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Why it is a mistake to cling
to European unity**

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A European Pillar of Social Rights

INTERNATIONAL QUARTERLY EDITION

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Editorial

The current issue of the *Quarterly* shines a light on two related issues: the crisis afflicting European social democracy and that buffeting the European Union. The EU has fallen far short of fulfilling its major ambition of being a »social union« for all of its citizens, and its shortcomings are linked to both the crisis of confidence among citizens in the work of European integration and the weakened role of social democratic parties in almost all of the EU member states. In the Great Recession that began in 2008, the Union failed to meet its self-proclaimed goal of acting as a bulwark against the onslaught of globalization, especially for a large number of younger citizens in the member countries of southern Europe. Rigid austerity policies there made the protection of basic social rights an afterthought. No one should expect that young people in Spain, Italy, and Greece, hit hard by continuing mass unemployment, would become ardent supporters of an EU in which there seemingly is no place for them. But a new initiative is in the works that may represent an important step in the right direction to enable the European project to recover its luster. Known as the »Social Pillar of the European Union,« it requires all the leading institutions of the EU, along with the member states' governments, to commit to a more resolute common social policy. Maria Rodrigues, an outstanding European politician, intellectual, and co-founder of the project, outlines it in this issue.



Speaking of the EU's future, we also continue the discussion about ways to deepen the Union to make it capable of more energetic action. It is hard to see how we can overcome the current crises without a stronger EU. In this context the key question is: does the Union need a new architecture for that purpose, in which a »core group« of countries prepared to take further steps toward unification would enter a tighter confederation with each other, while continuing to cooperate as closely as possible with a »periphery« of the remaining members?

Debates about the crisis of European social democracy have focused on four possible causes: the parceling-out of the left-of-center political space to competing organizations that have by now become well-entrenched (the Greens, the Left); the blurring of the social democratic brand-identity by years of participation in social-liberal governments, failure to craft a new narrative for social democracy in the 21st century, and inability to offer credible social and cultural responses to the uneasiness of segments of the new working class over mass immigration. One of the articles in this issue features an analysis of the challenges implicit in this all-important future topic.

Thomas Meyer

Thomas Meyer
Editor-in-Chief and Co-Publisher

Thomas Meyer

On the Use and Abuse of Marxism

For many years the works of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels have exerted a dominant influence on the interpretation of socialism in Germany as well as many other European countries, with the exception of Scandinavia and (initially) Great Britain, as well as on the so-called Third World. That influence has persisted, albeit in a milder form, up until the present day. In crisis situations, mobilized leftist milieus regularly breathe new life into it. At present we are witnessing an unparalleled Marx renaissance that runs the gamut from the culture pages of bourgeois newspapers to left-wing academics and intellectuals, and even includes the Chinese Communist Party, in which the Marxist legacy seemed long since to have been jettisoned. This amazing breadth of interest should not surprise us, since it was imprinted on the history of Marxism almost from its beginning and persisted for well over a century. The unprecedented bandwidth of the »applications« of this doctrine, extending from social democracy's emancipatory reformism all the way to the interest in legitimation evinced by dictatorial »Marxism-Leninism,« is by no means purely serendipitous; it is grounded in the corpus of Marx's work. However, there is an irreducible core of humanism in his thought that allows us to draw a clear distinction between its use and abuse for political ends.

At any rate, the widespread notion – one that likewise is primarily designed to serve political ends – that Marx's work »contains« Leninism is not consistent with either the history of the democratic labor movement or the findings of intellectual history. In appropriating Marxian theory, the democratic labor movement always put the »democratic« Marx first, along with contributions by Engels. The centerpiece of this »history of influences« was the idea propounded in the *Communist Manifesto* (1848) that the socialist workers' movement needed first to win the struggle for democracy and only then, within this framework, gradually establish »social« control over private property in the means of production. Engels insisted that history should be understood as a process that obeyed laws similar to those found in the natural sciences. However, in the socialism practiced by social democratic parties, his claim was seen as little more than a scientific confirmation of their conviction that they and their cause were propelled forward by the »tailwinds of history.«

Marx and Engels had bequeathed to posterity a radical critique of capitalism as well as the supposedly »scientific« certainty that the history of class struggle would not end until »production was organized and run by and for society.« But they never explained how a socialist mode of production such as this could be organized so that – to follow its own inherent imperative – it would bestow powers of self-determination on the producers in their work while simultaneously making possible the rational macroeconomic regulation of production. As history was to show, this lacuna in the theory of socialist economic organization left the list of political options wide open. And indeed the blank spaces were destined to be filled in through a highly diverse array of practical actions. The expression »dictatorship of the proletariat,« which was only mentioned rarely and in passing by

Marx and Engels, had a narrow and exclusive focus. It was intended to establish that a democratically elected »workers' government« would not respect the fundamental »bourgeois« right to private property in the major means of production, a right that of course was dear to the hearts of the propertied classes. The dictatorship of the proletariat actually was supposed to make possible a government by and for the »immense majority.«

Accordingly, social democratic parties and numerous grass-roots leftist milieus operating outside of them, especially in the labor unions, justified their democratic programs in terms of Marx's theory. They relied on Marx totally until the demise of the Weimar Republic and partially even after that, right down to this very day. The statement of the German Social Democratic Party's basic program, which is still in force and consistent with its 150-year-long history, holds that Marxism is one of the roots of social democracy. By contrast, the »Marxism-Leninism« (as it later came to be called) developed by Vladimir Ilyich Lenin and his successors after World War I on the basis of their experiences in autocratically ruled Russia represented a definitive break with the originally democratic impulses of Marxism, even though it cherry-picked selected elements of Marx's writings. The pivotal move in this misappropriation was Lenin's fundamentalist conversion of the Marxian theory of history into an unassailable dogma. As such it bestowed upon the professional revolutionaries who had been initiated into its mysteries a superior justification from which to act in the name of history and ride roughshod over democratic norms and fundamental rights whenever the latter got in the way of the enactment of the »truths« of this dogma. Thus, the acrimonious struggle between Leninist communists and democratic socialists that split the labor movement, especially in Western Europe between 1917 and 1921, was never really about accepting or rejecting »Marxism.« Rather, the controversy centered on whether the democratic or the Leninist interpretation was truer to Marx's legacy. The struggle played out between a fundamentalist and a democratic, open-ended interpretation of Marx's theory.

Ways of reading Marx as expressions of political interests

Marx's work itself is thus marked by an unusual diversity of themes and a wide variation between his work on theoretical principles and the current political positions that supposedly can be taken on the basis of those principles. But it is also shaped by the long interval – over four decades – during which it assumed its mature form, a time full of tensions, divergences, and undeniable contradictions. Consequently, even the direct access to the texts that we enjoy today does not enable us to find quick and unambiguous answers or prescriptions for the unresolved issues of the present age. And for that very reason it continues to offer points of contact that allow us to understand the current situation better – or perhaps criticize it unflinchingly.

For those reasons, it may prove useful here to recall a few of the principal ways of interpreting Marxism and the problems they have bequeathed to us. As a preamble, it must be noted that, except in the very early years when Marx himself was still alive, his oeuvre and ideas always found entrée into the organizations of the work-

ers' movement or leftist intellectual circles in highly specific versions purveyed by other political interpreters, i.e., as »Marxism.« These variants of »Marxism« bore the stamp of the peculiar interpretive schemes of their time as well as of the politically situated interests and perspectives of those responsible for the interpretive paradigms in question. Within certain limits, this sort of appropriation of a theoretical legacy under the aegis of the issues and perspectives of the day is a common occurrence.

