of the ‘Movements’ can offer any political alternative or consolidate the Left, but instead it is more likely that they will serve only to further narrow the possibilities for overcoming existing narratives. Filling the chasm left within the Left with non-Left content, thus equalizing the two political streams, empties its space even further, euthanizing progressive and emancipatory fortitude and the notion of the Left as a unifying trans-ethnic political idea. Without paying reference to social and economic relations, the emptied signifier of the Left can be dangerous, easily taking on the position of the Right. Therefore, taking a leftist stance must be to delegitimize the social, political and economic framework of Dayton from the Left.

²⁷ Later renamed as the Social Justice and Democracy Movement of Bosnia and Herzegovina (*Pokret socijalne pravde i demokratije* – SPD).

Concluding remarks

To be radical, as Karl Marx underlined, is to grasp things by the root. That is why a radical re-thinking of the Left within the Dayton-constructed reality requires changing the notion of the Left at the root – and this root is *the Left itself*. As seen, it is the normalization of the *status quo* that is the most dangerous position for the Left, being this way amortized and vacuumed as infertile and confirming. However, there is an open, both unused and alienated, space for the Left stemming from the very logic of the system that shapes social and political demands upon which the Left must catch. The struggles within the social field in recent years have illuminated such claims, albeit in a manner too insufficient to consolidate and enlarge the activist scene to an extent that it could take a clear leftist stance towards the articulated issues. Despite the absence of general unifying political norms, the Left has also to be aware and take note of the fact that it needs to transcend the context of systemically divided society that has been integral to the existing reality for over a quarter of a century. The challenge is, therefore, to determine whether the social and political strains enlightening systemic ambivalences would be more effectively challenged within mono-ethnic communities, than their current positioning as separate and abstract political agendas distant from the present reality. In other words, how can inclusive policies be best offered within such a particularized framework?

Using state services and public sector as partocratic and clientelist mechanisms of the elites in rewarding loyalty, securing social peace and maintaining the status quo – both on the Political Right and Left – facilitates parties' continuous grip on power, forming thus a wide electoral body using and offering material dependence to their *wards*. This exploitation has become a condition of existence. Entering the political theatre is possible only if marginal particularities or identities are left aside, both those of the constituent peoples and the sectarianism among the actors on the Social Left. A need for a comprehensive political organization is seen as crucial and – speaking of workers – “has to go much more radically with its demands than compromise with the ruling

elites and would have one of the most difficult tasks – unification” (Šaćiri 2019). Therefore, shaping the struggles within the *social field* will require solidarity and joint arrangements, finding common strains in achieving social justice, equality or freedom.

As this chapter has no intention of dealing with the specific process(es) of creating leftist policies, but instead attempts to map the occasions and possibilities for the Left within the post-Dayton landscape, once more it must be underlined that the Left here is understood in its ideological plurality, and thus respects possible inner disputes surrounding certain questions and issues. However, two key facets that must be in common are reasonable and obstinate policies respecting the reality of the social context from which they emerge and the equal importance and involvement of local, national and international issues. It is important that the Left acts politically, no matter whether through elections or non-institutional engagement, both being complementarily important. With a total of 53% of non-voters, the Left must produce counter-hegemonic narratives, winning the social space by championing the needs within it and mobilizing and encouraging the abstinent and suppressed to organize themselves politically.

The recognition of class subordination could precede the emergence of the *demos* as a political actor beyond the *ethnic*. Through this, the Left could penetrate from the social into the political field, in which the existing social coordinates would still be respected, but not as the basis for politics. New protests that arise from the oppressive nature of the system’s exploitation of society (most recently workers’ and union protests, LGBTIQ rights or environmental issues) need to be the crux around which the Left has to organize and offer real political and social alternatives, which are currently absent, being marginalized or simply unclear within the scattered and internally divided Social Left. The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has illuminated the gaps which so far used to be a matter of secondary, sidelined phenomena and debates, as being essentially important. One aspect of the possibility that their loudness could even be heard is that it has served to expose their alienation and the impossibility of adequate political action.

Thus, it is time to show readiness for finding room in which to radically deconstruct the capitalist and market logic through new forms of integrative, socialist struggle. By no means does this imply that national question(s) should be set aside and ignored. On the contrary, since it is hard to imagine this ever happening, they have to be framed and positioned differently. As seen, these two processes inextricably go hand-in-hand in the context of Bosnia and Herzegovina. It is now of the essence to not only rectify the historical mistakes, but also to demystify the ideological basis forged in the 1990s. Therefore, the Left in Bosnia and Herzegovina has two crucial undertakings: first to get rid of the burdens of the past, acknowledge and distance itself from the atrocities and crimes of those regimes that misappropriated elements of Marxism for their own exploitation, and second to penetrate among the oppressed, marginalized and silenced in order to politicize and organize their struggles. The focus must be on society as a whole; accepting it as plural, heterogeneous and dynamic, instead of reducing it to a single homogenized subjectivity. With the constant meeting of theory and practice, it is time for the Left to start constructing an imaginary that will challenge the foundations upon which the forces of retrograde policies thrive.

Providing original and authentic leftist narrations instead of their predominant rightist counterparts would allow for a consideration of different aspects of what precisely the post-conflictual reality is built upon, thereby highlighting the connection between the horrors of ethno-politics and economic relations. This would allow a new Left to not only proffer its own stance on questions the Right currently has monopoly over, but also to radically deal with current, suppressed or new topics whose issues require alternative answers. In other words, it implies inclusive and continuous political struggles questioning the system but abstaining from entry into any arrangements with the *guardians of the regime*, thus forcing them to exhaust their political limits. Given that under the Dayton Agreement-imposed reality, political parties are limited in their acting and achieving within a clear, ideologically pluralistic terrain, it also broadens the potential for actors of the nominal and mainstream Social Left to

participate in broad, ideologically less rigid program coalitions, further weakening the still-dominant wartime ethno-national parties. Although such endeavours would still allow conservative stances to be favoured, they create a space for new policies that simply cannot be set within the existing frames.

The fact that existing relationships of power gain their legitimacy through ideology must not be forgotten. Such ideology acts covertly to explain reality and create an image of a world in which order is self-justifying. Since the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina still live in the symbolic omnipresence of the past war, in order to protect themselves from criticism, dominant narratives from all three sides impose moral legitimacy by which any questioning that exposes the immanent logic under which they operate is discredited through narratives that force a return of the *heretic deviations* into the very algorithm of the system. Asking “What next?” one year after the 2014 protests, Minel Abaz, a political activist from Sarajevo, highlighted the problem of *class consciousness*, which was previously relatively high due to the legacy of the socialist period, but today witnesses the problem of ‘ideological confusion’, which can be overcome by educating, agitating and organizing the oppressed: “it means that it is not enough to mobilize for protests, blockades of streets (other public spaces) or to organize plenums. These elements of political strategy must be complemented by longer-term efforts that target everyday practices, socially pervasive self-perceptions, and worldviews – in short, they must aim at transforming everyday consciousness or ‘common sense’” (Abaz 2015).

Finally, its presence necessitated and confirmed by the political framework of the Dayton Agreement, the so-called international community is an additional important factor in reproducing and maintaining the *status quo*. Hence, a new Left in Bosnia and Herzegovina must also be *globally immersed*, critically considering the role of the international community and foreign actors, as well as that of neighbouring countries and their right-wing governments’ interventions in domestic politics, often likewise with the intent of providing barriers to change. Therefore, counter-hegemonistic narratives promoting social justice,

equality, anti-fascism and democracy both within politics and the economy must emerge from cooperations with new progressive actors at both regional and international scales. Re-establishing a new leftist idea among the former Yugoslav countries is arguably an emancipatory political goal in and of itself, as it serves to question not only the exclusivity and reductionisms of post-Yugoslav national animosities, but also to overcome the domestic auto-colonial reflections and uses of colonial (mis) readings of the Balkans, imagining it as a *possibility* instead of a *mirror reflection* of a suppressed Europe, perpetually giving birth to nation-states. Although the idea of accelerating historical processes is to be rejected, the social realm of Dayton and its contradictions have made it possible to imagine a new Left within a space that has been immanently emptied of it. It is, finally – to use the famous 1968 student slogan – important to *be realistic and demand the impossible*.

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What's left of the Left in Serbia following the restoration of capitalism?

Abstract

The Left in Serbia shares the general weaknesses of the European Left, which has found itself in an unsteady position since 1989. However, there are certain specific features of the Serbian Left, related to both the Yugoslav socialist past and the 1990s legacy of the Milošević regime, that make its prospects even worse. Socialist Yugoslavia, which emerged from the self-styled 'Socialist Revolution' and was developed within the framework of self-management and non-aligned policies, has still retained some negative legacies from the standpoint of symbolically hegemonic Serbian conservative and liberal nationalism with which the Left in Serbia must cope today. Socialist Yugoslavia did leave behind some positive legacies, but, after 1989, these were cancelled out by the extremely negative legacy inherited by the Serbian Left from the Serbian president Slobodan Milošević and his wife Mirjana Marković. As the leaders of two parties, the Socialist Party of Serbia (*Socijalistička partija Srbije*, SPS), and the Yugoslav Left (*Jugoslovenska levica*, JUL) respectively, they incorporated values of nationalism and a form of specific political capitalism at the periphery of the world capitalist system. Today's SPS collaborates with the ruling Serbian Progressive Party (*Srpska napredna stranka*, SNS) on nearly all neoliberal legislative initiatives and policies. Despite these numerous negative legacies and the peripheral position, a new young generation of radical democrats and leftists in Serbia, such as the Civil Front and the Radical Left Party (*Partija radikalne levice*), is now involved in various social and political initiatives and movements.

Keywords: Left, radical democracy, socialist legacy, symbolic hegemony, world capitalist system.

Introduction: What is Left? What is capitalism? What is neoliberalism?

■ At the outset of this chapter, the basic concepts applied throughout must be clarified. As already explained (Bakić 2019; 2015), the formalist definition of the Left and the Right, *à la* Sartori,¹ purified of any content, is theoretically unacceptable. Its usage is limited as it is a reduction of political complexity and is helpful only for orientation within a chaotic reality (Ignazi 2004: 9-10). Such a formalistic approach cannot assist comparative-historical research if the meanings of the concepts are volatile and are, to a great extent, specific to a certain historical period or even a country. That is why a structural definition of the Left and Right is more theoretically powerful (Bakić 2019). It stresses the significance of equality as the main principle of the Left and hierarchy as that of the Right (Bobbio 1996: 67-8) Therefore, the Left fights for social equality, and is, by necessity, anti-capitalistic (and anti- all previous socio-economic systems which have embraced legal inequality) because capitalism, although it abolished legal inequality, creates oligarchic structures and huge inequalities in wealth and income. The Right considers various social hierarchies indispensable to the proper functioning of a society, and it is either pro-capitalist (liberal, modern conservative, and radical right)² or supportive of a previously existing socio-economic system.³ The Left does not recognize the authority of religious dogma of any church, while the Right needs it. The Left is strongly future-oriented and the Right is

¹ “[...] historically, Left and Right entered politics heavily loaded with cultural and religious meaning. [...] (These) labels are easily ‘unloaded’ and ‘re-loaded’ – for their lack of any semantic substratum” (Sartori 1982, 255-6, cit. acc. Ignazi 2006, 8-9).

² Conservatives justify social inequalities by stressing natural inequalities of social groups and justify inequality by divine order, while liberals are not aware that starting points in capitalism are not equal for everyone. Finally, social liberals and contemporary social democrats stress meritocratic principle in order to both decrease and justify social inequality by creating a society of allegedly equal chances.

³ The extreme Right can be anti-capitalist, but in favour of legal inequality of social groups due to their different race or culture, professions or moral qualities. Generally, the more distant the point in the past is favourable as a vision of desirable society, the more reactionary the ideologies and movements are.

oriented towards the past or present. The Left rationally looks for alternatives to the existing non-rational reality, while the Right demands a continuation of the holy traditions or respects empirically confirmed good praxis. The Left supports feminism, multiculturalism, practicing of different lifestyles and ways of thinking, while the right prefers national or racial homogeneity, and conventional family patterns and sexual behaviour (Bakić 2019; 2015).

One should differentiate between various leftist streams. Anarchists are in sharp opposition to all authority, and consider the state as equally dangerous to society as capitalism and the church, while communists and socialists look at the state as an indispensable agent of social development. Extreme leftists consider revolutionary violence necessary to the abolition of capitalism and elimination of the division of labour as a source of all social inequalities. Radical leftists consider a revolution necessary in certain situations, e.g. when political and business oligarchies refuse to accept electoral defeat; however, they accept the parliamentary system in principle, and think that the socio-economic system can be changed by revolutionary measures of the government and people. Finally, moderate leftists, e.g. social democrats in the middle of the 20th century, reject revolution and consider gradual and cumulative reforms as exclusionary means of changing the social system (Bakić 2015).

Capitalism is a socio-economic system that is based on private property, entrepreneurs who combine capital and work to maximize profit for their enterprises, and the work of legally free people who sell their work to employers in order to earn their wages and salaries that allow them to consume various products and follow a particular lifestyle. One can differentiate between several forms of capitalism throughout history: antique capitalism in ancient Rome, which appeared as a non-dominant way of economic life under a dominant slave-owner economy; medieval capitalism in some cities (e.g. the Hanseatic League) within a dominantly feudal society; liberal and monopolistic capitalism of the 19th and the first part of the 20th century; the fascist capitalism of the 1930s and 1940s; the capitalism of the welfare state (1945-1970s),⁴ and

⁴ The welfare state appeared as a product of social-democratic reforms after the Second World War. However, social democrats initiated reforms within

neoliberal capitalism (since the 1980s).⁵ Neoliberalism has been the hegemonic capitalist ideology since the early 1980s, with Margaret Thatcher in the UK (1979-1990) and Ronald Reagan in the USA (1981-89) at its helm, although 'the Chicago boys', Chileans who were Milton Friedman's students at the University of Chicago, returned to Pinochet's Chile as early as 1973 to establish a similar free-market system under the umbrella of an authoritarian-right political system and brutal military rule (Klein 2007, 79). Bearing in mind the sudden collapse of the European 'actually existing socialism' (since communism, strictly speaking, has never existed), it comes as no surprise that, since the last decade of the 20th century, powerful neoliberal advisors of the new capitalist oligarchies have applied the shock doctrine (monetary discipline, sharp cutting of government spending, massive privatization and massive unemployment) to restore capitalism as quickly as possible in almost all post-socialist countries. Certainly, such a triumph of neoliberalism was structurally supported by deindustrialization, a decrease in industrial workers' role(s) in the social structure, as well as by the fragmentation and atomization of workers, their precarization, and a huge decline in trade union membership and the subsequent loss of significance of the unions themselves.