The Marxism that shaped Western European social democracy in the years before the First World War was considerably influenced by the world view of Friedrich Engels, who drew heavily on models offered by natural science, and by Charles Darwin's theory of evolution. Far more than in the work of Marx himself, history in the light of these thinkers' approaches rather resembles the evolutionary processes of nature. That is to say, deliberate human action seems essentially incapable of shaping broad historical trends over long stretches of time. Perhaps it can influence historical episodes in the short term, but only to a limited extent. Consequently, Marxism's function as a motivating and legitimating world view dominated its reception at the cost of its role – which was constantly being weakened – as a source of reflection about what concrete, practical steps should be taken next. The analyses, schemes, and concrete programs that were needed for purposive, active engagement were thus consistently underdeveloped in the democratic wing of the »Marxist« workers' movement. And Marx's own writings were of little help, because he offered only general suggestions, not fully developed theories of action. In this strand of the social democratic tradition there was a characteristic dichotomy between the »theory« laid down in the general section of the party program (in which everyone professed to believe) and the measures called for in the section on action.

Lenin's interpretation of Marxism – not Marxism itself – sealed the split of the international workers' movement and turned Marxism-Leninism into an authoritative world view and theory of legitimation for the communist parties of the 20th century. Because Lenin sought in Marxism an instruction manual for making a revolution in a predominantly agrarian country, one in which the working class was a small minority of society and the peasantry was denied education, he exaggerated certain elements of Marx's theory to make it fit those circumstances. This also included the reinterpretation of Marxism as a quasi-naturalistic account of historical laws that offered legitimation for the actions of professional revolutionaries, the dogmatic treatment of the stages of historical development, and the transfer of control over the means of production from the society (as demanded by Marx) to the state. These are also some of the key points of contact between the Leninist version of Marxian theory and the liberation movements of the Third World, to the extent that they still invoke »Marxism« as their inspiration. In addition to their attraction to the Leninist notion of a revolutionary avant-garde, they also gave to the term »working class« a new, far more elastic meaning, so that it now covered even the peasantry in an agrarian society. The latter could now inherit the emancipatory role that Marx had reserved for the »proletariat.«

»Western Marxism«

Of the three main currents of Marxism, the so-called »Western« strain has had a significant influence in Europe from the 1920s until the present despite the wide spectrum of approaches developed by its chief theorists (from Georg Lukács and Antonio Gramsci to Karl Korsch and the Frankfurt School). Western Marxism differed from its counterparts in that it no longer maintained any direct connection to the workers' movement and affiliated parties and thus lacked a practical context in which to situate its theories. Its leading thinkers were intellectual critics of capitalism and culture who hoped above all to find Marxist-inspired ways to explain questions such as: why the great revolution had failed to happen in the West, why the working class had not developed a Marxist-oriented class consciousness, and why the policies of the two estranged brothers of the labor movement – social democrats and communists – each in its own way had misrepresented the »true« theory of Marx. Accordingly, they shifted their focus to the cultural and, to a lesser extent, the individual sphere where society's patterns of interpretation and the consciousness of the modern working class principally took shape. This new shift of emphasis yielded some quite fruitful syntheses, for example between Marx and Freudian psychoanalysis (the Frankfurt School) and between Marx and existentialism (France). By contrast, a combination of Marx and Kantian ethics, known as Austromarxism, did play a crucial role for many years in laying the foundations for the Austrian labor movement.

Despite their sharp conflicts, the feuding parties of the workers' movement did have one thing in common: Both understood »Marxism« as an all-embracing world view. That is, not only was Marxism expected to define the movement's grand political and socioeconomic objectives; it was also supposed to provide answers to existential questions about the »meaning« of human history and the lives of individuals. Even »Western« Marxism, cut off as it was from the labor movement and primarily an affair of intellectuals, may have had a similar integral significance for the lives of some individuals well into the middle part of the 20th century. But by now the ethical and philosophical energies of both variants of Marxism have been fully depleted. It is hard to imagine that they ever could be revived. Attempts by the Chinese president to spark a Marx renaissance at the country's universities and in the Communist Party will likely fail for this very reason.

Where do we go from here with Marx?

So now the question must be raised: If we want to learn from Marx today, where will we find the relevant points of contact? The most recent Marx renaissance in the Western world actually has resulted from a deep sense of perplexity occasioned by the unanticipated financial crisis of 2008. This renaissance, which has extended even to the culture pages of »bourgeois« newspapers, has attempted to sidestep all three of the main lines of the Marxist tradition described above in hopes of finding direct access to the themes of Marx's *Critique of Political Economy*. At an analytic level many of Marx's insights concerning capitalistically organized economies seem to go to the heart of the matter even today – or perhaps especially today. Of course,

the whole history of capitalism has been shadowed by a principled critique arising from a variety of sources. Capitalism itself is no shrinking violet to be intimidated by a slight breeze emanating from the scholarly world or politics, let alone by words in the culture section of a newspaper. Quite the contrary: it was forged in the fire of bitter critiques during the late 18th century and has evoked massive resistance in both theory and practice at every stage of its development. What we often forget is that it survived all of these attacks and emerged from each phase of critique stronger than ever, partly because it cultivated the art of incorporating the criticisms into its own practices.

Certainly, the profound transformation of capitalism since Marx's time did not come about thanks to the merits of Marx's *Capital*, but instead was due to social democratic policies that managed to establish links to Marx himself. The embedding of private property and markets in a comprehensive social-welfare state, the domestication of class conflicts via collective bargaining and co-determination, and the regulation of the economy have partially, though not irrevocably, civilized capitalism.

The social democratic compromise that brought us to that point is solidly grounded in Marx's thought. In 1868 Marx made a crucial distinction that clarified his political ideas. Reflecting on the struggle for an eight-hour day, he declared that »the limitation of the working day [is] a prerequisite. Without it, all other efforts at improvement and emancipation must fail.« What was at stake here was the need to dismantle the laws of the political »economy of capitalism« by democratic reforms and enact instead the »political economy of the working class,« the principle of which was not to be the untrammled use of capital, but rather »insight into and foresight about society's needs.« Marx thus sketched out the principles of a reform strategy for embedding private property and markets in political and social counter-structures to insure that social interests would prevail over the profit motive. It would not have surprised Marx a bit to learn that this strategy of transformation would involve a struggle that featured both advances and setbacks. Marx may have built a few elements of a holistic world view and a metaphysics of salvation into his doctrine (though Engels was far more guilty on this score), but those aspects of his doctrine are by now passé. The experiences of the 19th century put paid to the first element and those of the 20th, to the second. However, the core idea of social democracy even in the 21st century is that the market economy and private property can only be made acceptable in society when leavened by a policy of »insight into and foresight about society's needs,« to use Marx's own words. If only for that reason, Marx does not deserve to be thrown onto the scrap heap of history.



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Longing for a Strongman

Indonesia in the aftermath of the Ahok saga

In May of 2017 the then-governor of Jakarta, a Christian of Chinese ancestry named Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (commonly called Ahok), was sentenced to two years imprisonment by an Indonesian court on trumped-up blasphemy charges. The verdict was preceded by a months-long election campaign for the governor's office in which religious sentiment was a key factor in the struggle for power. Charging that Ahok had insulted Islam in one of his speeches, conservative Islamic religious scholars (Ulama), with the support of Islamic organizations, were able to mobilize about 500,000 people on December 2, 2016, for the largest street demonstration in Indonesian history. Under pressure from the street, the blasphemy trial finally got underway at the end of that month.

Regardless of these developments, the election campaign continued into January of 2017. Both of Ahok's rivals, Agus Harmurti Yudhoyono (son of ex-president Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono) and Anies Baswedan (former minister of education in the previous government) staged religiously-themed campaigns. Ahok still led after the first round because the Muslim vote was split, but in the runoff election that followed, Anies prevailed, backed by Islamists and the notorious ex-general Prabowo Subianto. In April he won with 58 % of the vote, buoyed by a wave of Islamic agitation, whereas Ahok ended up in jail just three weeks later.

Religion, power, and politics

The case of Ahok undermines the myth of tolerant Indonesia. A country with the world's largest Muslim population, Indonesia won the struggle for democracy in 1998, proving to many observers that Islam and liberal democracy are indeed compatible. However, since the early years of the 21st century, a conservative paradigm shift has taken place that is changing the face of tolerant Indonesian Islam. Important Muslim institutions and mass organizations were purged of liberal influences and their adherents branded as »heretics.« Conservative Muslims propagate a literal interpretation of Islamic texts and vehemently reject a hermeneutics that liberal Muslims regard as indispensable for a »true« understanding of those same texts. The literalist understanding of Islam has led to increased intolerance, especially toward non-Muslims and sexual minorities (LGBT).

Furthermore, the hegemony of Islamic conservatism has encouraged the toleration of fundamentalist and extremist organizations. During the authoritarian era of Haji Mohamed Suharto, they were suppressed as enemies of the state. Today, by contrast, they are allowed to perform systematic work at the grass-roots level in educational institutions and marginalized social milieus. By reinterpreting vertical conflicts (poor versus rich) as horizontal conflicts (true Islam versus everything else), they cleverly transform social inequality and the neoliberal developmentalist

regime into weapons that they can use for their own goals. In this context they also reject as un-Islamic a democracy based on progressive values.

The democratic reforms in Indonesia have given rise to a democracy that continues to be fragile, in which the old elites have adapted to the new political structures. For that reason, Indonesia's political system has been described by many observers primarily as an arena for power struggles contested by elite networks.

In contrast to that image, the political careers of the current president Joko Widodo (often called Jokowi) and Ahok played out quite differently. They fought their way to the top echelons of Indonesian politics by using the new, democratic, decentralized structures, aided by progressive civil society actors. Until 2014 Jokowi held the office of governor of Jakarta with Ahok as his second-in-command. After Jokowi was elected president in 2014, Ahok moved up to the governor's office and has since been considered as the president's political sidekick. Nevertheless, to achieve their extravagant ambitions, they had to conform to the rules of the traditional political game and seek allies among the old establishment. Accordingly, both Jokowi and Ahok entered into a marriage of convenience with the governing party, the PDI-P or Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle, in which the former (and fifth) president of Indonesia, Megawati Sukarnoputri, calls the shots. However, by forging that alliance they also made enemies of various powerful political actors who felt challenged by the reform agenda and the growing influence of elites close to the PDI-P.

As these maneuvers unfold, an unholy alliance is emerging consisting of influential old oligarchs, elements of the military, conservative-Islamist groups, and rent-seekers who jointly are pursuing the goal of weakening Jokowi's government. There are indications that ex-president Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono worked behind the scenes during November and December of 2016, deliberately trying to stir up public indignation as a way of supporting his son Agus in the first round of the election. Likewise, it became clear in the run-up to the second round of the election that, besides Suharto's ex-son-in-law, Prabowo Subianto, some members of the family of the former dictator had taken behind-the-scenes positions in favor of the anti-Jokowi and anti-Ahok forces.

Although Prabowo is considered to be a representative of the old, corrupt elite, he has met with broad acceptance among conservative voters. In the presidential elections held at the end of 2014 he lost by a whisker as the opponent of Jokowi. Among other promises, he pledged to rescind the advances toward democracy made during the previous few years. Looking ahead to the presidential election in 2019, the tea leaves suggest that there will be a rerun of the previous duel between Jokowi and Prabowo.

Democracy in danger

The saga of Ahok has irretrievably broken down the political fronts of Indonesian society, within which all societal actors must seek to position themselves. Prabowo's anti-democratic agenda makes him and his supporters natural – if only strategic – allies of the conservative Islamists who reject liberal democracy as un-Islamic.

The Ahok saga had enabled the Islamists significantly to reduce the social influence of moderate Islamic mass organizations, thereby gaining some room for

maneuver, both discursively and in the realm of power politics. Just recently they threatened to unleash »people power« on the Indonesian government, by which they may have meant anything from renewed mass demonstrations to the overthrow of Jokowi's government. Some of those pulling the strings in this campaign are close confidants of Prabowo.

Also, fake news and hate-mongering have been disseminated systematically throughout social media that deliberately fan the flames of ethnic, religious, and racist resentments. The problem became so serious that a fatwa (an Islamic legal pronouncement) was issued against fake news in March.

The strategy of the anti-democrats seems to be working. In addition to the opposition politicians, even president Joko Widodo himself has taken to warning against »too much democracy« on several recent occasions. By these channels a narrative has insinuated itself into public discourse that equates liberal democracy with chaos and tumult and fosters a desire for a more orderly and harmonious state of affairs. This narrative plays into the hands of ex-general Prabowo Subianto. He has stage-managed his public persona to make himself seem like a strongman who can be trusted to restore law and order with harsh methods and fatherly devotion. President Jokowi, who looked so pale and weak in the face of last year's mass demonstrations in Jakarta, is under increasing pressure to assume the role of strongman as well. This is the backstory behind some of the measures he has taken recently that remind many observers of aspects of the Suharto dictatorship. In this context, presidential directive number 2/2017 has been particularly controversial. When invoked by the president it will speed up proceedings to ban civil society organizations that take a position against the official state ideology of Pancasila. At this point, the decree is aimed only at the dissolution of radical Islamic groups, yet civil and human rights activists criticize the decree anyway, because it might open the floodgates for abuses of power.

Equally alarming are statements issued by the president and some elements of the security apparatus in connection with the declaration of a »war on drugs.« Chief of police Tito Karnavian has stated that the extra-judicial shooting of suspected drug dealers on the Philippines model should be a new strategy in the fight against drug-related crime. His comments were endorsed publicly by the president. In addition, Jokowi has tried to portray himself as the new *bapak pembangunan* (father of development), a complimentary title for Suharto that glorifies the former autocrat's successes in the development field. Such rhetoric is often linked to the accelerated construction of mega-projects such as big power plants, highways, and harbor facilities that can be played up in the media as visible symbols of the regime's development achievements. To carry out such projects he is relying increasingly on state-owned firms which have re-emerged as important economic actors during his term of office. Many observers have begun to think that these measures represent a return to state-dominated developmentalism.

The alienated president

When Joko Widodo was elected president in 2014, hopes were high for a social transformation. Progressive and emancipatory social movements, especially, saw in

him the embodiment of their aspirations for a reform movement. But once he reached the top, the realities of the political system caught up with him.