Piketty shows that, in the new millennium, the level of social inequality has reached its highest peak since it has been possible to measure this, the period immediately preceding the First World War excluded (Piketty 2014). The defeated Left, whether this was communist parties that mostly withered away in electoral terms, or social democracy, which oriented itself towards the middle class and

a capitalist society in order to bring essential changes, which would gradually, thanks to their cumulative effect, lead towards the evolution of the old capitalist into a new socialist society. However, after a couple of decades, in the first half of the 1970s, even before the neoliberal counterrevolution had begun, European social democrats gave up on the idea of the cumulative effect of reforms, and started to reform the capitalist society in order to improve and humanize capitalism and not to change it into an utterly new social-economic formation (Przeworski 1985).

⁵ One can also talk about political or crony capitalism in contrast to market capitalism, but it is important to realize that both kinds are ideal types that do not exist in reality. Whether we should consider some society as an example of political or an example of market capitalism is dependent on a thorough historical description and socio-economic analysis.

betrayed both the working class and its leftist essence, was unable to oppose such a trend. However, since the middle of the 1990s, the radical right parties in the old oligarchies of the world capitalist system centre have successfully jumped in and used welfare chauvinism to attract workers (Bakić 2019). At the same time, nationalism has become socially normalized and taken on by the political mainstream (most notably in Orbán's Hungary) and successfully intertwined with neoliberalism in the new post-socialist oligarchies at the (semi)periphery of the world capitalist system. The Left has only recently, and with many difficulties, recuperated in the centre, and even more slowly at the post-socialist (semi)periphery.

The case of Serbia

The 90s in Serbia

While the international context discussed above, which was applicable to most European countries, has to be considered, there are certain additional specific features of the Serbian Left, related to both the Yugoslav socialist past and the 1990s legacy of the Milošević regime, hindering the Left's prospects in Serbia compared to many other countries in Europe. After the Tito-Stalin split in 1948, socialist Yugoslavia, through a self-styled 'Socialist Revolution', developed within the framework of socialist self-management, being less authoritarian than other socialist regimes established across Central and Eastern Europe, while following a non-aligned foreign policy and staying at a distance from both the NATO and Warsaw Pact blocs. Nonetheless, supporters of nationalist ideas in the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts (SANU), the Serbian Orthodox Church, the Serbian Association of Writers, and some factions within the League of Communists of Serbia were dissatisfied with the existing constitutional ethno-federalism in Yugoslavia, and especially with the position of Serbia in relation to its provinces of Kosovo and Vojvodina (Bakić 2011; Bunce 1999; Milosavljević 1995), and they therefore worked towards changing it. Slovenians in the League of Communists and their cultural institutions were against such constitutional reforms (Dragović Soso

2002/3), while the above-mentioned groupings of Serbian anti-communist intellectuals used this nationalist and institutional conflict to impose symbolic hegemony, disseminating this form of nationalism across almost all social strata in Serbia. It was mostly a narrative of self-pity and self-victimization, depicting Serbs as the greatest victims of 'Yugoslavia' and 'communism', and one which can be found in other nationalist narratives throughout former Yugoslavia (Bakić 2011; Kuljić 2006; 2002; Milosavljević 1995).

However, Slobodan Milošević, president of Serbia (later also of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia), and his wife, Mirjana Marković, were self-proclaimed leftists. Milošević, leader of the Socialist Party of Serbia (transformed into the League of Communists of Serbia), manipulated nationalism and even far-right nationalists to keep his power intact, while his wife, leader of the Yugoslav United Left (YUL), tried to promote internationalist ideas. Many members of the former communist elite transformed their political capital into economic capital during the restoration of capitalism, accommodating themselves within the new social circumstances (Lazić 2011). Moreover, some members of YUL (including Nenad Đorđević, Željko Mitrović, Zlatan Peručić and Dragomir Tomić, among others) and others who were ministers on behalf of YUL (Milan Beko, Danko Đunić) were among the richest tycoons in Serbia. Both facts strongly influenced the public perception of leftists as being hypocrites.⁶ In addition, both parties were 'socialist conservatives' (Tadić 1996), unprepared for substantial ideological innovation and democratization. Most importantly, both parties and the Milošević regime itself were, to a certain extent, criminalized.⁷

⁶ Milan Beko was at that time also a close friend with Zoran Đinđić and in good relations with the party coalitions in power after 2000.

⁷ The Milošević regime used the secret services and criminals (some of whom were first small-time criminals and smugglers of oil, narcotics and cigarettes, e.g. the so-called Surčin Clan members who were later, after the split of the Surčin Clan and the formation of the so-called Zemun Clan, involved in Đinđić's assassination, while others were professional killers and bank robbers like Željko Ražnatović (known by the moniker 'Arkan'), who was engaged in the assassination of political opponents abroad) in order to escape the UN-imposed sanctions (Lazić 1994) and fight the wars in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina (Bakić 2011). In the last phase of its rule, the regime eliminated some of its political opponents, such as the former friend of Milošević and potential opposition presidential candidate

Their governing coalition marked a hybrid regime that can be defined as authoritarian multiparty socialism with a dominant party. Social ownership was not only constitutionally protected but dominant in the economy, and a historical revisionism related to the period between 1945 and 1989 was not promoted by these two parties; they defended anti-fascism as a core value, while the main opposition parties were, to a greater or lesser extent, all in favour of historical revisionism. By the same token, the Milošević regime was firmly secular, in contrast to much of the opposition. In contrast, post-Milošević governments 'threw the baby out with the bathwater' by implementing non-constitutional mass privatization until 2006, abolishing social ownership as a constitutional category (2006), and supporting a de-secularization and rehabilitation of fascist collaborators, if not actual fascists.

Tycoons or newly emergent capitalist oligarchs were mostly members of the former communist nomenclature who transformed their former political power and inclusion in important social networks (social and political capital) into economic wealth, and were the ones who mostly benefited from the deliberately slow privatization process of the 1990s and its acceleration after 2000 (Lazić 2011). The political and economic elite from socialist Yugoslavia was skilful enough to use the specific circumstances created by the wars in former Yugoslavia (1991-1999) and the UN sanctions imposed on Serbia (1992-2000) to enrich itself and maintain its position as social elite in a political capitalism at the periphery of the world capitalist system. At the same time, as a consequence of these processes, social mobility in Serbia became the lowest in Europe (Cvejić 2006).

Newcomers came mostly from the underground criminalized sphere, who were either used or tolerated by the regime to break through the wall of the UN sanctions by means of smuggling oil, cigarettes and other rare and luxury goods (Lazić 2011). In other words, the Milošević regime created an additional moral and political burden for all leftist movements, parties and policies in Serbia,

Ivan Stambolić or the journalist Slavko Ćuruvija. There were also a number of unsuccessful assassinations attempts on Vuk Drašković, one of the opposition leaders in the 1990s (and, nowadays, a member of the ruling coalition led by the SNS).

which they have yet to overcome. In addition to this, trade unions, traditionally linked to leftist parties and ideologies, and which were already malfunctioning during the single-party socialist system, remained obedient to the Socialist Party of Serbia and Yugoslav United Left throughout the 1990s. Finally, the authoritarian multiparty socialist political system with a dominant party (SPS), which employed widespread corruption, and against which other political parties had no chance of winning power at elections, made relatively frequent tactical coalitions and entered into cooperation with the extreme right Serbian Radical Party (*Srpska radikalna stranka*, SRS), making leftist ideas and practices widely despised among middle strata and opposition-oriented people (Lazić 1999; 1994). The Serbian youth was particularly anti-left oriented during the 1990s.⁸ At the same time, the extreme right SRS, although operating in very specific historical circumstances, resembled some radical right parties in other European societies. It skilfully combined national and social demagoguery, and attracted the lower social strata, particularly non-qualified and semi-qualified male workers, into its rank-and-file and as supporters (Bakić 2019; 2009; Mudde 2007).

The Left in Serbia during the first two decades of the 21st century

All these factors, specifically when related to the social and political circumstances in Serbian (Yugoslav) society, caused the burdensome development of the Serbian Left after 2000. However, neoliberal policies and features at the periphery of the world capitalist system, such as “accumulation by dispossession” (Harvey 2003), privatization, labour market flexibilization (economic aspect) and precarization (social aspect of the same phenomenon), austerity measures or public-private partnerships, experiencing the highest inequalities in Europe (Krek 2018), all of which were manifested in Serbian society during the first two decades of the 2000s, and

⁸ An illustration of this is the fact that, during the anti-Milošević regime, demonstrating students shouted “counter-right” whenever a column of students wished to turn left. The students hated the word *left* so much that they did not want to even mention it.

especially after 2012, made room for leftist ideas and newly formed leftist generations.

Despite this, by the end of 2019, there was no truly leftist party in Serbia. The Socialist Party of Serbia (led by Minister of Foreign Affairs Ivica Dačić⁹), although self-declared as democrat-socialist, and the Movement of Socialists (led by a former member of JUL's leadership and minister – in several governments after 2012 – Aleksandar Vulin¹⁰), are perceived as deeply corrupt and have been discredited, not only by their infamous participation in the Milošević regime and their role in the Yugoslav wars, but by their support for the nationalistic and neoliberal policies of the authoritarian Vučić regime as well. By the same token, trade unions, traditionally both carriers and supporters of leftist policies, are numerous in the public sector yet almost non-existent in private companies. Their leaderships are often corrupt and close to either the government or rich opposition leaders, as well as to the management of the companies involved. Alongside these agency-related factors are structural ones, such as deindustrialization, precarization and the decline of the role of the industrial worker in the social structure, which could further explain why the trade union leadership generally suffers from a lack of confidence among the wider public and, particularly, among workers.

The Serbian Left (*Levica Srbije*), led by Borko Stefanović¹¹ was a short-lived (2015-19) unsuccessful party¹² that finally lost its ideological and political identity within the Party of Freedom and

⁹ Ivica Dačić (1966) was a newcomer and young spokesperson of the Socialist Party of Serbia from 1992 to 2000. After the death of the founder and first president of the Socialist Party of Serbia, Slobodan Milošević, Dačić became the second president of the SPS in December 2006 (Predsednik Ivica Dačić, <https://www.sps.org.rs/predsednik/>, 10/25/2020).

¹⁰ Aleksandar Vulin (1972) was spokesperson of the Yugoslav Left (JUL). He has founded and led the Movement of Socialists since 2008.

¹¹ Borko Stefanović (b. 1974) was a young and talented diplomat, recruited into the diplomatic corps after 5 October 2000, and led the Democratic Party MPs' club in the Parliament of the Republic of Serbia (2014/15). However, due to an ideological and personal intraparty conflict, he left the Democratic Party in 2015, a Serbian variant of Third Way social democracy, and founded *Levica Srbije* (Serbian Left).

¹² The author of this article helped write the party programme but did not join the party

Justice (*Stranka slobode i pravde*), led by the former mayor of Belgrade and tycoon Dragan Đilas. Stefanović tried to attract mainly corrupt local politicians from the social-liberal and clientelistic Democratic Party instead of young leftist and grass-root activists who had been visible in various leftist struggles, e.g. student protests against education as a commodity, workers' strikes and protests against criminal privatizations, local community protests against the "accumulation by dispossession" of various public utilities such as water, or against air pollution, at least since the end of 2003 (Šper 2020).

There are, however, certain groupuscules that are worthy of mention: *Krov nad glavom* (Roof over the Head) is an organization that defends the right to own a home; in practice, it defends poor people who are the target of 'civil enforcement officers' who expel them from their homes, sometimes because of a very small debt, e.g., several hundred euros; the Left Summit (connected to the German Rosa Luxemburg Foundation); the Serbian section of DIEM25, M21 (Trotskyists); the Reds; SKOJ (Stalinists); the Anarcho-Syndicalists, and the Social Democratic Union (the last being much more a party striving towards a social democracy that wants to transform capitalism into democratic socialism than a party that wants to create 'capitalism with a human face', as social democracy has tried to do since the first half of the 1970s¹³) (Przeworski 1985).

These groupuscules have unfortunately very often found themselves in competition, if not in conditions of enmity. Yet, the Left Summit, DIEM25 and SDU have nurtured very close relations since 2018, when the latter called upon all leftists to surpass their ideological differences and personal vanities and join forces to fight capitalism and the thoroughly corrupt political system. They wanted to direct their efforts towards building a more human democratic socialist future. Indeed, during 2019 and 2020, many members (not whole organizations) of the Left Summit and DIEM25 accepted the invitation, as well as some individuals who were not members of any of these organizations, and formed the Radical Left Party (RLP), officially at the beginning of September 2020. The party had a two-day online congress that elected

¹³ Otherwise, it would be situated at the social liberal part of the right side of the ideological-political spectrum (Bakić 2019).

members of the main board, the executive board and the presidency. All the party bodies were collective and, to avoid potential authoritarian challenges, they instituted a bottom-up decision-making process.

The main values of the RLP are equality, solidarity and freedom. Indeed, these values, promoted during the French Revolution, cannot be achieved in a capitalist setting, as experience has confirmed. It is for this very reason that the party is strongly anti-capitalist. It aims to oppose both xenophobic nationalism and liberal or conservative imperialistic cosmopolitanism as ideological means of capitalism. In contrast, the party strongly supports internationalism based on equal rights of all nations regardless of their power and wealth. In addition, it stresses its antifascism, rooted in the Partisan movement against the Nazi occupation during World War II. Bearing this antifascist legacy in mind, the party wants to fight all movements and parties that support fascist ideology, i.e., extreme-right movements and radical right parties. Nonetheless, there is an awareness that the 'actually existing socialism', including the Yugoslav self-management variety, suffered a lack of political freedoms and, hence, it was strongly directed towards a new democratic socialist system, which may, however, have included some Yugoslav and other socialist experiences. Moreover, the RLP is fully aware that socialism has to be more democratic than capitalism in order to attract massive support and ensure its own survival. Besides a higher level of political democracy, i.e. direct democracy, especially, although not exclusively, on the municipal level, economic democracy is also needed in the workplace. In this case, the self-management experience might be inspiring, but one has to be ready to fight for symbolic hegemony in public because socialist self-management and social ownership have been recognized as the main obstacles to an efficient economy by pro-capitalist politicians, pundits and journalists since the late 1980s.

Of course, a society upon the periphery of the world capitalist system cannot win the struggle against capitalism alone. That is why the RLP calls for a 'Balkans for Balkan peoples' and close internationalist worldwide cooperation. By the same token, the party is proud of its close international relations with similar movements from Croatia (*Radnička fronta*, i.e., The Workers' Front and *Nova*

Ljevica, i.e., The New Left), Slovenia (*Levica*, i.e., The Left), Germany (*Die Linke*), the UK (Left Unity), and the pan-European leftists DIEM25 (Mašina 2020). Stemming from these relationships, in the summer of 2020, the party issued the Regional Solidarity Declaration with its Croatian and Slovenian sister parties.