When he assumed office, his governing coalition controlled just 38 % of the seats in parliament. Nevertheless, as time went on Jokowi skillfully won over opposition parties into the government camp. But the price paid was high: Many reformers were forced out of the cabinet as members of the old elite took their places. Political polarization since the Ahok case has increased the pressure to keep political partners in the governing coalition by offering them concessions. The president's inaction in the face of a major corruption scandal over personal identity documents, involving some powerful members of the governing coalition, reveals the effects of this pressure. In addition, the reintroduction of certain Suharto-era elements is now driving the president's increasing alienation from his progressive supporters.

Many people, reflecting on the balance sheet of his accomplishments in office so far, have expressed their disappointment, especially when it comes to reducing social inequality or protecting human rights. Of course, progressives also view with alarm the rise of the Islamists and authoritarian forces, but they recognize that Jokowi has barely touched the real root of the problem: the oligarchical structures of the political system. To the contrary, they believe that Jokowi himself has become a part of the existing system.

In the battle against reactionary forces, liberal politicians and advisers now determine the thrust of Jokowi's policies. To be sure, measures to diminish social inequality finally have been assigned a crucial role in the broader struggle against the rise of Islamist movements. In this vein the coordinating ministry of economics published a strategy paper in January that was intended to nudge public discourse toward a so-called »justice economy« (*ekonomie berkeadilan*). Yet so far, by all indications, market-liberal forces have been able to water down the progressive scheme to suit their own ideas. As social injustice takes on an air of permanence, the way is paved for right-wing neo-populism. And so the vicious circle is closed.

Thus, despite its cultural and political uniqueness, Indonesia displays the same problem that plagues progressive forces all over the globe: how to gain political hegemony and hold their own against both the neoliberal mainstream and right-wing movements, which mutually reinforce each other. Rather than confronting the real problems of social policy such as growing inequality, social exclusion, and diminishing opportunities for participation (especially for younger people), the latter displace conflicts to the level of religious and ethnic issues. Worryingly, because the young democracy in Indonesia lacks a progressive social policy to act as a corrective to that displacement, it is less and less able to defend itself. Given this background, the most recent developments surrounding the gubernatorial election in Jakarta may be an ominous sign for Indonesia's immediate political future.



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Heavyweight Skepticism about Everyday Reasoning

Are center-left parties in Europe too aloof?

Do you know Wile E. Coyote? He is a luckless cartoon character in the stable of the Warner Brothers entertainment conglomerate. He spends most of his time dreaming up every conceivable trick to catch his nemesis, the Roadrunner, who scoots along desert highways at breakneck speed. But in the end Wile E. may sail along atop a flying cannon ball heading for a pile of dynamite or emerge from a dust cloud at the bottom of a canyon. Right now, Wile E. Coyote and German social democracy have a lot in common.

True enough, for now the Social Democrats in Germany fortunately remain quite far from total collapse, but the direction in which they are moving does not bode well for the future. They have lost badly in four straight Bundestag elections and three of those defeats have been labeled »historic.« So the question can't be avoided: When will results like this cease being regarded as exceptional and instead be treated – however reluctantly – as the new normal? There are several reasons for the party's poor results, not least of which is that the German election outcomes fit seamlessly into a pan-European trend in which – apart from a few exceptions – social democratic parties lately have been hit with one disastrous wake-up call after another.

There could be a fruitful debate about the reasons. What went wrong between the parties of the center-left and the voters? Have the parties moved too far to the right? Too far to the left? Are they too centrist? Are »left« and »right« outdated as political categories or are political parties per se simply obsolete? Are the candidates too old? Too young? Are they too bearded or too clean-shaven? Are they too masculine? Is the choice of campaign themes excessively naïve? Or perhaps they are merely grist for the mills of the opposition? Yes, no, maybe! And so it goes – on and on.

It can be assumed that the reason for this would have to be broad and comprehensive enough that it can explain such crisis-plagued trends at the continental if not at the global level. So then the principal explanation will be as painful as it is banal: European social democracy is losing traditional voters without making up for those losses by attracting new sources of support. The short-lived Martin Schulz euphoria that broke out at the beginning of 2017, when the German Social Democrats succeeded (temporarily) in winning back lost voters to the party, only goes to show how painful all this has been.

People like to explain the crisis by inventing »narratives« that always seem to miss the mark or by pinning the blame of a »lack of courage« for »visions and new world orders.« That might indeed be a shortcoming. At any rate Jeremy Corbyn and Emmanuel Macron now seem to have met some need by choosing to be ultra-enthusiastic.

But then maybe all this is a lot less complicated. We can imagine political parties as lying within a simple system of coordinates with one cultural and one economic

axis. Ever since the attempt was made to court the »new center« by offering a »third way,« the position of most Western center-left parties has shifted toward the middle of the economic axis. At the same time, likely as a reaction to that economic move, in many cases those same parties have drifted closer to a post-materialist left-liberalism along the cultural axis.

At first, this coordinate shift enabled them to win some smashing electoral victories and often made sense in terms of practical politics. Yet it simultaneously amounted to a double salvo fired at the two pillars that for decades had supported the left side of the political center among its traditional voter milieu. The result has been that, at least on economic and cultural issues, social democracy has lost its ability to connect with precisely those segments of the populations who traditionally have constituted its most loyal bloc of supporters. The political establishment reacted with incomprehension if not downright contempt to the backlash of insecurity that arose not least from fear of a relative loss of status stoked by global unpredictability and economic polarization.

Which axis is the more important one and which kind of alienation is more acute? It would be hard to give a »one size fits all« answer to that question. But considering the way in which the SPD-sponsored Agenda 2010 reforms have been partly reversed in practice, with more rollbacks likely to come, the cultural axis seems to be the most crucial one in the German context. The recently reignited debate over whether Germany has or should have a »guiding culture« proves that this is indeed the case.

In self-styled progressive circles, it would be difficult nowadays to contribute to this debate without first putting a bit of distance between oneself and the framing of the topic. To accomplish that distancing, the first step is to write off the entire debate as meaningless, then to emphasize that, when we talk about a guiding culture, we are dealing with a really »difficult concept« – indeed with an idea that is truly reprehensible. Norbert Lammert, Heribert Prantl, Robert Habeck, Herfried Münkler, the Young Liberals, Jürgen Habermas – the list goes on, but they all reach the same conclusion: »Guiding culture? No way.« It's said that such a notion is undefinable, divisive, harmful, if not outright unconstitutional.

Certainly, part of this is dialectic. To the extent that the concept of a guiding culture has been touted by the right as a counterweight against multiculturalism – beginning with Friedrich Merz and going on to the AfD's party program – the progressive forces want to keep their distance from it. At the same time, it is equally clear that such skepticism has not been plucked from thin air. The critics' doubts about whether there is a monolithic German culture may well be justified. And very few people would gainsay Thomas Oppermann when he rejects a guiding culture on the grounds that the state has no right to dictate to people when it comes to matters of religious beliefs, political opinion, or sexual preference. He is surely right about that!

But is that really the question that people care about? Or are apples and oranges being packed together in one conceptual box: a political-normative elite discourse and an appeal made by citizens based on everyday reasoning that, in and of itself, is anything but chauvinistic?

However deep the unease felt by many progressives about »the rights of mainstream society« and demands directed at immigrants to assimilate, majority public opinion appears to be very clear on the subject. For the latter, having a guiding culture as part of their everyday reality does not present any serious problems; in fact, it is pretty much taken for granted. According to a recent YouGov poll, a mere 25 % of the citizens in the Federal Republic registered fundamental misgivings about a »guiding culture.« A survey taken by INSA in 2014 offers even more unambiguous statistics: It found that 90 % of respondents expect foreigners who come to Germany to adopt the »traditional guiding culture there« (incidentally, the figures drop by only 1 % when the range is narrowed to only the SPD's voter base). When pollsters narrow the focus of their research exclusively to Germans with a migration background, they come up with very similar results. Here too, according to polling in 2016 by the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, a majority of 83 % expects newcomers to »adapt to German culture.«

Are these »guiding culture fans« really dreaming of a Christmas tree decree or of having their »religious, political, or sexual preferences dictated« to immigrants, as Thomas Oppermann fears? Or are the 90 % mostly concerned about other things? Perhaps they are worried about easing the strains of migration by helping the recently arrived immigrants adapt to their new society in ways that are not covered by the human rights provisions of the German constitution. Whatever the merits of that constitution, its articles are about as useful for managing the everyday problems associated with immigration as a globe is for navigating in street traffic. Viewed through this lens, the heavyweight skepticism that the center-left brings to the concept of a »guiding culture,« only serves to indicate how aloof it has become from ordinary social policy issues.

It is clear enough that the discussion about a guiding culture is not happening in a vacuum. Instead, it is one of the foundation stones of the center-left's decisions about what basic policy positions it should adopt on a broader range of issues than can be summarized under the heading of migration-nation-homeland. But it is precisely on this score – i.e., when they position themselves as the driving forces behind a pro-migration policy motivated entirely by cosmopolitanism – that Europe's progressive parties are drifting away from majority social opinion. Or else they simply write off the nation-state as a bit of reactionary atavism that ought to be superseded as quickly as possible.

Today, in the academic left-liberal milieu of fading European social democracy, opinion leaders rarely make do without a reference to the inevitability of global migration movements, which – as supposedly quasi-natural phenomena – must be accepted politically. Considering the events of the summer of 2015 and the Federal Government's temporary loss of control over its own borders, these positions all too often seem intended to stifle debate rather than contribute to it.

Especially astonishing in this context is the fact that, although elements of the center-left generally over- rather than underestimate the potential of political steering, on the topic of migration alone they embrace a »there is no alternative« perspective. In most areas – global financial and trade flows, climate change, gender

roles, digitalization, political discourses, indeed even language itself – the left not only has confidence in its own ability to shape events, it also demands the chance to do so, and justifiably so. But there is one exception: Where migration is concerned, the regnant position is political defeatism. Here, the consensus amounts to this: no one is allowed to raise doubts about the »whether«; the only thing that politics is permitted to tinker with – albeit only the details of the policy – is the »how.« Why is it that the otherwise so valiant protagonists of »Yes, we can« have so little confidence in themselves to handle this particular issue, especially since it is the very one which voters absolutely expect them to handle?

The left-center would seem especially well-situated to bring about a synthesis between international responsibility and the requisites of the social welfare-state, and thus avoid abandoning the field to the radicals. Of course, the point here is not to abandon one's own core principles, trying to outstrip the right-wing populists on their right-flank and throw social progress into reverse gear in the vain hope of winning back radicalized ex-social democratic voters. Yet there is space in between the extreme positions that could be occupied politically. Doing so would help narrow the gap, at least to some extent, that has opened up between social democratic parties and their former voter base. That is exactly what should happen during the coming months, unless social democracy would rather follow Wile E. Coyote over the cliff.



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Brexit: Tears Before Bedtime

Michael Bloomberg, the former Mayor of New York, has stated that Brexit is the »single stupidest thing any country has ever done,« apart from the election of Donald Trump as president of the United States. What is certain is that the British electorate and political system, and more especially the Conservative Party, have backed themselves into a corner and are now no longer sure how to extricate themselves. Since 1945 the population of the United Kingdom had avoided a public discussion about its role in the modern world and where its future lay, preferring to »muddle through.« But with the disappearance of the Commonwealth and its markets, the British government reluctantly decided that, for mercantile reasons, it had no option but to join the Common Market. From the beginning the British were at best only lukewarm about their feelings for Europe. To this day for the British, the term Europe has never included the United Kingdom; for them Europe still begins in Calais.

At the same time the UK always has relied on its »special relationship« with the United States of America, a fiction deeply embedded in British folk mythology,

which gave the USA a backdoor into Europe while at the same time misleading the British into thinking that the UK could »punch above its weight« on the world stage.

But suddenly, with Conservative Prime Minister David Cameron's decision to call a referendum on Britain's future relationship with the EU, the country was forced into the public debate that it had tried to avoid for the past 70 years. The campaign lasted just a few weeks, but it was emotional and vitriolic and has poisoned the atmosphere of public discussions ever since. As a result the nation is now more deeply divided than it has ever been in living memory. There remain the old divisions and subdivisions between and within classes, the cultural and historical differences between North and South and between England and the Celtic fringe; in addition there is the growing divide between rich and poor, between the haves and the have-nots, which has exacerbated social friction and provoked widespread dissatisfaction. But now, since the referendum vote on Brexit, a schism has opened up between old and young, between those who voted for Brexit and those who voted to remain in Europe. The United Kingdom's population is divided against itself; dissension festers between friends and within families, while disunity, conflict, and treachery afflict all three main political parties, but most crucially the ruling Conservative Party under the leadership of Theresa May. The Conservative Party is fighting for its very survival, and many fear that the party and the government are in a no-win situation.

The Conservative Party under Cameron, which initiated the idea of a referendum in order to head off the threat to its right flank from UKIP, miscalculated. They did indeed succeed in destroying UKIP, but were forced by a very slim majority of the electorate to trigger Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union and begin the process of withdrawal, collateral damage that they had not anticipated.

The Conservative Party cannot hope to survive the next general election if it fails to get a favorable deal from the other 27 EU members, and even a compromise on exit payments and conditions is likely to mean the end of Theresa May's leadership career. The British negotiator, David Davis, is playing a not very subtle game of brinkmanship and hoping that the EU's Michel Barnier will blink first. But this outcome seems unlikely. The negotiators on the EU side repeatedly have made their conditions clear. They also have quantified the cost of the divorce time and again, pegging it at 60 billion euros. »It is just a matter of settling accounts, as in any separation,« Michel Barnier has said.

But for both the British government and press, matters are not that simple. They are accusing the EU negotiators of putting unfair pressure on the UK, effectively forcing it to buy a pig in a poke. Before the British government suggests a possible figure, it wants clarification as to exactly what the UK is likely to get in return for its payment. Article 50 mentions nothing about money or obligations, and David Davis has said that, should the two sides fail to come to an agreement on withdrawal, the UK would not have to make any financial contributions at all. Barnier's ticking clock is the two-year period laid down by Article 50 to complete a deal.

As a gesture of goodwill, Britain has agreed to make a total contribution of 20 billion euros to the EU budget for the period 2019–20, but is reluctant to be more specific about any further payments. Theresa May has given a vague pledge that

the UK will »honor its commitments.« But the EU wants assurances that the UK will abide by *all* commitments, which would mean that Britain would have to pay a further 30 billion euros for projects that already have been agreed to by the UK, but where the money has not yet been spent.