The social structure of the RLP consists of mostly young middle-class professionals and workers, including women and members of national and sexual minorities as party members and supporters. However, the party is still not attractive to the older population, although it advocates the interests of all marginalized social groups. Some party members are activists in the 'Roof over the Head' movement, together with M21, the anarcho-sindicalist initiative and *Ne davimo Beograd* (Let's Not Drown Belgrade). At this moment in time, sociologists, artists, historians, and IT experts are slightly over-represented in the party's social structure. Certainly, it needs more economists, lawyers and engineers. However, the main challenges are the building of a party infrastructure and a lack of money. The first challenge will likely be surpassed, and the party will try to overcome the second by means of membership fees and small donations from its supporters, as well as through the enthusiasm of its young members. Unfortunately, the party has not escaped the chronic illnesses of the Serbian Left, i.e. factionalism, based on doctrinal differences and personal non-productive conflicts, and its prospects are bleak.

Besides the RLP, several grass-roots movements that first appeared at the municipal level, and then tried to create the Civil Front (CF, *Građanski front*) are worth mentioning at this point, even though they are, strictly speaking, not leftist; rather, the CF is a coalition of leftist, radical democratic and social liberal streams, which resembles, to a certain extent, Syriza and Podemos, although the radical democratic and social liberal streams are stronger than the leftist stream (Ilić 2020).¹⁴ Nonetheless, they present a radical democratic challenge to the corrupt political system, and are opposed to any Radical Right demagoguery. That is why at least some of

¹⁴ The fact that Syriza and Podemos are often considered 'Radical Left' is just a testimony of how far the whole ideological-political spectrum has been shifted towards the Right since the fall of the Berlin Wall. Certainly, just as an illustration of the previous argument, François Mitterrand would be considered a radical leftist today, although he was only a moderate one four decades ago (Bakić 2019).

these local movements may come to be a political partner of the RLP in the future. The three oldest movements within this front are the Local Front (*Lokalni front*, LF; Kraljevo), the United Movement of Free Flat Owners (*Udruženi pokret slobodnih stanara*; Niš) and Let's Not Drown Belgrade (*Ne davimo Beograd*, NDBG; Belgrade).¹⁵ Most of them like to stress that they are leftists because they are 'oriented towards human beings and not towards profit'.

More recently, a number of local grass-root movements from other Serbian cities and towns have joined, such as *Lokalni front* (Local Front; Valjevo), *Samo jako* (Keep It Strong; Mladenovac), *Jasno i glasno* (Clear and Loud; Požarevac), *Samo lokalno* (Just Locally; Bečej), *Bez straha* (No Fear; Apatin), *Građanski preokret* (Civil Turnaround; Zrenjanin), *Kritična masa* (Critical Mass; Kula), *Inicijativa za Požegu* (Initiative for Požega; Požega), *Građanski front* (Civil Front; Vlasotince), *Lokalna alternativa* (Local Alternative; Vrbas), and *Biro za društvena istraživanja* (Bureau for Social Research; Belgrade). All of these movements, except the last one, which is a social research organization, were born as local civil initiatives aiming to fight authoritarian and corrupt local governments. The near-simultaneous appearance of all of these movements during the third phase of the multiparty system in Serbia, which began in 2012, is understandable, if one bears in mind that the Serbian public is characterized by a complete lack of confidence in the Serbian political oligarchy, whether in government or in opposition.¹⁶ For

¹⁵ LF was formed in 2015, and after just a few months it had its first electoral success in 2016 (at the time, the election threshold in Serbia was 5 percent) and get deputies in the local Parliament. *Ne davimo Beograd* was also formed in 2015. Although it managed to attract many citizens for demonstrations against the Belgrade Waterfront project in general and, in particular, against the illegal destruction of small houses and firms in Hercegovačka Street during the national election night in 2016 (a typical example of accumulation by dispossession), it did not succeed in getting any deputies in the Belgrade Parliament. Nonetheless, NDBG won 3.44% of the vote, and was in fifth place among the non-coalition lists; this was, relatively speaking, a success. The Movement of Free Flat Owners from Niš has not participated in any elections yet. Nevertheless, it was successful in its struggles against the corrupt local government as well as against some communal public enterprises, especially the public provider of heating energy (*Toplana*). These actions have raised its visibility and attractiveness for citizens all over Serbia.

¹⁶ The first phase of the Serbian multiparty system after the break-up of European socialism was an authoritarian multi-party socialism with a dominant party (1990-2000). The second phase lasted between 2000 and

instance, the Local Front (Kraljevo) has a very telling slogan: 'Local Front: Because all others have betrayed us' Indeed, the widespread feeling that ordinary citizens have been betrayed, and that they were completely lost and overlooked during the transition towards a capitalist partocratic clientelistic system fuels the anger and the will of people to organize themselves into local movements to try to influence decisions related to their own lives.

However, there are divisions and non-productive conflicts, both among individual local movements and between the three initiator organizations on the one hand, and the other local movements on the other. It was one of the reasons for the Left Summit and the Social Democratic Union having decided not to participate in the Civil Front. The fact that the three initiator organizations have, at least at this moment, the upper hand in the Civil Front is against both broadly accepted democratic norms and the building of mutual confidence and solidarity among all the movements. Furthermore, currently, the Civil Front does not allow individual membership; only members of local movements can be members. Finally, the slow-motion formation of the CF was the last drop in the already full glass, and seven organizations left it in September 2019, going on to establish their own loose organization of local movements named United Civil Movements (*Udruženi građanski pokret*) in July 2020.¹⁷

All of these groups consist of activists who are deeply engaged in socially responsible actions like fighting for one's right to have accommodation or the right to clean water and clean air, fighting

2012 and was marked by typical oligarchic relations and the formation of closely related economic and political branches of the oligarchy. Finally, the third authoritarian multiparty oligarchy, with a dominant party, began with the defeat of Boris Tadić at the presidential election and the rise of Aleksandar Vučić as an authoritarian leader who was able to discipline both branches of the oligarchy by having absolute control of the secret services, followed by blackmailing his main political rivals and many businessmen, even going so far as to imprison one of the richest tycoons in Serbia (the owner of Delta, Miroslav Mišković). In such a demagogic way, the oligarchs have been disciplined, while the hearts of many ordinary people have been won over by the demagogue.

¹⁷ These seven organizations are: Keep It Strong, Civil Turnaround, Just Locally, Local Alternative, Clear and Loud, the Bureau for Social Research, and Right on Right (*Pravo na pravo*): the final of these came into being following the split of the United Movement of Free Flat Owners, while the first has not become a member of the United Civil Movement.

against accumulation by dispossession manifested, for instance, in the protest against the urban banal-nationalistic (Billig 1995) megalomaniac project Belgrade Waterfront¹⁸ and its strong tendency toward gentrification,¹⁹ against public-private partnerships²⁰ and/or private ownership of communal enterprises, against the 'parties of office hunters' both in government and in opposition, and widespread authoritarian styles and the corruption of local politicians and officials. Of course, they are all fighting for workers' rights, improvement of often very bad working conditions, and against precarious employment, as well. However, the CF's shortcomings, as well as the fragmentation and atomization of the working class, its readiness to become an easy target of politicians who combine social and national demagoguery, and a lack of any strong workers' union, make this struggle very difficult. Certainly, the relative underrepresentation of workers in the Civil Front does not make the task any easier.²¹

By the same token, all the groups have developed strong ecological awareness and have stood up against both the government and multinational or national private companies that are close to the government or to informal centres of power, and are ready to destroy the human environment in order to maximize their profits. The resistance to micro-hydropower plants across Stara Planina, in

¹⁸ The obsession with "the tallest tower" and "the largest shopping-mall" in the Balkans and high "national flag-trees at all entrances in Belgrade" is just an illustration of a banal nationalism expressed in the Belgrade Waterfront project.

¹⁹ Poor people from Savamala (a Belgrade quarter upon which the Belgrade Waterfront development is planned to be built) generally, and Hercegov-ačka Street in particular, were violently removed, so that rich people would be able to move in.

²⁰ Public-private partnership could be described as a 'public risk – private profit' deal.

²¹ There is no reliable data about the social structure of CF activists. However, on the basis of direct observations (the author of this paper was involved in Civil Front activities until the second half of 2019) in several Serbian cities, underrepresentation of workers and an overrepresentation of the middle strata membership within the rank and file, as well as the supporters of the Citizens' Front, seems indisputable. One can argue that persons employed in education and health protection are overrepresented among the Civil Front's membership and supporters. This is an obstacle for any radical democratic, let alone democratic socialist, initiative in contemporary Serbian society. In this respect, the situation in the RLP is slightly better, it having attracted relatively more workers into its rank and file.

south-eastern Serbia, is probably the most famous and most successful environmentalist initiative in the country. The fact that the working class joined together to fight private company interests connected to powerful politicians, and that they found solidarity among local organizations united in the Civil Front, increased awareness among the wider public about environmental problems, and has encouraged them to take up the fight for their right to a healthy environment.

Finally, the anti-fascist and anti-nationalist orientation of the CF is worth mentioning, bearing in mind that a number of established leftists have become caught up in the wave of nationalism, not only during the 1990s, the period of mass-conversion of former Marxists (politicians and scholars) into nationalists or liberals, but also in the present day (Kuljić 2006; 2002). Indeed, the CF, UCM as well as RLP, strongly oppose any form of the historical revisionism that was systematically nurtured during the second and third phases of the multiparty system development in Serbia. At the same time, the Civil Front and United Civil Movements are unambiguously against various (re)inventions of tradition that take place in the public life of Serbia as part of the rehabilitation of the Serbian Orthodox Church. On the contrary, it is in favour of a secularized republic in which no church or its members can be socially privileged. Human beings should be led by reason and not by any prejudice or non-disputable obedience to any other authority.

Conclusion

The period of Socialist Yugoslavia frustrated Serbian nationalists who thought that Serbs were in a worse position under communist rule, if not discriminated against, in comparison to Croats or Slovenes (Bakić 2019). Such a relatively widespread opinion helped many Serbian Marxists to adopt, *en masse*, conservative, liberal or socialist nationalism at the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s. Yugoslavia became 'the biggest Serbian delusion'; first, in the mindset of influential members of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts from the middle of the 1980s (Milosavljević 1995), with this sentiment then becoming widespread among the public.

By the same token, such an opinion fuelled the historical revisionism that the Milošević regime had resisted in the long run (Kuljić 2006; 2002).

The Milošević regime created many obstacles for truly leftist ideas, people and politics. During the 1990s, the current generation in power was politically socialized within a harshly anti-leftist ideological atmosphere. Nevertheless, despite all these negative legacies, and thanks to a peripheral position in the world capitalist system and rising inequalities in Serbian society, a new young generation of leftists has arisen in Serbia, involved in various social and political initiatives and movements and everyday social struggles, and which is willing to create an entirely new and potentially strong Left, based on the ideals of equality, brotherhood and liberty. Nevertheless, there are differences between the clearly leftist RLP and the relatively ideologically blurred Civil Front and United Civil Movements. The RLP is trying to build a truly democratic and decentralized organization able to operate at all levels (local, regional and national). The other two, however, are rather loose coalitions of local organizations. That is why one cannot expect their efficient action at the national level. The CF needs to create more democratic relationships and much better communication among its own organizations if it also wishes to operate at the national level. This almost exclusively local orientation is a major limitation of both the CF and UCM, and it does not seem likely that either will be able to overcome it. The Radical Left Party, on the other hand, is a truly ideological party that aims to change the dominant political culture of 'office hunters'. Certainly, it is a difficult task and long-term goal, but the struggle against capitalism is even more difficult and more distanced. Nonetheless, the imperialist and neoliberal destruction of the economy, politics, society and culture in Serbia is so complete that one has to try to build a Radical Left alternative in order to reclaim a sense of normal everyday life.

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IV

**Is there a way back,
and what are the challenges?**

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Challenges for the Left to go global: The disparity between centre and periphery¹

Abstract

Conflicting narratives of resistance exist within the contemporary European Left. One of the obstacles for the consolidation of contemporary European movements, which identify themselves with leftist traditions and/or goals is that the definition of 'Left' is not only blurred, but is furthermore divided into factions, which are continuously growing apart. These narratives are not necessarily conflicting, but they do emphasize different values and garner support from different groups. They also exhibit highly divergent levels of concern for rights of the growing refugee and immigrant population in Europe, women's rights, LGBT rights and minority rights in their respective countries. The growing aggressiveness of corporate capitalism leaves neither little room for the consolidation of those narratives, nor much chance for their separate success. In order for such narratives to become international, there needs to be an increased openness towards global cohesion, since the current dismissal of the periphery with all its immanent difficulties makes it impossible for peripheral movements and experiences to be perceived as internationally relevant.

Keywords: left, internationalism, inequality, periphery

■ The periphery is vulnerable to the loss of common ideas, markets and goods. Nationalism grows strong in the periphery as a result of deprivation and isolation. New nationalism is about restrictions and strengthening of borders around the centre, i.e. the EU in the case of the European periphery, especially in favour of the 'inner circle' of powerful founding states, thereby fuelling the destruction of common property and increasing levels of isolation.

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New forms of nationalism, xenophobia and national identity are manipulated as replacements for, for example, professional and class identity, and, in so-called 'culture wars', two kinds of identity are emphasized: racial, national, ethnic, regional and tribal at the group level, and sexual, political and cultural at the individual, as opposed to class and/or professional identity. We see this becoming more prominent on the periphery, which is already cut off from the 'normalcy' of civilization, with inequality being felt in the geographical and historical, as well as the social, dimension. Nationalism's strongest divisive properties act to feed both inequality and instability. It provides for enemies, within and without, to enable calls for sacrifices needed to overcome the danger, to punish the lazy, and to exclude those who could possibly coexist in solidarity.

Inequality is integral to disintegration on the global level; disintegration of communities, institutions and ideas, and provides fertile ground for nationalism. The loss of the very concept of common property is the loss of the ideal of humanity. We need common ground for survival and for dignity as human beings.

When looking into the contemporary works grappling with inequality it is clear that, although significant insights are being made into the specificities of the destructiveness of modern-day inequality, it remains difficult to see how the division between centres and peripheries will be overcome, even as centres, and peripheries with them, move and change place. It is as if the scarcity of resources is just a token in the game of dominance.

The very notion of 'centre' is presumptive; it is often the heritage of dominance and exploitation. On the level of self-perception, the importance of one's place in the world, one being a person, a gender, a profession, a nation, or any other group, is tied to the perception of others. If I am greeted with dismay or disdain at the very mention of my origins being from the Balkans, I would be more inclined to react in self-loathing ("nowhere else is such criminality possible", for example) or anger and self-aggrandizement ("we ate with gold forks when they were eating with their hands" type of nonsense). As objective as we as researchers aim to be, it is difficult to remain impassive to the careless insults hurled unthinkingly from the 'more civilized' places. Therefore, the notion of centre is important in geopolitical decisions (manifest destiny of

leaders of the Free World), and the notion of periphery is important in taking seriously anything, including theories and movements, emanating from there.