Because a financial settlement is not enforceable under EU law, the only leverage Michel Barnier has to reach agreement on the exit bill is the tenuous hope that the British do not want to end up with no deal, and that the British would want to maintain their international credibility as trustworthy trading partners. Are David Davis and Theresa May prepared to risk Britain's good name in order to save their party and their careers? Will Barnier or Davis blink first, and will there be tears before bedtime? Don't miss the next thrilling installment of this nail-biting cliffhanger!



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Dominika Biegoń

Veering off Course

Why it is a mistake to cling to European unity

In his final speech on the state of the Union last September, Jean-Claude Juncker, President of the Commission of the European Union (EU), wanted to give a boost to or »put wind in the sails« of the project of European integration. In his view the European clipper ship should set a course toward greater unity. To make that happen, he proposes an expansion of the Eurozone and the Schengen area. The euro ought to be the currency of all EU member countries (with the exception of those that negotiated a contractual opt-out clause for themselves), and the EU should become a single unified space without borders. Yet his ideas for the future of the European Union are not constructive. The maxim that guides future EU policy should not be to achieve greater unity, but instead to handle diversity in a lawful, open, and orderly manner. In order to improve and democratize the EU's problem-solving capacity, it is necessary to allow European countries to move along at different speeds.

By clinging to the vision of European unity, Juncker is making a U-turn and dealing a rebuff to plans for a Europe moving at different speeds, the very plan favored by governing circles in France and Germany. Even the »White Paper on the Future of Europe,« issued by the European Commission earlier in 2017 and intended to set in motion a process of discussion about the next phases of European integration, pointed in a very different direction. The remarkable thing about the White Paper is that the Commission did not present »more« Europe as the only option, with no alternatives; instead it initiated a discussion of a Europe moving at different speeds,

and even openly contemplated a rollback in the remits for which the EU would be responsible. That was a novel move, because, in addressing the process of European integration, the European Commission ultimately had always taken the lead in advocating the federalist dream of ever closer union. In contrast to the White Paper, Juncker's speech on the state of the Union invoked this older federalist tradition in which »more« Europe is better in every case. Unity takes precedence over diversity and Schengen; now the euro was to be imposed by fiat on all other member states. The metaphors employed in the address speak volumes. Juncker emphasizes that »Europe must breathe with both of its lungs, the eastern and western. Otherwise, our continent will experience shortness of breath.« There is no more succinct way to formulate the demand for unity and indivisibility.

Already, macroeconomic imbalances are threatening the proper functioning of the Eurozone, a fact that speaks against its further expansion. Current accounts deficits with countries running a surplus are forcing an internal devaluation within the European monetary union, which stifles growth and has deflationary effects. Moreover, current accounts balances that drift apart make it more difficult to adopt a suitable monetary policy, because the external value of the euro is too high for one group of countries and too low for another. Accepting even more countries into the Eurozone would make the latter still more disunited and raise the risk that the European Central Bank's monetary policy might not respond adequately to the exigencies of national economies.

Even from the viewpoint of central and eastern European member countries, it is questionable whether it would make sense from an economic perspective to adopt the euro. As Fritz W. Scharpf showed convincingly in a recent paper delivered at Cologne's Max Planck Institute for Social Research, the current rules in the Eurozone regime, at least as presently constituted, cater one-sidedly to the interests of major exporting countries with hard currencies such as Germany. The goal of the crisis-management policies of the last few years has been to impose this model on the southern European Eurozone countries as well. In this context Scharpf talks about »structural convergence [that is] asymmetrically enforced.« Yet, the crisis in the southern Eurozone countries was exacerbated by the edict that they had to adopt austerity policies and impose lower wage settlements. EU economic policy-making should have taken into account the structural conditions in southern European economies, especially their large domestic sectors. As was the case in southern Europe, the implicit bias in the rules of the Eurozone regime that favor export-oriented hard currency countries such as Germany may present a stumbling block to the development of eastern European economies.

The second project proposed by Juncker, the expansion of the Schengen area, is equally dubious. According to data supplied by the Commission, Bulgaria and Romania meet all the criteria for joining the Schengen Accord, while Croatia meets almost all of them. Thus, there is no valid technical objection against bringing those countries into the Schengen zone. In the medium term, the expansion also would make sense on political grounds as a way to build trust among the member countries. However, in the current political situation, in which many member states are

facing major security challenges, some citizens would feel less secure if the expansion proposed by Juncker were carried out. Furthermore, the refugee crisis has stoked fears of a loss of control over security policy in some member countries and reinforced their desire for greater national autonomy in regard to border control. In the context of these trends, Juncker's proposal sends the wrong message: If it really wants to reduce the distance between itself and its citizens, the Commission would be well advised to take the perceived reality of the latter more seriously.

There is a fundamental problem with both of Juncker's proposals, one that has stirred controversy throughout the history of the process of integration: the relationship between unity and diversity in the structure of the European political community. Is the European Union ready to accept more flexible forms of political cooperation, i.e. a Europe of different speeds, or will it cling to the federalist ideal of »ever closer union« as spelled out in Article 1 of the Treaty on the European Union?

The examples discussed here suggest the limits of a »unitary union.« Certain EU policies make sense to some member countries, while appearing counterproductive to others, in fact even harmful to their national interests. Given this set of circumstances, a Europe of countries moving at different speeds offers an opportunity. That kind of Europe could enhance the problem-solving capacity of the EU and make the Union more democratic. If we were willing to accept or even expand more flexible forms of integration like those that already exist in the Eurozone regime and the Schengen Accord, the EU would be empowered to respond in more nuanced ways to the problems of its member states. A Europe moving at different speeds takes fuller account of the differences within Europe's population and of the continent's diverse national sensitivities.

A more open and orderly approach to diversity would be a first step on the way toward the ideal of a »European democracy,« a scheme articulated by Kalypso Nicolaïdes, Richard Bellamy, and Frank Schimmelfennig, among others. It envisages a Europe in which the member states represent a democratic arena well worth preserving, in which institutions with much historical continuity arrange for the balancing of different interests. Hence, supranational institutions should not be too hasty in ignoring political decisions taken at the level of the nation-state. In other words, a Europe moving at different speeds could offer a way out of the European Union's democratic deficit.

Juncker's proposal of a unitary union with its own currency and a borderless internal territory fails to do justice to these criteria. By clinging to outdated visions of unity, the EU risks paying too little heed to different national interests and national socio-economic conditions. If the Commission remains on its present trajectory, the EU will not develop into a clipper ship with wind in its sails. Instead, it will be like a rudderless tanker that slowly but surely drifts off course.



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Joachim Poß

A Scapegoat for Everything, a Solution for Nothing

Populism in Europe

A few months ago, the citizens of Germany were called upon to decide the composition of the 19th Bundestag (parliament). More than one in every eight votes went to a right-wing nationalist party, the Alternative for Germany (AfD), that drew attention to itself by its populist and racist slogans, while portraying itself as the »only true voice of the people.«

The outcome of the election reflects the temper of the times. In recent years, far-right parties appear to have gained a solid foothold in the political systems of many European countries, from the Front National in France under Marine le Pen and the Dutch PVV headed by Geert Wilders to Viktor Orbán's Fidesz in Hungary and the Polish PiS Party led by Jaroslaw Kaczyński. Left-wing populist parties have enjoyed comparable success. In Greece, the Syriza Party furnishes the prime minister, and in the parliamentary elections in Spain, held in June of 2016, the Podemos Party emerged again as the third-strongest force. In the first round of the French presidential election, the left-wing populist candidate, Jean-Luc Mélonchon received almost 20 % of the vote.

But how do we explain the surge in support for populist parties? What does it mean to say that a party is populist, especially given that the term can be applied to left- and right-wing parties alike? And what is the best way for pro-Europeans to respond to current trends?

In his essay, *What is Populism?*, Jan-Werner Müller argues that populist parties can be distinguished by their claim to be the only legitimate political force that represents the entire people and speaks for it as a whole. Inevitably, this claim makes other parties or even supranational institutions such as the European Union appear illegitimate in the eyes of populist parties. To the populists, anyone who disagrees with them on this point is simply representing the interests of an illegitimate elite and therefore does not really belong to the people. Thus, for example, the electoral program of the populist Alternative for Germany Party states: »The secret sovereign in Germany is a small, powerful political oligarchy that has formed inside the existing political parties. (...) This oligarchy holds in its hands the levers of state power, political education, and influence over the media and the dissemination of information to the population.« The claim to be the sole representative of the people is in strong contrast to the fundamental European idea of pluralism, which finds expression in the European motto, »United in diversity« and is solidly anchored in the structure of the European Union.

Aside from their claim uniquely to represent the people, populist parties also stand out on account of their destructive political style, which encourages disparagement of the European Union. As a rule, such parties criticize the status quo without presenting realistic plans for a better future. It is easy to dismiss the European Union as too bureaucratic, but harder to find an alternative that, as the EU has done,

could guarantee the peace in Europe for over 70 years. As Martin Schultz once put it, the populists have scapegoats for everything and solutions for nothing.

The remarkable thing about both points – the claim to exclusive representation and the destructive political style – is the fact that they apply to left- and right-wing parties alike. Despite their differences on many political issues such as migration policy, populist parties agree almost entirely when it comes to rejecting European integration. For example, the former presidential candidate and chair of the leftist party La France Insoumise (Unsubdued France), Jean-Luc Mélonchon, insists that France abandon the European treaties on the grounds that the latter violate the country's national interest. In the AfD's electoral program, the Schengen, Maastricht, and Lisbon treaties all are denounced as »illegal« interference in »sacrosanct popular sovereignty.« Finally, according to the (German) Left Party, the Maastricht and Lisbon treaties »have inscribed neoliberalism in the foundations of the EU.«

Certainly, in its present form the European Union is far from perfect. But populist parties commit a fatal error when they seek the solution to existing problems in a return to national selfishness. Those who aspire to a more social Europe and a fairer taxation of banks and corporations have to cobble together the requisite majorities in the European Parliament and in the Council. By contrast, those who defame the EU as a »neoliberal project« and, like the Left Party, suggest that people in southern Europe would be better off without the EU, are helping no one. The very opposite is true: The promise of salvation that all social and economic problems can be solved through a return to an imaginary »popular sovereignty« can have disastrous consequences. The Brexit vote provides a cautionary tale.

The Brexit example

With their slogan, »Take back control,« the representatives of the »leave« side appealed to British sentiments of sovereignty, and thus deliberately created the impression that Great Britain could leave the EU without having to suffer negative impacts on its economy and labor market. Only three days after the Brexit referendum and months before the exit talks were scheduled to begin with Brussels, Boris Johnson assured everyone that even after it left, Great Britain would continue to have access to the European internal market. This is just one example of the numerous lies that the »leave« side told in conducting its campaign. Furthermore, said Johnson, Britons would still be able to live, work, and study in the EU. The only thing that would change, he claimed, was that Britain would no longer be subject to the European legal system. But now, a year and a half after the vote, those promises have proven to be empty. Even the prime minister, in her September 22 speech on fundamental issues in Florence, dismissed the idea that after Brexit Britain would continue to enjoy access to the European internal market. After the fifth round of negotiations, the future status of British citizens in the EU and of European citizens in Great Britain remains an unresolved question. The European Union rejected Britain's initial offer. It is becoming increasingly apparent that the populists of the »leave« side ran their campaign without the faintest inkling of a plan for what would happen after a vote in favor of Brexit.

On the role of national governments in the EU

Still, it would be a mistake to try to assign full responsibility for Brexit to the »leave« side. The fuzzy position of the Labour Party and especially its chair, Jeremy Corbyn, contributed to the outcome of the referendum. Rather than campaigning resolutely for the interests of the British people, whose jobs depend on Britain's being an EU member and remaining in its internal market, Labour under Corbyn proved to be halfhearted and indecisive on that question. Indeed, surveys indicated that, prior to the referendum, many voters did not even know whether the Labour Party was campaigning for or against Brexit.

And, in the last analysis, former British Prime Minister David Cameron bears a large share of the blame for the outcome of the Brexit referendum, since for years he held the EU responsible for mistakes made by his own nation and then still – in a highly unconvincing way – pleaded the »remain« case. Confronted by the lurid accusations of the Brexiteers, there was little he could say except »Yes, but ...,« a rejoinder that persuaded neither the rank and file of his own party nor the citizens of Great Britain.

The behavior of the ex-premier strikingly illustrates how some governments of EU member states have conducted an irresponsible, anti-Brussels brand of politics, unconcerned about its catastrophic consequences for Europe or even their own countries. The way in which heads of state and government reach joint decisions in Brussels and then go home and pretend that they had had no part in making them has contributed mightily to EU's citizenry's loss of confidence in the European Union.

The public does not entirely realize that European Union policies are made primarily by the heads of state and government. It is not so much the Commission or the European Parliament, but rather the behavior of the member states that has led to a decline in public support for the EU, even though the populists would like us to believe otherwise.

Whenever the member states, Commission, and Parliament have acted in concert in recent years, the EU has accomplished a great deal. Among other achievements, it has put in place a support system for unemployed youth and created an investment fund that, in its first year alone, mobilized 169 billion euros of investment money, of which a large portion went to small and middle-sized firms. These are not »elite projects« as the populists want us to believe; instead, they are measures to create jobs especially in structurally weak regions, and thus help people at the local level. By the same token, European efforts to harmonize taxes, e.g., for corporations, are not merely games played by out-of-touch EU bureaucrats. Ultimately, it cannot be a matter of indifference to European taxpayers when international companies refuse to do their part in financing the community.

It is incumbent upon the member states' governments to make people realize what has been accomplished already and, when it makes sense, to work even more closely with the Commission and Parliament in the future.

Implications for social democracy

Populism in Europe is not a new phenomenon. But in the last few years the populists have learned how to exploit European crises for their own ends. Whether in

their dealings with the AfD or in anticipation of the upcoming Italian elections, pro-Europeans will have to confront populist forces on at least three fronts.