The Slovenian sociologist Rastko Močnik has searched for connections between socialism and nationalism: “However, contrary to the liberal nationalisms of the 19th century, and in even starker opposition to the anti-colonial nationalisms of the 20th century mostly inspired by socialism, contemporary ‘nationalisms’ require, and often succeed at imposing a quasi-authoritarian discipline upon their followers. If they come to power, they attempt an ideological *Gleichschaltung*, aligning of the whole society. [...] Ideological elements are mostly old, but their collage is new, and the present nations and real functioning of their states differs from the working of nationalisms in anti-imperial struggles of the 19th century and in anti-colonial endeavours of the 20th century. We may surmise that the operations of the ruling class alliances in the nation states, their political economy and ideology, are new and specific” (Močnik 2019, 24).

Indeed, when leaders of superpowers talk about ‘national interests’, the very interests of which they speak may be oceans apart, overwhelming and swallowing the interests of small nations. This is only natural in the geopolitical game of risk. This perspective gives their voters a sense of national pride in greatness, and if any lingering tendencies to real classical leftist thinking remain, including considerations of equality and human rights, they are easily externalized. The middle-class voters of Western Europe, North America, Japan and Australia (let us call it the West) feel extremely conscientious and generous when they participate in rallies against injustices in those sad places they cannot find on the map. Issues that may seem of lesser importance to someone threatened with poverty, or, at the very least, the endless drudgery of living in humble circumstances, take up a lot of energy. Bathrooms assigned to gender fluid people, national holidays in honour of minorities and such may look like true achievements. An extra euro for a ‘fair trade’ coffee in a Council of Europe canteen is all the sacrifice it takes to feel that we have helped the poor, exploited coffee growers in Africa and South America. Finer nuances of judicial process are discussed.

In contrast, in the countries of Asia, Eastern Europe, Africa and South America (let us term this the 'East', although obviously, this is not geographically correct) that are not blessed with long and continued established legal and democratic procedures, with long histories of poverty and/or colonization of different types, 'Western' concerns are often seen as frivolous, or even wrong-headed, and people instead feel virtuous for contributing to democratic struggles and attempts to bring about social and economic justice only by being directly involved in initiatives that can result in beatings and even jail time. They concern themselves with the right to vote and survival, being paid a living wage, and having access to and opportunities for education. Popular causes involve fair elections and the right to work, introducing fairer labour laws and such.

That is how it used to be for a time, but, as I mentioned earlier, times can change, centre and periphery are in a dialectical relationship, and, in every region, there are pockets of poverty and affluence, highly educated and ignorant people, violations of rights and abuse of privileges. The large-scale democratization of information, not supported by any kind of filing system that would make it readily obvious what is important and/or plausible, combined with a widespread misunderstanding of the right to an opinion and critical thinking, has produced fertile ground for populism as a global phenomenon sweeping all continents and types of government.

However, this has not given rise to an internationalization of problems, unless we count certain narrow influential groups. The problems of poverty are traditionally exported to a different neighbourhood, and, on a bigger scale, to a different continent. The sharp turn of capitalism towards financialization has produced dysfunction and inequality on a large scale, and the ubiquity of all kinds of news has made this even more obvious. The narrative of centre and periphery is once again being framed in moral terms. If one is at the centre (e.g. Washington or Paris, or Belgrade, in the case of Serbia), then the troubles of periphery (the rest of the world, inner city, Peripherique, Africa, the Sandžak) are often, even on reflex, viewed as provincial and too basic and 'uncool' to become involved in, or, conversely, also a deterrent, too intricate and

in need of local expertise. That is why it is so hopeful to see local initiatives achieve a modicum of success and connect to larger issues, as in the old environmentalist slogan “Think globally, act locally”.

Močnik traces the elements of modern-day populist tendencies, mostly in Europe, and even more pronounced on its periphery, to the history of those parts, with modern twists and ‘improvements’: “The features that suggest the analogy between the contemporary populism and historical fascism are the weakness of national bourgeoisie and its class re-composition by compensational reliance on state apparatuses, political mobilization of dissatisfied lower middle classes, and class de-composition of the working masses” (Močnik 2016, 3). But, of course, a lot of the old imagery that evoked nationalist goals is outdated, and the goals of the exploiters have evolved too.

Populism is not an ideology. It is a political methodology that can be used for different ideological goals. The problem, which is now being solved with populism, is how to make people less interested in the common problems of humanity. That is done by persuading them that their specific group (mostly the ‘nation’, but there are other forms of identity politics) is under constant threat from ‘others’. In addition, prosperity is moved into the future by establishing an understanding of reality as a maze of different groups that are involved in some sort of survival game. Hence, refugees are (illegally, according to international declarations) redefined as ‘migrants’, implying that they are in competition with the resident population. They are not even called immigrants, to avoid any suggestion that they might stay.

Močnik sees a problem with identity ideology: “Identity community is monistic and inwardly oppressive. [...] Identity ideology is also an efficient mechanism of domination, as it supports spontaneous survival strategies employed in working people’s households, and reproduces their position of the oppressed and exploited” (Močnik 2016, 13).

It is all the more effective at the periphery, because it is difficult to be removed from financial and decision-making centres and still compete in the best capitalist tradition. The explanation comes from the paranoia of proximity of intruders: “Therefore, we can see

more and more borders on the periphery, borders are getting more impermeable for people, and more porous for capital. When globalization reaches every village on the periphery, then every fence becomes a border” (Močnik 2016, 60).

It is necessary to make many borders in order to better exert control in what is accepted as universal (capital) and what is to be managed as separate (people). In order to justify those delineations, we often use intolerance: “Intolerance is a power ploy of marking territory and delineating borders through marking other things as stupid, bad, crazy, ugly, intolerable, insufferable, unbearable. Not to tolerate is to exclude, isolate, define, mark. Dogs piss on the ground for that purpose, we often put a flag up” (Mićunović 1999, 289).

The Left will never be successful without internationalism. True internationalism is not possible without respect for different places, nations and ethnicities. The very concept of ‘centre’, of ‘free world’ is detrimental to the respect for those who live, and create – whether they thrive or survive – on the periphery. It is necessary to problematize the centre/periphery dialectic in order to make room for diversity and understanding. Equality of possibilities can only be striven for in those circumstances, and that is why those circumstances are the prerequisite of the successful movement for equality and for international understanding (let us give up the lofty and hollow dreams of ‘international order’ and ‘international community’). Lenin defined communism as soviet rule and electrification. The new Left should include in the definition of the Green New Deal components addressing equality and international understanding. For this, we need to do more than just tolerate others, the different. There is plenty of mention of ‘inclusion’ in the corporate documents of transnational institutions, but very little understanding.

As Močnik says: “Ideology of tolerance is only an addition from the other side to the intolerance on this side, so it is to be expected that ‘liberal-democratic’ politics will in practice be intolerant, although tolerant in their programs” (Močnik 2016, 189). That is so because it is not the true aim of those policies for there to be tolerance, but to present the game as fair, and then rig it. “[...] Parties that work on restoration of capitalism do not do anything else,

except use state (repressive, ideological) violence to bring about *new relations of oppression and exploitation*" (Močnik 2016, 190). The primary identity therefore becomes national, and economic relations are not called into question, making it even more difficult for leftist politics to cross borders, or even gain footing in one country or across one nation.

It is not possible to export all of the problems of the centre(s) to the periphery. The very core of European ideals is corrupted by the management of the 'migrant' crisis (unwillingness of rich European countries to honour their obligations to refugees according to the international documents that they themselves created), management of the health crisis (the 'pirate rules' suddenly in effect when medical supplies are insufficient), management of the economic crisis (considerable societal resources used to protect corporate entities, to the detriment of resources allocated for citizens); and "the centre doesn't hold, all that is solid melts into air". The periphery is ill-equipped to absorb the fallout ('migrants' on the 'Balkan Route', the American-Chinese battle for digital supremacy, swift financialization of the remnants of the economy). The constant bickering (sometimes with fatalities) at the edges of old empires is corroding any progress ever made in making those peripheral places in the image of the central powers.

It is corroding even the centre, as Varoufakis has commented, in regard to the disintegration processes in Europe: "Grexit, in short, was the weapon the EU forged and used to force successive Greek governments into accepting their country's incarceration in the neoliberal equivalent of a Victorian workhouse. Brexit, by contrast, was a home-grown aspiration, rooted in the structural incompatibility between laissez-faire Anglo-Saxon capitalism and continental corporatism, and invoked by a coalition comprising sections of Britain's aristocracy that successfully co-opted working-class communities wrecked by Margaret Thatcher's industrial vandalism. These voters desperately wanted to punish the cosmopolitan London elites for treating them like long-devalued livestock" (Varoufakis 2019). It is even more corrosive on the periphery, where there is less confidence and fewer resources, and our role models are leading us astray.

Why is it so difficult for the Left to use the growing inequality politically?

The Left is different in the West, traditionally defined as the capitalist world centred around Western Europe and its most successful colonies; the USA, Canada and Australia. In the French and Anglo-Saxon political tradition, there is a feeling of being 'at home' in democratic practices and 'caught up' with history, and disturbances in the force are seen as aberrations, while the 'normal standard' of living, doing business, legal matters and democratic procedures are taken for granted. On the contrary, there is a feeling in the periphery (obviously including the Balkans) that we are going backward, there is a confusion of thinking that we somehow first have to catch up with all those civilizational developments in order to start complaining about our situation. Indeed, 'leftist leanings', understood as striving for greater rights, come from the top of the educated classes, education having not been long enough connected to economic upward mobility to solidify into class.

Nevertheless, the following issues should be confronted:

- 1) There is a profound global crisis of environment, equality and democracy.
- 2) The forces of 'whatever this is, if you're unwilling to call it neoliberalism' are getting stronger.
- 3) The answers come from different – some even dangerous – places.
- 4) The Left is dissociated from identity, nationalism, political ambition, lack of understanding and inner conflicts.
- 5) The inevitable resolution of the crisis as it spirals out of control, unless the Left (using the term broadly) can consolidate, will be dark and backward, stemming from the extreme Right.
- 6) In order to claim the solution, the Left must unite.
- 7) Unification cannot come through negotiation, but through claiming a true international idea.
- 8) Internationalism is ultimately a leftist idea, with the main difference between Right and Left in dealing with globalization being the difference between imperialistic/capitalistic

bargaining between nations and/or companies, and holding true to an idea that can be understood across all nations (let us avoid the term 'universal' for the time being).

- 9) Therefore, the only way for the Left to create a field of possible resistance through giving it a widely acceptable context is through embracing the idea of a new international, at least in spirit.

In order to forge an international alliance, or even something on a smaller scale, it is necessary to bear in mind the 'common property', for which citizens need to understand why they, individually or collectively, belong there. In order to 'own' a universal, international, humanistic ideal or identity, it is necessary to be clear on *who* they are, and *what* are their goals, interests and values. That is hindered by the constant onslaught of false, imposed, or at least suggested identity and loyalty, to the state, company and ethnic group. "It is important for the hegemonic liberal project to have people have an indeterminate identity, so people are in a state of constant profound confusion, incapacitating them for any revolutionary action" (Mićunović 2018, 13).

Unfortunately, the identity chosen as important for the expression of dissatisfaction is rarely a class identity, which in itself is a term derided by nationalists and liberals as old-fashioned and irrelevant. We would understand more about this 'striving for status' and not necessarily deem irrational every non-material goal if we were to use some old-fashioned economic terms to define it. The exchange value *is* the use value because status is something we *use* to enhance our sense of value, to make up for things that we might actually need. But capitalism at this stage cannot function if we become aware of our true needs and interests and if we come to value solidarity and humanistic ideals. It wages a modernized class warfare, because it is no longer acceptable for the masses to be modestly comfortable, there are simply too many people, plundering the majority of them in a race to the bottom is a necessity of making profit at this stage.

As Varoufakis (2018) observed: "[...] independently of establishment politicians' aims and their ideological smokescreens, capitalism has been evolving. The vast majority of economic decisions

have long ceased to be shaped by market forces and are now taken within a strictly hierarchical, though fairly loose, hyper-cartel of global corporations. Its managers fix prices, determine quantities, manage expectations, manufacture desires, and collude with politicians to fashion pseudo-markets that subsidize their services. The first casualty was the New Deal-era aim of full employment, which was duly replaced by an obsession with growth. [...] Austerity's pervasiveness thus reflects an overarching dynamic that, under the guise of free-market capitalism, is creating a cartel-based, hierarchical, financialized global economic system. [...] The result is not only unnecessary hardship for vast segments of humanity. It also heralds a global doom loop of deepening inequality and chronic instability".

The vast segments of humanity Varoufakis mentions are disproportionately from the periphery. Anything happening at the local scale, especially if the locality is at the periphery, is easily dismissed as an unimportant aberration.

The problems of consolidation of contemporary movements that identify with leftist traditions and/or goals is that the definition of the Left is not only blurred, but is also divided into factions that continuously grow further apart. The major goals of any leftist political movement are oriented toward solving the problems of humanity, specifically the lack of equality, freedom, solidarity and connectedness. Contemporary problems of humanity are vast and varied. We may sometimes not be compatible in our understanding of them, nor in our attempts at solutions. One of the problems of the traditional Left is that it was over-dependent on equality implemented on an equal footing, not taking into account individual beneficiaries' different, sometimes even incompatible, interests.

The necessity of renewal of an international for the Left-oriented resistance

In the words of Naomi Klein, we missed a step in keeping up with progress, our societies developed at a different pace to technology, production, population and globalization: "This is a story about bad timing. [...] And little wonder: just when we needed to gather, our public sphere was disintegrating; just

when we needed to consume less, consumerism took over virtually every aspect of our lives; just when we needed to slow down and notice, we sped up; and just when we needed longer time horizons, we were able to see only the immediate present” (Klein 2014).

Articulating a resistance movement as a leftist one, now that the targets have moved and converged while, at the same time, the goals of the Left seem to have become more diverse, is a difficult task. Diversity in the Left is not a bad thing; it has shown that the Left has evolved to include things that were either on the margins or non-existent in the ‘glory days’ of the 1960s, when we were all internationalists and equated patriotism with imperialism, which it is. This does not mean that participants need to be homogenized, or debatable subjects restricted. It means that articulation of action informed by solidarity and shared values needs to evolve in order not to lag behind the Right and ideologically neutral populist politics, which have both adapted well to the new scene and are gaining ground. ‘Leftist’ cannot mean exactly the same what it did historically; it has to be more flexible and more encompassing. But that should not impede clarity and intensity of purpose. Once again, as always, it is a question of life and death. Life and death of ethnic and cultural minorities, refugees, wage slaves, and the abandoned children, women and men trapped in war zones of arms and of scarcity.

There is a possibility of a ‘velvet revolution’ that could be a sort of cultural revolution (which is certainly needed and necessary before we can even think of any change), in which we would again address, with more vigour than in the 1960s, questions about our values of hard work and stability. It is possible that, after all this experience, like a person entering middle age, with any luck, our civilization will stop taking itself so seriously and embrace a floating kind of destiny, instead of curling up in fear of a new and (setting aside the question of whether certainty is an illusion) uncertain one.

These major narratives can be recognized: 1) civil rights and political liberties are not fully realized, as emphasized by unequal access to justice addressed by #BlackLivesMatter and

similar movements; 2) sexual harassment and other manifestations of gender inequality addressed in, for example, the #Me-Too movement, are rampant; 3) there is a growing rebellion against increasing inequality, as exemplified by #OccupyWall-Street; 4) there is an urge to protect what is left of the heritage of indigenous peoples as in #PipeLine; 5) the rights of immigrants are to be protected, as in #freeChildren.

There are many more, and that gives us hope that the philosophy of profit didn't envelop all social interactions. There is often criticism that these movements contribute to the 'culture wars' through their delineation of different groups by their stark differences and seemingly competing narratives of marginalization. These narratives are not of necessity conflicting, but they do emphasize different values and gain support from different groups. They also have a different level of concern for rights of the growing refugee and immigrant populations, women's rights, LGBT rights and minority rights in their respective countries. It is almost as the 'Think globally, act locally' slogan has gone awry, and it is now increasingly difficult to find commonalities in the very unequal and diverse world.

The 'new' problems facing humanity are: a) climate and environment; b) (over-)population and disease; c) a lack of political and economic influence for the lower 90%; d) diminishing tolerance for diversity; e) fake news and general lack of education; f) diminishing resources; and g) the spreading of conflicts. We are talking about these as if they are 'new' problems because the narrative of possible never-ending progress laid aside worries of our inherent limitations and contradictions as a species. It was considered pessimistic to dwell on disasters with a bright future within grasp. Humble realism is more present in the first generation that is going to live with less comfort and abundance than their parents, and values of humanity emerge again in a new guise that encompasses the living world. This does not occur, however, without intergenerational tensions in understanding what humanistic goals should be.

We should not forget the importance of vast generational gaps in values, income, expectations and influence. Looking at a demographic chart recently, I was shocked to discover that,

while being born in 1957, I am considered a baby boomer. I am fairly certain that is an expansive definition of that generation. Researchers and policy makers need those charts; they have to delineate different groups in order to determine who gets which incentive, opportunity or restriction. They remind us of, but poorly describe, the vast changes in the socio-economic landscape over the past 50 years. “The generational gap between baby boomer parents, co-conspirators of greed and privilege who still admit no wrong and their millennial or whatever offspring who are given no hope and doomsday clocks of all kinds are looming over their heads is heightened by the illusion that there ever was a better future. The future in question and the struggle of recreating the world of their parents puts young people in the less fortunate position even when there are privileges granted to them, they will not sustain their status and wellbeing in the dystopian society in the making” (Mićunović 2019, 72).

This is an important, often downplayed, divide. Our ‘prisoner’s dilemma’ can be articulated in this way: *Why should I care how other people’s children will live in years to come, when I will no longer be around, since they do not care for the elderly, and I feel alone in my old age?* That dilemma cannot be resolved within the confines of self-interest. We must include some values of humanity as a species, and, even more, as a project. It is important that we make significant progress in that area soon. Social progress has been slow, but circumstances, natural and technological alike, have caught up with it, and are threatening our very survival. We need to find common ground in the foreseeable future.

The lack of sheer understanding of what might be ‘in common’ for different sexes, generations, classes and nations is fuelling the divisions that are becoming dangerous. Obviously, it is not the same if one is 30 or 60, but should it make for an almost adversarial relationship? Intergenerational solidarity is a difficult thing to achieve, but should we not at least try? The struggle for gender equality is in a stage of constantly embattled progress and growing backlash. Interracial and interethnic harmonies seem as far away as in the last century.

Internationalism is essential in any attempt to solve any problem, yet, the divisiveness of nationalism stands in the way. Transnationalism failed because transnational institutions became either dominated by their stronger participants, or became a landscape for permanently contested negotiation. For example, if the IMF advocates privatization, that identifies them as a contrary force to transnationalism, or, at least, any true internationalism, and shows the Fund's true nature as a multinational corporation as opposed to a transnational institution. "In contrast to internationalism and with the constraints imposed on international relations by the transnational institutions, there is an expected turn to nativism as the policy of protecting the interests of native-born or established inhabitants against those of immigrants, similar to local eating, and general flaky resistance to globalization" (Mićunović 2019, 72). It is difficult to forge alliances when there is so much diversity and so little inclusion, but we can build them on the basis of internationalism.

The main idea of the Left, especially in its origins as an international(ist) movement, was equality, something that is possibly more needed now than ever before. In the relationships between different countries, different social groups and different proximities to actual decision-making, there is growing inequality. Inequality is closely tied to all other problems; it is redefined by the importance of access to new technologies, new democratic practices, relevant and reliable information, and resources that are becoming scarce. The justifications of inequality by appealing to merit are redefined by what merit *is*, and arguably even more so, by sources of income, property, inheritance, privilege or influence.

Inequality cannot be fought only at the local scale, and that is why the essence of the Left must include true internationalism, one that recognizes diversity but also recognizes the universal goal of equality. That is something that has been promised, and not only by the Left, that is also something that is not just a special interest, but necessary for the sustainability of human society as we know it. Transnational organizations were entrusted with developing that internationalism, but their success in that area has been extremely limited.

The role of transnational organizations in the cartelization of the global economy and its dominance over all other aspects of livelihoods is rooted in their integration of proposed standards into the system in such a way that the products of transnational organizations (treaties, recommendations, development projects) are incorporated into the dominance of the managed delivery of all resources and their outputs to the global economy, which in turn has come to be dominated by increasingly financialized cartels. The values inherent in internationalism are reinterpreted as outputs of projects geared towards dominance and the plunder of resources. "Inequality is integral to disintegration on the global level, disintegration of communities, institutions and ideas, and it's breeding nationalism. The loss of the very concept of commons is the loss of the ideal of humanity, without which, belonging reverts to race, gender, religious affiliation or something even less tangible, like a sports club" (Mićunović 2019, 74). Commons, or common properties/goods, are important for our notion of ourselves as members of society. Of course, we can side with Margaret Thatcher, and state that there is no such thing as 'society', but rather only individuals, but in any kind of belonging we need not only recognition of ourselves and others, we also need that common ground, and, in a very real way, we need commons as grounds for survival. If the Earth is not a place for all of its inhabitants, if the economy is not a system in which we can all survive with dignity, the perpetual sense of danger, something regularly presented to us in the media, will eventually completely replace our feeling of belonging to any community.

We are also regularly kept from knowing about and understanding, let alone participating in, decisions about our physical, economic and social environment. The constant spin about a supposed battle for world domination, making secrets necessary, insinuating lurking dangers, and the separation of the financial sector from the real economy make us all dependent on decisions made without our understanding or influence. For this to change, it is necessary to revive participatory democracy, that is, true involvement of citizens in governance. This would require the redefinition of democratic procedures, of economic

relations and of educational goals. Internationalism and the balance between centre and periphery could foster the necessary changes. Leftist movements, if working in solidarity, could contribute to an optimistic refashioning of the humanity project in such a way.

It is important to distinguish the hope that is inherent in the vision of international solidarity, sometimes still glimpsed in the event of a global catastrophe, solidarity and humanist ideals best represented in the spontaneous protests, sometimes achieving global attention, and the 'international community' residing in transnational organizations, which keep their importance in play through negotiations into which they factor their particular interests. There is a great potential for the renewal of the true leftist ideals of equality and internationalism. We must look for it in initiatives born of struggle. Established institutions tend to solidify around a stance that is no longer appropriate. In order for a leftist movement to be accountable, it must be owned by the people and not by corporations, as can happen with established parties and international institutions.

In order to maintain hope for a change that can benefit humanity, restore potential and diminish inequality, we have to give a chance to the existing leftist movements. The European leftist movements are struggling: 1) The British Labour Party and the DiEM25 (Democracy in Europe Movement 2025) pan-European movement are yet to be tested. Pan-Europeanism is not really internationalism, but at least it is an attempt to transcend both the nationalisms so present in Europe and the corporate agenda of European transnational institutions. It is about political and civil rights, political and decision-making equality; 2) The Yellow Vests movement in France is about workers' rights, economic equality, end of corporate greed (theirs is the demand for caps on salaries at 15,000 euros per month); 3) The Green Party of Germany, coexisting with a variety of interest groups but insistent on environmental rights (a province of the Left, because the Right, as exemplified by Trump, is not keen on any impediment to exhausting natural resources); 4) *Omas Gegen Rechts* "Grannies Against the Right" is an Austrian movement founded by older women in order to preserve what they see as true

European values of inclusion, equality, tolerance and solidarity, against the tide of the Right, which they see as manipulating masses and democratic procedures to erode those values. These are examples of initiatives that may fail, but yet show that dissent to the prevailing narrative is commonplace and widespread.

Nationalism is one of the issues that will inevitably be entangled with inequality, because of the dominance of certain races and ethnic groups over others. There is the question of 'good' nationalism. Colonialism is bad, and decolonization movements, in order to aspire to self-determination, fostered nationalism, and, since any kind of national pride was forbidden and taken from them, it was construed as a facet of self-affirmation. That, of course, did not only disseminate conflict between smaller communities, but allowed for a false solidarity, tribal-based instead of class-based. Civil rights movements established the minimum of civil rights for all and awakened the need for political freedoms in everyone, those who were oppressed and those who were merely complacent alike. But a backlash came, and we have to wonder: *What went wrong with cosmopolitanism, internationalism, globalism and transnationalism?*

There are many reasons for transnational institutions having failed to help build internationalism. They were controlled by imperialistically minded officials of powerful nations. There was a lack of understanding of the dialectic between economy and politics. Most importantly, the TINA (there is no alternative) mantra, so beloved by the financialized capitalist powers, was hypnotic in its simplicity and versatility, incorporating many calls for dominance and exploitation.

The political movements of the Left (traditionally, speaking of equality and humanity as a whole) are in danger of becoming a maze of particularities, seemingly old-fashioned and irrelevant. There is a danger in voicing reasonable well-meaning ideas, that are never so full of promise as a beautiful lie, but neither can be as daunting as an assumed obligation. Maybe the commonalities of humanity have been overrated, and it's easier to find commonalities in smaller groups. Furthermore, the great opportunities that globalization created have also acted as great temptations for unbridled greed and unfounded ambition.

New challenges arose from certain improvements in international relations that were not supported by sufficient foresight and good faith. Decolonization opened up a new market for transnational exploitation. Technological progress made advances in war and trade quicker and more difficult to counter. Introduction of indigenous cultures to the world stage relativized social standards based on customs idiosyncratic to Western culture. Financialization of the economy, partially a by-product of digitalization, introduced spiralling economic inequality in national societies and in the international arena. "Going back to nationalism is a way to confirm values (national, religious, traditional, for the lack of any universal ones) and fulfil interests (national, class, etc.). That is why we see a number of new (or recycled) grass roots movements that are xenophobic and entrenched in nationalistic view of history. Global protest in the spirit of true internationalism is in part difficult to imagine because of all the bits of incomplete contradictory information floating around which makes little drops of protest less likely to coalesce, as well as the 'modern way of life' which seems like a waste of life on administration and entertainment. The noted exception is #FridaysForFuture, the series of idealistic protests of high school students against lack of action for the protection of the environment. The way of life that requires constant vigilance against predators and distraction from thinking cannot truly be called progress" (Mićunović 2019, 77).

There is a dwindling source of space, energy and time; education, health services and public transportation are eroded, justified by the mantra of TINA, causing the vanishing of commons in any sense, and with them the very understanding of community. It is questionable whether the people who have become disunited by the call for competition and distance, vast income and opportunity differences and identity issues of race, gender, ethnicity and sexuality that linger on, could consider any purpose as other than utilitarian, something that is reinforced by the narrative of wartime rhetoric, i.e. "we can't afford", "we have to sacrifice", "we measure how much more that person can contribute before we disconnect them from the respirator". People are warriors, producers, consumers, worshippers,

breeders *en masse* for the privileged few. If most of those functions can be and are constantly replaced and/or made obsolete by technology, maybe efforts at sustaining the species itself and millions of individuals would likewise dwindle.

There is a question arising from the twin forces of technological progress and financialization, combined with growing inequality and dwindling resources. What will be the purpose of people? If people have previously been reduced to soldiers, voters, workers and consumers, often without much regard for their individual happiness, what will happen when these roles become redundant? It is time to forcefully assert the value of humanity as a project that includes respect for individuals.

We can already see how this is played out upon the periphery. Whole regions are dismissed as unimportant, whole areas of rich countries are left without necessary aid (as happened after Hurricane Katrina in Louisiana and again after Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico) and the UN cannot raise funds to stave off hunger in Yemen. The rights of refugees are denied to people from Syria and Afghanistan, and children are separated from their parents at the border between Mexico and the USA. It is only a matter of time until large numbers of people who, for the time being, consider themselves middle class, and live in middle-income countries, will be faced with such dire need, but there will be fewer people left to speak on their behalf.

We are faced with a choice not dissimilar to the prisoner's dilemma. In the classic prisoner's dilemma, one gambles that someone else's behaviour will be worse than their own. Now it's the case that people are reluctant to recycle while 'scarce' resources are used to maintain golf courses.

If leftist movements, and not all movements are leftist (to paraphrase Alain Badiou '*tout ce qui bouge n'est pas rouge*'), are to gain any traction, they have to address at least some commonalities. Class is too stable a concept for today's busily changing world. We need to recognize that trampling on our basic human, social, economic and cultural rights is contrary to leftist principles, and then maybe we can make those movements coalesce. Solidarity is not something that is foreign to the modern world; it is mostly just confused by stories of division and

scarcity. According to Sartre, scarcity can be overcome in the material world, but it is much more difficult to do so in spirit, which is why exploitation does not always end with satisfaction: more is always needed.

The question of centre and periphery is closely connected with the question of Right and Left: While the Political Left is open to the understanding of polycentricity of the world, ideas and roles we play in society at large, the Political Right has always been conservative in the sense of maintaining the established hierarchies of fixed (unequal) roles. It is very difficult to imagine the spread of leftist ideas at a global level, because throughout history this has not really happened, with some form of geopolitical play always translating such ideas into spheres of influence. The missing ingredient is a care for the needs of strangers (Ignatieff 2001): in a scary, uncompromising prisoner's dilemma manner, 'our' destinies are intermingled with 'theirs', not mediated through hierarchy or different entrenched political causes, but understanding that, however far apart, we are still neighbours.

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Towards a new European internationalist project without false dilemmas: against/within/outside the European Union

Abstract

The Greek trauma has revealed the inability of the European Left to unite on a common vision and goal concerning the European Union (EU). The referendum in the United Kingdom (UK) – one of the EU's financial centres – and subsequent 'Brexit' has been another bitter illustration of this crisis of orientation. This chapter will address the false binary choice, in which the Left has been trapped: to '*remain*' within the EU and accept its rules or to '*leave*' in the name of 'national sovereignty' expressed by dominant ultra-neoliberal and/or racist currents. Looking through the lens of subaltern populations/classes of the population – be they native or migrant, within the centre or within the different (internal and external) semi-peripheries of the EU – this chapter suggests how a new internationalist European Left should oppose all discriminations, relationships of domination, and xenophobic policies at all intertwined territorial levels and fight for social and environmental justice across them. It further offers proposals as to how such a new internationalist European Left should delegitimize non-democratic institutions and treaties that are destructive for social rights and the environment, and begin to build alternative self-organized counter powers, to resist market competition and to build new popular and freely shared sovereign relations, which would protect and extend collective goals against the privileges of the few.¹

Keywords: Greek crisis, Brexit, Sovereign, Internationalist, Intertwined territorial levels

¹ This chapter was written before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, which revealed the main arguments presented in this chapter. For more details see Samary 2021.

■ The Greek trauma – based both on the neo-colonial diktat from the Eurogroup towards a semi-peripheral member of the Union and Alexis Tsipras’s final choices – has revealed the inability of the European Left² to unite around a common vision and goal concerning the EU. The referendum in the UK – one of the EU’s financial centres – and subsequent ‘Brexit’ has been another bitter illustration of the pseudo-choices in which the Left has been trapped, dividing all of its currents, including its most radical (anti-capitalist) components, both among themselves and within each political family: Either to ‘remain’ within the EU and accept its rules with the hope for progressive reforms in the framework of the existing treaties, or to ‘leave’ in the name of ‘national sovereignty’ expressed by dominant ultra-neoliberal and/or racist currents. This chapter will address these false binary choices, taking into account the main challenges emerging from recent debates associated with the Greek and British experiences.³

Global challenges emerging from recent debates

In September 2016, it seemed that these trapping dilemmas started to be analysed and overcome: Yannis Varoufakis, drawing lessons from both the Syriza experience and the British referendum, replying to his left-wing critics (among others Tariq Ali, Stathis Kouvelakis, Vicente Navarro and Stefano Fassina), clearly rejected

² In this text, the term *Left* is used in a restrictive, yet pluralist and open manner. As with Neil Davidson (2019), the debates and strategic challenges with that part of the former traditional Left, which explicitly supports the neoliberal features of the EU while retaining a ‘socialist’ label, will not be discussed. However, positions of the Remain and Reform orientations towards the EU and/or different ‘anti-capitalist’ positions are included. Given that experiences, defeats and gains can polarize a party and produce unforeseen political evolutions behind the same labels (from ‘realistic adaptation’ and ‘lesser evil’ and integration within the dominant system, over radicalization, up to strengthening anti-capitalist and socialist positions), the *Left* in this text is necessarily pluralist. The notion ‘Radical Left’ covers in general those currents that can be most strongly identified with anti-capitalist positions.

³ This is an updated, revised and shortened version of “No Lexit without ‘Another Europe possible’ – based on struggles in/outside/against the EU” (Samary 2016b) published on the website of the Committee for the Abolition of Illegitimate Debt.

these two dominant options, and proposed a third way based on his new project, DiEM25 (Varoufakis 2016):

“In the space of eleven months two referenda shook up not only the European Union but also Europe’s left: the Greek OXI in July 2015 and Brexit in June 2016. The question is not whether the Left must clash with the EU’s establishment and current practices. The question is in what context, and within which overarching political narrative, this confrontation should take place.”

Addressing those who claimed “that DiEM25 was pursuing the wrong objective (to democratize the EU) by means of a faulty strategy (focusing at the European rather than at the national level)”, Varoufakis summarized three existing leftist options. He considered the first one to be ‘fast receding’, and qualified it as a standard euro-reformism, typically called for by social-democrats, who argue for greater reform and democracy. However, according to him, the problems of the EU cannot be solved by ‘a little more democracy’ and a few reforms, since the EU is constructed as a ‘democracy-free zone’ that aims to keep the demos out of the decision-making process. Therefore, given that the EU’s institutions were incapable of undergoing a reform through the standard process of inter-governmental deliberations and gradual treaty changes, the initiatives for ‘more Europe’ remain misguided, since they would eventually result in the formalization and legalization of a rigid austerity policy, which he described as the Schäuble Plan. This would, in turn, deepen the crisis afflicting Europe’s weakest citizens, enhance the appeal of the xenophobic Right wing, and eventually speed up the disintegration of the EU. The strongest confrontation stemming from this would be with the non-elected organs of the EU – the informal Eurogroup and the European Commission (EC) in their defence of the ‘general interest’ of the Union as defined by market competition and the European Central Bank (ECB), as was dramatically revealed against Syriza. And in this regard Varoufakis has no illusions about the limited power of the national parliaments and governments, knowing that using this power comes at the cost of a rupture with the EU troika, making a clash with the EU establishment inescapable (Varoufakis 2016).

Sharing such a conviction and drawing from it some lessons for the future are part of the challenge that the different components of the European Left must address, and therefore seriously discuss. But even agreements on this are intertwined with important dividing disagreements about how to 'break' with such an establishment, and for precisely what alternative project.

This is where the main debates within the Radical Left begin, within which one part advocates for a so-called 'Lexit' (a portmanteau of 'Left(ist)' and 'Exit') as an alternative to the perspective of potential reforms. Stathis Kouvelakis, a member of the Syriza central committee when the party won the January 2015 Greek election, broke with prime minister Alexis Tsipras after he called the referendum for Greece to leave the eurozone, arguing that Greece must on one side play the referendum game, while on the other it must block the forces of the xenophobic and nationalist Right from winning hegemony and diverting the popular revolt.

For Varoufakis and DiEM25, the notion of Lexit is not convincing, most of all because by leaving the EU the Left cannot – and would not – block the forces of the xenophobic and nationalist Right from winning hegemony and diverting the popular revolt. This is even moreso the case because such a campaign, i.e. one based on national sovereignty, is inconsistent with the Left's fundamental principles.

Instead, DiEM25 proposed a process based on two phases summarized by its guiding pronouncement: "The EU will be democratized. Or it will disintegrate!" The first phase, until 2025, should develop in the framework of the existing treaties, fighting for the democratization of the EU through a series of broad eclectic fronts. Were this to not lead to a result, it would lead to a *de facto* disintegration of the EU. In a second phase, a democratic constituent process would be launched to build another European project based on new treaties. As for any other leftist alternative, links with social movements, the nature of its alliances and the will to build a pluralist and democratic 'European public space' mutualizing experiences and elaboration would be crucial to success. However, this attempt at a 'third option' clearly faces similar limits as the first (Euro-reformist) option, due to its weak social implantation and the choice of avoiding directly challenging the existing Treaties.

Nevertheless, there are two highly pertinent methodological and political issues raised by Varoufakis (2016) in the debate against the *Lexit* option. The first of these is the absolute need for the Left to come back to a “concrete analysis of concrete situations”. Through such lenses, Varoufakis stresses that opposing the Maastricht Treaty that established the EU in 1992 and criticizing the increasingly authoritarian and anti-social features of that union after the crisis of 2008, does not provide a single and simple answer as to how to defeat its specific singularity. It makes a great difference whether the starting point is a borderless Europe (in which European workers are able to exercise complete free movement) or a Europe like that of the early 1950s where nation states controlled borders and could create at will a new category of Italian or Greek proletarian *gastarbeiters*, and Varoufakis correctly argues that this highlights the dangers of *Lexit*. While the EU has established free movement, *Lexit* involves acquiescence to (if not actual support for) the end of this and for the re-establishment of national border controls, complete with barbed wire and armed guards, which cannot be in line with leftist principles.

Related to this need for an updated ‘concrete analysis’, the European Left must address the strategic consequences of the ‘territorial’ transformations within the new globalized system: while the ‘Lexiters’ emphasize the national level because of its *demos* and traditions, EU reformists aim to subordinate the national struggles to a European primacy within the globalized system. Discussing the content of the ‘nation state’ and the EU, Varoufakis proposes a rejection of any fixed territorial hierarchy: international, European (not reduced to the EU) and national struggles should be articulated and implemented according to the ‘principle of subsidiarity’.⁴ Here we would support these two methodological principles against abstract analyses and fixed hierarchies, but also

⁴ The principle of subsidiarity states that social and political issues should be dealt with at the most local level and only be given to the next higher level of state institutions if the capacities of the lower hierarchical level are not sufficient to efficiently solve a specific task alone. Consequently, the level of regulatory competence should always be “as low as possible and as high as necessary”. The democratic and social question that remains is: *Who judges, and according to what criteria, the efficiency of the resolution of an issue and whether an issue moves to a higher level or not?*

reformulate them within more explicit anti-capitalist dimensions: on one side “a concrete analysis of a concrete situation” and on the other the social, environmental and democratic ongoing struggles, articulated at the national, European and international levels, raising important debates both with the pro-Remain Left and influential ‘Lexiters’ like Costas Lapavistas. This because the narratives about the European construction too often tend to be reduced to the part of the reality that fits best with what is considered as the strategic conclusion to be ‘demonstrated’. The challenges for the European Left therefore concern both the emergence of a common critical historical narrative, integrating the point of view and experience of all peoples and plebeian classes involved in the different historical phases, and an updated strategic debate taking lessons from the recent experiences and crisis. Below, this chapter will first deal with the narratives and then with what could be considered as tactical and strategic debates in very different contexts.

About narratives: The EU is neither ‘Europe’ nor simply ‘capitalist’

The semantic battle is a key one within class and democratic struggles. It is one of the crucial tasks of a future pluralist and internationalist Left to challenge the current exclusive interpretations of what are to be considered ‘European values’ within both Europe’s past and present, which are supposed to be by their very definition both progressive and, indeed, universal. At the same time, the EU, a supranational organization stemming from the European Economic Community (EEC) mainly based on the Treaty of Rome (1957), and transformed into its current shape largely upon the basis of the Maastricht Treaty (1992), is to be treated as a historic construction, whose structure should not be considered un-touchable. This would also permit deeper analysis behind the ‘capitalist’ features, the continuities and discontinuities of its socio-political, institutional dimensions; and, in doing so, allow for a recalling of the other geo-political (capitalist and anti-capitalist) realities, which have fashioned and divided the continent. This would stress the genesis and context of a project in evolution, delineate its

sponsors, and analyse the crises, which have induced the unforeseen institutional transformations, and lay bare the contradictions. But also, it facilitates an analysis, with the peoples concerned, of the illusions or hopes linked to these projects, not the same here and there, or in various past phases. Finally, it is about the haziness of the political debates, which underlie the appellation 'Europe', which at best is apologetic, or, worse, arrogant and dominant – similar to the USA calling itself 'America'.

Besides or opposed to such a neoliberal imperialist 'Europeism', leftist pro-EU variants tend to emphasize three 'heritages' from the EEC: the French/German alliance and efforts to overcome the traumas of the Second World War; resistances to US hegemony; and the trace of social-democratic models. There is certainly no unified narrative nor even orientation among those who share the view that such a Left that could unite all of these three aspects (Lapavitsas 2018a).⁵ The Greek and British experiences could have two key opposing ideological and political effects. What dominated was the very short-term radicalization of an absolute opposition (what I call a 'campist effect') within the Remain/Leave dilemmas. The pro-exit currents would tend to reject any slogan along the lines of 'for another Europe', which they identified with a pseudo-internationalism of capital (but not of workers). On the other side, dominant Radical Left narratives on the EU have opposed any of the Remain-Reform arguments through an identification of the EU as a 'prison', rejecting the idea that it was and could be a "field of social and political struggles".⁶ The nation-state level of struggles became an absolute priority because an exit was considered a pre-condition for progressive struggles, while the EEC/EU construction tended to be presented as a linear and US-led project. Stressing (rightly) the anti-communist dimension of the Marshall Plan supporting Western European alliances,

⁵ Lapavitsas's specific interpretation of the German-led EU and the debates linked to the Greek and British referendums shaking the European Left will be commented on below.

⁶ The French Marxist economist Cedric Durand used this formulation in a discussion organized on this theme in Madrid in March 2016, in which Varoufakis and the author of this text were also involved. He had developed a consistent narrative along this line with other future 'Lexiters', including Kouvelakis and Lapavitsas (Durand dir.2013), which is discussed in greater detail in Samary 2016b.

such presentations often omit other important features: first, the Marshall Plan was also a US attempt to gain dominance over its own allies (and facilitate its exports), producing resistances to its absolute hegemony in military, economic and international relations. By founding the EEC a US-led European military defence project was defeated – most of all due to de Gaulle’s opposition. In addition, the EEC was not a ‘free trade’ association, even if the Treaty of Rome posited ‘free trade’ as one of its objectives. Instead, it was combined with political, geo-strategic and supranational dimensions. Lapavistas’ narrative on the EEC only stresses the (real and lasting) strength of historical nation states in the process of decision-making and the institutional setting of the new union. But this is not sufficient to characterize the very unique and evolutionary combination of inter-governmental and transnational features of the EEC and later the EU. For sure, during the post-war boom, the EEC was dominated by policies giving a more predominant role to state intervention and banks than to financial markets (notably in France and Germany, whereby it can be considered that, after all, this was also not a sign of ‘free trade’ orientation). But political aims and transnational dimensions also distinguished the EEC’s singularity from the outset, in international trade relations in particular: a collective bargaining power (in front of and resisting US strength) was considered better than single, separate national ones exercised by those who established the *common market* and its *Customs Union*. This was a concrete issue raised by the UK referendum. Moreover, the different dominant bourgeois powers never reached a consensus about the role of national governments, markets and supranational institutions.

As a consequence, the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) was initiated by the UK in 1960 (with the support of the USA), initially regrouping seven countries into a western trade bloc alternative to the EEC (a reality often ignored by reductionist and linear presentations of EEC/EU history).⁷ De Gaulle’s opposition to the UK’s

⁷ The eventual defeat of EFTA by the EEC, which eventually become the dominant West-European alliance, occurred when five out of the seven initial members joined the EEC: first the UK and Denmark (1973), then Portugal (1986) followed, after the establishment of the EU, by Austria and Sweden (1995). Of course that was combined with concessions, in particular opt-outs from the euro-system, which was a sign of weakness of the EU project.

membership was in fact a manifestation of his resistance to a US Trojan Horse. Altogether, the EEC was never (even when it became the EU) a simple free trade agreement, as is the case with NAFTA (which has neither a budget, nor a parliament, nor political pretensions). Moreover, all transformation within the EEC were triggered by crisis and decided by the dominant social and political forces and 'from above', on class basis but without a united vision. While the international monetary crisis of the 1970s led to the end of the post-war International Monetary System and compromises, the EEC in 1979 established a European Monetary System (EMS) based on the ECU (European Currency Unit),⁸ and still influenced by the Keynesian concept: in particular, collective regulated exchange rates and control of capital flows within the EMS were to allow for a relative autonomy of national policies (which was still an important issue for debates about the European Left related to alternatives to the euro-system).

It was, however, the international economic crisis and the international neoliberal turn that led to the European Single Act of 1986, which dismantled the control of capital flow within the EMS so that from 1990 on the new liberalized system became effective. That was an essential institutional and economic turn, which weakened the autonomy of national policies and the EMS under the pressure of speculative movements. This made the EEC's turn towards the 'four freedoms' of movements (of capital, goods, services and labour) concrete, and eventually led to the EU's full commitment to neoliberal globalization, while simultaneously introducing historical and institutional discontinuities within the EEC.

In parallel to the economic crisis, geopolitical events and goals of historical importance also led to a pragmatic adaptation in different phases. The union was enlarged in various contexts on the basis of discourse, which encompassed values, demand for stability, and a claim to pacify the continent. However, enlargement did not occur in the same way before and after 1989. All those narratives influenced the popular perception and legitimation of the project. In the initial phase, and in the context of the Cold War, in order to attract a growing number of countries endowed with a strong historical

⁸ It was later called the Exchange Rate Mechanism (ERM), which was transformed into ERM II when the euro replaced the ECU, while some member states could not or did not want to become members of the eurozone.

reality, the new union was forced to combine ‘federal’ dimensions and a very strong inter-governmental and confederal reality. The introduction of direct universal suffrage for the election of the European Parliament in 1979, and some expansion of its restricted powers with increased redistributive European budgetary funds in the 1980s, could be described as mere ‘smoke and mirrors’. But the enlargements signified both greater economic and potential weight and greater heterogeneity, raising real difficulties and institutional adaptations. But they also encompassed geopolitical stakes: to create an alternative to the US hegemony in crisis in the 1970s, to integrate the countries of southern Europe coming out of dictatorships in the 1980s, and to offer a continental project in the post-1989 historical turn. All these changes led to political and socio-economic partial contradictions within the neoliberal turn of the Union.

Such a turn found its roots in the global structural crisis of the capitalist world order in the 1970s. Its “counter-revolutionary dimensions” (Harvey 2007, Dardot and Laval 2019) were organically contradictory to any social and political cohesion on either national or international level. This was further illustrated – and even worsened – when the establishment of the new EU became organically associated with German reunification and with the post-socialist transformation of Eastern Europe through “the opaque ‘revolution’ of 1989” (Samary 2019). Revisiting this past in a pluralist way is still a collective challenge for the European Left. This will also concern the EU involvement in the first NATO war on the continent (in 1999 in Kosovo) and more globally its managing of the Yugoslav crisis and wars.⁹

Globally, contrary to the enlargement of the EEC to the countries of southern Europe, the eastward enlargement was associated with the implementation of the Washington Consensus criteria, and with the building of a competitive Europe through exports, with the specificity of the German competitive advantage through its historical relations with Eastern Europe. The peoples of Eastern Europe (including those from East Germany) were exploited to implement a radical policy of social and fiscal dumping on the continental scale: the ‘convergence’ between ‘old’ and ‘new’ Europe took place in such circumstances that the only winners were only

⁹ On all these topics, refer to contributions on <http://csamary.fr>

ever going to be the forces at the head of all these countries, without popular legitimacy. That is why they tried and (partially) found in 'European' discourses associated to EU membership a substitute 'program', so long as the EU still had a certain popular attractive power – albeit an illusory one. The financial lobbies and all the forces of neoliberalism increasingly came to bypass and/or challenge the official European narrative of cohesion, democracy and equality by upholding the market-led dominant features of the EU; neoliberalism was supposed to be established on an 'ordoliberal' footing, suppressing political discussion about economic choices and imposing 'golden rules' of austerity in constitutions, all decided by the governments of the Union hidden behind 'European rules'.

Gaps between principles or discourses (egalitarian and democratic) and reality are part and parcel of the actuality of all parliamentary 'representative' systems, whether national and/or European. This gap was radically broadened by the distance placed between European institutions and the European peoples, but before that, it was introduced everywhere by the global logics of neoliberalism: its ordoliberal trends are organically based on the capitalist market economy, using the euro or sterling. The crisis of democratic legitimacy of all representative systems arises from their anti-social – and thus anti-democratic – drift, everywhere symbolized by 'TINA' ('There Is No Alternative') as a global feature of the new capitalist phase beginning in the 1980s.

Therefore, it is necessary and correct to stress the specific way in which the making of the EU fits into such a reality, and it is wrong to focus exclusively or primarily on the euro-system in order to explain such policies. For a long time, many economists have admitted that the EMU, through its heterogeneity, is not an 'optimal monetary zone', and that a single currency, without substantial budgetary counterweight, deepens the gaps in a capitalist commodity context. Therefore, isolating the currency – the euro – from the system that surrounds it is a theoretical and practical error. This is not to say that the currency is 'neutral'; it condenses multiple social relations and powers. But it is the latter that needs to be highlighted, which leads us to the two different crises articulating the national and European dimensions as the new challenges facing the European anti-capitalist Left.

The story of the Greek 'No'

The OXI (meaning 'No') of the Greek people was a mandate of opposition to the new austerity plan negotiated with the Euro-group. It did not express any kind of popular democratic choice of exit from the euro, even less from the EU, which stands it in significant contrast to the Brexit vote, combined with the fact that the Greek scenario occurred in a small and peripheral country. It should be remembered that a 'Grexit' option was defended first of all by the German component of the Eurogroup, and was not popular in Greece nor within Syriza – except among its left-wing current.

There is still no consensus, not even among Marxist economists, regarding the roots of the Greek debt crisis, nor there is one as to the best (or least worse) solution for it: whether or not to enter and then remain within the eurozone at any cost, even if there is a broad consensus about the disastrous vicious circle of austerity and debt, like Tsipras eventually decided.¹⁰ There is not even an agreement between the different leftist currents or figures who broke with Syriza about what to do now: the debate around the viewpoint of Varoufakis (Varoufakis 2017) is significant and still ongoing, with different critics (Toussaint 2019) raising highly pertinent points.¹¹ Several proposals expressed before and after the referendum illustrate the main idea that an alternative to the euro-system existed. It implied the subordination of market and banking forces to the satisfaction of concrete and fundamental social rights. But that was not only a key issue for the Greek people, but also a basis criterium for a truly popular Union for the European peoples. Although such a standpoint was in contradiction with the existing treaties (which had not been democratically adopted), it would have been the best opportunity by which to launch a European campaign to question those treaties and ask for a democratic European process discussing alternative proposals.

In any case, the process of building such a European alternative had to be combined with immediate explicit disobedience in

¹⁰ See, for instance, Michael Roberts (2019) discussing Costas Lapavistas (2015)

¹¹ Eric Toussaint presents different discussions (including his own) on Varoufakis's "Adults in the Room". Yanis Varoufakis responded on his blog to many of them.

the country, including an act of unilateral rupture with the Troika.¹² The aim would have been to delegitimize the euro-establishment policy and win popular (national and international) support against, in particular within the EU. The political hope produced by the Syriza call for a referendum, combined with its subsequent 'NO', illustrated the fact that such a battle could be launched and would be better implemented while remaining within the Union and resisting its establishment (at the risk of being discarded by it) than by leaving it. In addition, the control of capital movements and the suspension of the debt's payment would have further served to protect the popular political and democratic choices.

It would have also required a 'citizens' audit' in which an analysis of the causes of the debt would have taken place in a public – and pluralist – political debate on the resources and expenses of the budget behind the 'debt', including questions as to, for instance, what social and military expenses are needed and which fundamental rights and public services the state should provide for all. Further, questions about the banks' private management and failure should have been raised, including a number on the issue of the European bailing-out of the main French, German and Greek private banks behind the so-called 'aid' to the Greek people. That would have legitimized their 'socialization' in order to satisfy specified needs under democratic popular control. The creation of a 'fiscal currency' would allow the financing of public utilities and vital food production, thereby reducing dependence upon international and European market relations and the pressures of the ECB. Resistance to the EU's policies was possible and was not to be reduced to a forced or negotiated 'Grexit' (Lapavistas 2015) – not alike those proposals that had called for an open conflict with the EU (Toussaint 2019), and in particular with its capitalist logics (Roberts 2019).

If we draw out lessons on the weakness of the relationship of forces in the summer of 2015, these are situated on both national and European levels: at all these levels, the possible scenarios

¹² As an example see the Manifesto "Recommons Europe – For a new internationalism for European peoples" that was launched with very different (although not enough) components of the Left, with the aim of preventing a reproduction of the Greek and British deadlocks.

depended on the combination of political/ideological battles (against all the relationships of domination both in the EU and in Greece) and the extension of popular self-organization on the bases of solidarity (egalitarian, anti-racist), minimizing international commodity relations and dependence on the euro.

Contrary to a Grexit stance, the main positive lesson of the Greek experience seems to be that the 'NO' was intolerable for the Eurogroup because it was dangerous for the EU – which is, thus, fragile: it is a field of social and political conflicts and not simply a 'prison' from which we are to escape. Yannis Varoufakis has rightly stressed that it was France and its protective legislation that was targeted by the Eurogroup. The recent French mobilizations (from *Nuit Debout/Stand up at Night* in April 2016, against the new Employment Law, all the way to the 'Yellow Jackets' movement for social justice and the strikes against the Pension Reforms) show that the future is uncertain. But above all, a victory for the Greek 'NO' was dangerous for Germany itself, as for the whole of the EU, since it was a voice of the people to the peoples of Europe, and not to the leaders of the EU.

The experience of Syriza remains that of the first (and hopefully not the last) battle, which is both national and European, in/ against the EU and against its role in the globalized social war. The situation of crisis and instability is accompanied by polarizations, including within the EU itself. The instability and difficulty of 'governing' the EU testifies to this. But in the absence of a European progressive and credible alternative, referenda like the Greek one can fuel xenophobic nationalism, which can push towards a reactionary disintegration. Brexit is a stark warning of this.

Brexit or Remain – Was this the (right) question?

Certainly, no vote is pure or unequivocal. The complex motivations behind the votes in both the British referendum and the United Kingdom general election in 2017 and 2019 should not be underestimated, although this is not the focus of this particular chapter. It is known that votes in favour of Brexit dominated in England and Wales, while Scotland and Northern Ireland voted to

remain; Brexit won a majority among older people, but not among young people; it was massively supported among a part of the workers 'of English descent', but rejected even more so by those who were 'racialized' or 'othered'. No sociological, 'national' or political over-simplification would make this a 'plus' for progressive struggles. At best, it was a slap in the face for the EU and for the British establishment, as Tariq Ali put it at a meeting of Greece's Popular Unity in 2016.

Undoubtedly it was also a slap in the face for the EU's enlargement policies and their pretensions, but not an internationalist, progressive gesture based on solidarity: on this level, it chimes with the vote in the Netherlands during the referendum organized on 6 April 2016 (with 30% participation) where the EU's 'Association Agreements' with the Ukraine adopted in 2014 were rejected by more than 60% of those voting.¹³ These Agreements had again opened up an incorrect 'one-eyed campism' and unnecessary dilemmas dividing the European Left (Samary 2016a). And they also extended some of the EU's freedoms to partner states like Ukraine; a move denounced by 'Brexiters'. So, how would Ukrainian popular hopes – especially amongst youth – of rapprochement with the EU best be responded to? Whatever the vote, there would be no progressive option in the false dilemma of this referendum. Or, as Alona Liasheva (2016) rightly puts it: "to EU or not to EU? This is just the wrong question", continuing:

"The real solutions of issues of geographical division can come only by turning the question 'EU or Russia?' upside down and instead asking: The EU, Ukrainian and Russian elites or the people of Europe, Ukraine and Russia? This can be done only by creating networks of solidarity between the oppressed residing around all of those territories" (Liasheva 2016).

¹³ These Agreements of Association with the EU are mostly ratified without a referendum by the parliaments of the EU member states. As the leaders of EU members have explained, the Agreements do not mean any opening to future membership (contrary to the negotiations with the Western Balkan countries) nor any obligation to a military defence of the Ukraine. The referendum in the Netherlands was based on a specific rule permitting a popular consultation without binding consequences.

For sure, the challenge for the Left is also to demystify illusions about the EU in Ukraine and elsewhere. But this cannot be done with a logic of protectionism coming from those who are already members of 'the Europe of the Rich' coupled with racist rejections of immigrants. Brexit will not lessen that logic nor will it reduce the risk of authoritarian consolidation of a hard core of the EU, or of the Eurogroup, that will impose its norms on different 'circles' of members and non-members of the EU. But aside from this, Brexit raised also other challenges for the Left.

The UK is not a peripheral country. It is a great financial power, even if it was not one of the founding members of the EEC, since in the wake of the Second World War its ruling class showed a preference for a trade association with a higher level of freedom. And also it never became part of the Eurozone because it favoured market competition through utilization of its national currency: it had, therefore, both the financial and monetary tools to resist and negotiate with Brussels. The leaders of the UK have been close to US interests and have been, inside the EU, a major obstacle to any policy aimed at limiting social and fiscal dumping. The British (in fact English) affirmation of 'sovereignty' against the EU, dominated by far-Right forces, does not target the economic policies but the free movement of workers imposed by the EU – as Varoufakis underlined. Therefore, a campaign against the oppressed population, perceived as 'native' or stigmatized as 'invaders' or those who took British jobs and incomes, whose lives have become extraordinarily precarious and miserable, arose. Brexit will, however, certainly not put an end to (but rather increase) the destruction of social rights and jobs without social protection.

In the absence of a concrete and progressive European alternative, the British subaltern populations have taken different sides, by rejecting various relationships of domination. The parts of the internationalist Radical Left that supported Brexit – thus a Left Exit/Lexit – stressed the responsibility of the EU in regard to the societal damage suffered for decades far more than it did that of the British ruling classes, and the logic of the binary choices led them to identify all partisans of 'Remain' as 'defenders' of the EU.

Symmetrically, a part of the Left that fought for Britain to remain in the EU blurred the critique of the EU by calling for a Remain vote based on the “rights defended in Europe”¹⁴ – notably the free movement of workers, and assimilated any Brexit vote to a racist vote. This ‘campist logic’ – where anything that could give ‘arguments’ to the adverse vote is blurred – dominated this booby-trapped referendum, erecting walls between the internationalist currents of Lexit and those inside the Remain group who campaigned not to support the EU but rather to fight it from the perspective that Another Europe Is Possible (AEIP).

But a British majority – including a segment of Labour’s traditional working class base – did vote to leave the EU. The political decision of Labour’s majority to propose a new referendum and its official stand in favour of Remain – against Corbyn’s orientation – was defeated by the popular vote in 2019, even if, under another electoral system the result would have been the opposite. Discussing the interpretations of such results in the *New York Times*, Alex Niven (2019) stressed that

“For some, Labour’s compromise position on Brexit was too ambiguous, leading to the loss of crucial stores of both Leave and Remain voters. For others, the party’s demonized and unpopular leader, Jeremy Corbyn, was the main reason for its worst seat total since 1935.”

But, he underlines that the ‘mathematical’ cause of Labour’s defeat was loss of the so-called Red Wall, a palisade of onetime Labour strongholds stretching from West Bromwich on the outskirts of Birmingham to Blyth Valley near the Scottish border (Niven 2019). This fact is also obviously at the core of the analysis of Stathis Kouvelakis (2019). But his interpretation of this loss and of Labour’s defeat is in fact Brexit itself, which had dominated the political agenda since the referendum of June 2016 in which the majority of the Red Wall’s workers voted for Leave. Alex Niven’s interpretation, on the

¹⁴ That certainly explains – but does not legitimize – the formulation of slogans of the ‘Remain’ campaign, which obscure the dominant anti-social dynamic of the EU. See AEIP “Stay in Europe to protect our rights” (<https://www.anothereurope.org/protect-our-rights/>)

contrary, considers that “the collapse of the Red Wall was so wide-ranging and so profound that it cannot be explained merely with reference to the nuances of the 2019 campaign”. For him, the Labour Party’s spectacular defeat had been coming for decades, and was inherently linked with the deep transformation of British society and the working class itself.

Both of them however, minimize one fact: that Labour’s decline was halted during Corbyn’s ascension and campaign in 2017. Thierry Labica (2020) reminds us of the fact that this campaign shifted from the Remain/Leave debate to a central focus on social issues – even ‘potentially socialist’ according to Lapavitsas (2019) – while avoiding a re-debate of ‘the Brexit issue’ (the vote had to be respected).

In a remarkable text quoted in his conclusion by Labica, the journalist Fréa Lockley (2019) wrote to Corbyn: “We’ve not come this far to ever be stopped.” And she stresses what had been built with him, alongside the internationalist, environmental and social campaign *For the Many, Not the Few*:

“But while they may have destroyed that beautiful opportunity to build a government of hope and end the relentless destruction that’s been in play since Margaret Thatcher gained power, what remains will be far, far stronger. We know now that it’s up to us to come together for homeless people, children, pensioners, disabled people, every person ever forced to use a food-bank, people from every visible or invisible minority, and the millions whom austerity dispossessed. We’ll stand strong to save our NHS whatever that takes.”

But would such a campaign be possible also for a wider European movement? Arguably, certain ‘cross-roads’ were leading to binary deadlocks which prevented any ‘Europeanizing’ of Corbyn’s kind of ‘here and now’ social, environmental and internationalist program, both on the basis of the priorities of Varoufakis and DiEM25 and on the Remain side following Lapavitsas’s support for Brexit. But could the Corbyn Labour Manifesto ‘For the Many, Not the Few’ be nevertheless proposed as an essential basis for a popular and democratic debate, battle and constituent process for new European treaties? This remains a hypothetical question. But it would have certainly

divided and reshaped both the Remain-and-Reform and Leave eclectic 'camps', as well as the Labour Party itself, helping it to concretize the meaning of 'Another Europe'.

What Europe? The Socialist Internationalist strategic challenges for the 21st century

As a matter of fact, one of the difficulties faced by the campaign 'Another Europe Is Possible' in the present context was that the slogan 'for another Europe', as happens with many slogans and concepts, covered highly diverse – and even opposing – currents. On the one hand, it was used in alliance with Euro-reformists proposing minor changes that do not contest the essence of the EU's dominant anti-social and anti-democratic dimensions hidden by 'the worst evil'. On the other, among the Far Right throughout Europe 'another Europe' has become a more popular slogan than 'exit'; a shift that was triggered by the difficulty of Brexit even for a country which had retained its own currency, and by the so-called 'refugee crisis' in 2015 which saw the universal rise – across all political families – of Islamophobia as a dominant form of 'acceptable racism', facilitating the entry into parliament of many Far-Right parties. However, the 'other Europe' of the Far Right is based on 'purified' nation states and a Europe against 'foreign invaders' and neoliberal 'freedoms'. This means that, for an alternative Radical Left to be clear and credible, the slogan 'another Europe' must be translated into battles for concrete egalitarian and environmental rights for all people within a democratic logic of self-organization, both against neoliberal social attacks and against all forms of sexist or racist discrimination, domination and exploitation. And this is still yet to concretize itself in Europe.

On the other side, if the slogan 'another Europe' needed clarification and practical concretization, what about 'exit' becoming a general line and precondition for progressive (and socialist) struggles? In October 2019, in the context of the British pre-election campaign, the *Monthly Review* decided to publish on its site an open dossier centred on "the leading work advocating Lexit", The left-wing Case for Brexit (Lapavitsas 2018), with two important

assessments of that book: “Socialist Internationalism Against the European Union” (Davidson 2019) and “Navigating the Brexit Strait” (Storey 2019), followed by the author’s answer “Learning from Brexit” (Lapavitsas 2019). Davidson’s and Storey’s assessments raise fundamental concerns about three important and *de facto* issues articulated by Lapavitsas: the ‘free movement of workers’; one of the four EU’s pillars of freedoms confronting nation-state sovereignty, the German hegemony, and the concept of internationalism and socialism for a European Left.

Before drawing a conclusion, two points against false polemics should be made. First, from the perspective of the clear and radical Left, it is correct to criticize the ‘Remain-Reform’ portion of the Left, which associates any ‘exit’ and any Brexiter with racist positions. This however should not allow a rather light assessment of the racism issue within Brexit, as Lapavitsas also concedes in his answer that this critique of the Remain part of the Left “is not to deny the undoubted presence of racists within the right-wing Leave campaign, nor the heavy and negative emphasis on immigration”. Minimizing the reality of the dominant anti-migrant and racist dimensions of Brexit is not only wrong, but it is also linked to the approach to nation-states’ sovereignty’s confrontation with the (German-led) EU.

Second, besides and before real debates, let us stress another source of false polemic: as underlined (Samary 2016b), ‘exit’ from the EU tends to be understood as (or assimilated to) a much broader and important notion of a ‘break’ with dominant policies and institutions. This is a reductionist debate on strategy. And it does not allow debate on ‘Exit’ as a possible tactical choice in a given context (as it could have been discussed after the Greek OXI, for example). But it will confront the Remain part of the Left as another tactical choice. Both of these can be consistent with leftist strategic profiles and goals, which would imply the maintenance of a concrete critical approach to the EU, with this being concretized through unilateral acts breaking with its dominant unjust policies.

This does not provide clear-cut scenarios for the ‘territorial’ articulation and content of the battles. But it is not true that social battles and partial victories are impossible, both within and against the EU, as Lapavitsas says. He is right to place an emphasis on the

general market-oriented treaties and institutions. But solidarity and free care are also recognized as legitimate choices, even if they are under the pressure of dominant market-oriented criteria and mechanisms. In all countries of the globalized capitalist system, such legitimate choices, combined with new rights and property relations, are opposed to dominant rules, ownership rights and laws. They face the strategic issue of who has the power of decision-making at all levels, and according to which criteria of efficiency. All this expresses potential or increasing confrontations of alternative powers, covering different dominant rights, institutions and criteria. Such confrontations are concretized in the field of public services, where resistances and victories against privatizations and commodification are – and have been – possible. Within the EU, such was the case in 2004 and again in 2018/2019 against various forms of the ‘Bolkestein directive’ on services¹⁵ which

“would have given the Commission veto powers over rules and regulations tabled in the area of services, and it has been clear from the beginning, that it would affect areas such as child care, public services, city planning and labour rights at all levels of government – from the very local to the national level.”

This was (for the time being, at least) defeated, meaning that the Radical Left could share a common criticism and stance against neoliberal orientations and the *euro-system*, being itself far broader than the ‘euro’ and an ‘exit’: this would include putting in question the ECB’s statutes and priorities and, more generally, the Maastricht criteria and other European pacts on fiscal discipline. ‘Enhanced cooperation’ between trade unions, associations and political currents from several member states are possible and legitimate across all fields. They should trigger social resistances to neoliberal policies in order for fundamental needs to be satisfied, and advocate public debates in favour of a different European ‘system’

¹⁵ An international and European network led in Belgium by Eric Toussaint focused against ‘Illegitimate debts’. See, for reports on the struggles and victory against Bolkestein directives: <https://www.cadtm.org/Bolkestein-returns-EU-Commission-power-grab-over-services> and <http://www.altersummit.eu/alter-summit/article/municipalities-and-citizens-movement-defeat-anti-democratic-eu-directive>

– and against any neo-colonial internal and external politics of the EU.

Such battles do not only need a forced European relationship, but also a national (even international) dimension built around and based on Europe and its people (Dardot and Laval, 2019): the very same treaties, policies and institutions could impose their norms for all peoples in the whole Union and beyond. But the need to be prepared for a confrontation with the ECB and the institution of the eurozone is a key lesson from the Greek experience. It means the absolute need to *protect progressive popular gains both at the national and European level*, denying the right of the Euro-establishment to attack them on behalf of an abstract market-led ‘European interest’. This is a very different orientation than that of claiming a ‘national sovereignty’ with national dominant social and political forces, with ‘priorities’ for ‘natives’ against ‘foreigners’ and within a logic of market competition against other peoples.

That is why Davidson and Storey are right in their criticisms of Lapavitsas’s idealization of an exit and of the democratic content of nation states, which, in the case of France for example, or within pluri-national states like UK or the Spanish state, are, in many respects, not even better than the EU institutions. A strategy based on exit is even less convincing for a leftist current in a dominant country within the EU – like the UK, France or Germany – which have the capacity to put in crisis the roots of European solidarity. Instead it should rather put forward a platform of “For the Many, not the Few” implemented to as great an extent as possible at the level of the given country but proposed as a European alternative to existing Treaties, in order to address pressing social, environmental and international justice issues. The wishful scenario would be an alliance around such a Platform elaborated by leading leftist socio-political currents from some core and (Eastern and Southern) peripheral countries.

One of the key reasons for such an articulation of national and European battles being necessary is the multidimensional so-called ‘immigrant issue’ – beginning with the Polish (or Ukrainian) migrant and radicalized with the ‘refugee crisis’ and Islamophobia (concerning both national citizens, European migrants and refugees from war and climate crisis hotspots). That is the central challenge for

the Left: especially when 'exit' from the EU is identified with a 'break' with the EU's 'four freedoms' *including the movement of workers* (as Lapavitsas explicitly states). Unfortunately, his answers to his critics in *Monthly Review* do not alleviate the weak dimensions of his position. He considers that the "real problem" was that the British Left "completely underestimated the extent of popular opposition to the EU, particularly as the decline of health services was often associated with EU immigration in the popular mind (certainly false but nonetheless present)".

This line stands in relation to the call for an initial recovery of 'nation-state sovereignty'. However, this argument requires an analysis of the internal relationships of domination within the EU. Lapavitsas is right when he stresses that the EU and its crisis are neither to be reduced to general features of a 'financial regime of accumulation' nor to the 'fall of profit'. Specific relations of domination between EU's 'core countries' and its different (semi-)peripheries (in the South and East), internal and external, including oppressive 'partnerships' have to be analysed and denounced, including the contested role of the Troika's policy in Greece (Samary 2016b) and the concrete and unforeseen effect of German reunification on the Maastricht negotiations between France and Germany. Lapavitsas is also right to stress the specific position of Germany coming out of the institutional system established at Maastricht to convince the unified Germany to let go of its currency (the deutschmark) (Samary 2019b/2013), as well as that during the crisis the EMU has functioned in practice as a mechanism of ascendancy for German manufacturing capital, based on the suppression of German workers.

However, Lapavitsas's global assessment of the German hegemon is not convincing. Even his remarks about the German working class can be precisely an argument stressing the new context and content of the 'core-peripheries' relationships in the present capitalist world-system as in its specific European construction: there is a North in the South and a South in the North, while the former 'East' has become deeply socially and geo-politically differentiated. German's industry has huge interests in China and Russia. And the Balkan, Central and East European countries and populations are confronted with complex, chaotic, evolving continental

polarization – and interest in multipolar links. The dependency on German industry and investments is both a strength and a weakness in Central Europe. But what strategic conclusion should be drawn from all of this?

In such a new context, the emphasis should be placed more than ever on a 'free union' based on the democratic self-determination of peoples as a key issue for dominated nations¹⁶ combined with transnational (horizontal) solidarity and alliances between European plebeian classes. This orientation should take advantage of the contradictions evident within the EU and German society itself. Far from that, however, Lapavitsas's focus on the 'German hegemon' as the single oppressor of all European nation-states is wrong in many respects and misleading. During the banking and euro-crisis, in September 2011, Jürgen Stark, German member and chief economist of the ECB resigned from his post within its leading apparatus because of disagreements; and Jens Weidmann, Governor of the Bundesbank, was in constant opposition to the 'non-conventional policy' decided upon by the ECB. This does not illustrate Lapavitsas's vision. Moreover, according to him, the new military dimension of the post-Brexit situation, combined with Trump's power and evolving position on NATO, should mean that the pressure on Germany to boost its military spending will escalate and Germany will also be obliged to assert its dominance more openly, but he leaves open the French military and colonialist power and Macron's attempts to consolidate the specific French role and its alliance with Germany in the military domain.

Finally, the German and all other dominant classes of the Union now face a very insecure situation, for various reasons, such as international instability (and the consequence of the US-China conflicts and of regional wars with international dimensions), the recessive effects of the European class-oriented austerity and fiscal policy, and the danger of a new financial and banking crisis without a consistent Banking Union and dismantling of systemic banks

¹⁶ That does not mean that self-determination should not be implemented and respected in any country. But the responsibility of leftist currents should be to express solidarity with dominated nations and in all cases to analyse the different dynamics and contents of each proposal without separating social and democratic issues from national ones.

(those deemed “too big to fail”). The incapacity to ‘rule’ could be, like in France, confronted by increasing social unrest in the face of social injustice.

In such a context, a pan-European ‘transitional program’ (Davidson 2019) should make greater use of already-existing diverse platforms and elaborations triggering transnational socio-political mobilizations and alliances in the main fields of strategic importance. They all call for the subordination of markets and banks to the satisfaction of fundamental environmental and social needs and rights; and for all these issues, a European level of resistance would increase the efficiency both of national (local) and international ongoing struggles. Democratic procedures are to be introduced across all territorial levels on the basis of self-organization and in opposition to charismatic leaders and social-, gender- and race-based forms of dominations within the movements. Human relations, and natural and produced common goods and services have to be freed from commodification and privatization just as much as money does: whatever the words used to express this, a radical democratic eco-socialist or communist ‘concrete utopia’ is in the making in many scattered struggles today. Which leads to a final challenge: a European alternative leftist socio-political association needs to be part of a collective pluralist new International Association (Samary, 2018) to be invented, resisting the dominant system at all levels, drawing lessons from the past and present anti-capitalist experiences and failures, and addressing the ongoing capitalist crisis of civilization.

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