First, it will be important to keep the populist movements from staging themselves as outsiders discriminated against by liberal elites. The fact that, as things now stand, the AfD will be the third strongest contingent in the Bundestag and be represented in 14 state parliaments, undercuts the credibility of their self-image as a marginalized party of protest. Similarly, since June, 2016, the Italian Five Star Movement has held the mayoralty of Rome, among other offices. It is worth noting that the rampant corruption in Italy's capital has not improved at all on the watch of Mayor Virginia Raggi. And a glance across the Atlantic reveals that Donald Trump, populist par excellence, now sits atop the »system« that even he denounced as a corrupt »swamp« during last year's presidential election campaign. Yet he has surrounded himself with multimillionaires and family members.

These are just a few of the examples proving that populist forces by no means have been excluded from political processes. Populist parties owe much of their political capital and appeal to their self-portrait as outsiders who have suffered from discrimination, but who are only saying out loud what »everyone« thinks and therefore have been suppressed by liberal elites. If we want to prevent the populists in Europe from growing stronger still, we must succeed in deconstructing this self-portrait.

Second, we will have to focus much more closely than before on the implications of the political demands made by populist parties. When nobody thinks carefully about what it would mean to enact and implement a political demand, it can be converted readily into law and policy. For that reason, we must explain to people what the outcome would be for them personally, their jobs, and the economy as a whole, if populist demands became law. The Five Star Movement's call for an »Italexit« furnishes one example of this approach. If Italy really were to abandon the euro, interest rates on Italian government bonds soon would rise dramatically. Because Italian sovereign debt is already very high (133 % of GDP or 2.2 trillion euros as of 2016), that would present immediate problems for the government's capacity to act. And, of course, the first to suffer in that case would be the socially weak, such as the recipients of social services.

Third, in the struggle against populist forces we should not be too preoccupied with criticizing controversial statements by individual politicians. In the past, even social democrats have expended too much effort responding to a small number of highly provocative statements issued by a few populists. As a result, disproportionate attention is paid to individuals who sometimes are not even represented in parliament, which is exactly what politicians like Beppe Grillo in Italy or Nigel Farage in Great Britain want. The programs of populist parties also have vulnerable flanks that can be attacked. For example, the AfD, which purports to speak for the »people,« calls for the abolition of the inheritance tax, even though that would benefit primarily the very wealthy rather than ordinary citizens, as its spokespersons claim. It is also questionable whether the graduated tax rates that the AfD proposes really would result in greater social justice.

The implications for pro-European forces cited here indicate that we have important alternatives to the populist ideology. In a democracy nobody can claim to be the sole legitimate representative of the entire people. For that reason, the democratic forces of Europe must challenge the populists' claim to exclusive representation more resolutely than before. But to fight back effectively against the populists, one must have the necessary self-awareness and invoke European values of pluralism, freedom of thought, and the rule of law.



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Paul Nemitz

Eleven Theses on the Renewal of German and European Social Democracy

1. The decline of social democracy and the resurgence of both left- and right-wing populism are not purely German phenomena. Similar trends can be observed in many neighboring European countries. It is unlikely that every one of those declines was »home-made,« and that we are dealing with parallel developments. Consequently, it would be worthwhile to look beyond Germany's borders in seeking the causes of social democracy's tailspin and the formula for a political realignment.

2. Among the many causes for the erosion of enlightened social democratic politics, two of the most influential are the new digital communications environment and the social effects that digitalization has had, including its tendency to isolate individuals from one another. The rise of corporations like Google and Facebook, now present in every household, has left a mark on all democracies. These companies stoke the illusions that they can solve social problems and promote individual happiness through technology, both of which weaken democratic engagement and undermine democracy itself. For commercial reasons they encourage the impression that constant digital responsiveness and presence on the internet today are more important than direct contacts with human beings and active, long-term democratic commitment. For those reasons, democracy is understood in a highly simplistic way, with people now expecting instant happiness for themselves as individuals. We need to say it clearly: In a democracy, we cannot expect to have the instantaneousness or »instantness« (Evgeny Morozov) of instant messaging and purchases by mouse click. Democracy requires long-term commitment and the work of persuasion, carried on directly between one person and another. Finally, there must be willingness to compromise, which is practiced and learned in high school student councils, representative assemblies in universities, and councils of apprentices and

trainees, not to mention in local party committees. Things are not going well in these bodies, the incubators of democracy. They ought to be taken more seriously and revitalized.

Digital modernization

3. Democratic legislation to regulate the internet and internet-based economic activities is being opposed by the »California doctrine« of the global indivisibility of the internet and the cyberspace »Declaration of Independence« (John Perry Barlow). Those positions are the most obvious expression of the anti-democratic tendencies implicit in technological absolutism.

We must address in no uncertain terms the conflict between technological dominance and democracy and win people back so they will again engage directly in democracy. In that case, they would work with other citizens and for the society they live in – a society they can control and shape only through democratic means. »To dare more democracy« (to use Willy Brandt's words) today means to criticize the concentration of digital power, technological dehumanization and the sapping of democracy's vitality by technology. We need a vision of a new, shared engagement that restores the people's voice, respects them once again as speaking, thinking beings and leads them out of the (self-incurred) immaturity of »like buttons« and »retweets.« They must be led out of the machine-mediated online communities that have been manipulated and distorted by big data, profiling, and non-transparent algorithms. There, they mutate into data-producing zombies and get exploited as data objects.

4. Concretely, this means we need to give democracy – and party work – a new kind of immediacy that certainly could make better use of digital media, while still simultaneously putting the emphasis on direct cooperation between one individual and another. It would be seen as a platform and school of democracy as well as a venue for social mingling. The immediacy of political work carried out on the spot and between human beings speaking to one another and shaking hands, seeing and feeling each other, is the one genuine source of enduring engagement and sustained solidarity. Being a »catch-all« party also means being the place where people with different social, personal, and professional background come together, learn to understand one another, and collaborate. Whereas in the digital world people are classified, segmented, and sorted out according to their special interests, a catch-all party has to offer just the opposite: a hip place where you meet people that you otherwise would not meet. The local party organization intentionally has to turn itself into a place of resistance against social segmentation and digital isolation.

5. There are lessons to be learned from the demise of the Pirate Party in Germany. Technology does not solve political problems and fails to create lasting solidarity. Nevertheless, the SPD absolutely needs to embrace digital modernization, both for organizational reasons and to win elections. We should be open to digital experiments on substantive issues that may encourage solidarity and sustained engagement, even on committees of experts. Yet openness is not the same thing as adopting a naive faith that technology can save us. So far, there is no unchallenge-

able empirical evidence proving that digital social networks lead people to make lasting political commitments and show enduring solidarity. What previous studies do show is that, when a person is politically active, the digital culture offers him or her a new channel for that activity. Those who are not politically active or interested are not moved by social media to embrace long-term engagement. On the contrary, those who are less active slide back into »slacktivism« (from »slacker« and »activism«), in which financial contributions to political causes, attendance at political events, and conversations are supplanted by »retweets« and the pressing of »like« buttons. Thus, people no longer have to get up from their couches; they can show (rudimentary) signs of life in the digital netherworld by button-pressing. Social media have effects similar to those of drugs by making users dependent and weak. Insiders report that they are programmed with the objective of fostering dependency. In fact, it is hardly a coincidence that the word »user« – an expression from the drug scene – is applied to social media participants. That is another reason why emancipatory politics demands a critical stance toward social media.

6. The tension between the inevitable complexity of constructive political programs and the decline of the traditional press with its longer texts – not to mention the shortening of attention spans – has become even more dramatically apparent with digital media. The digital communications environment, with the small screen of the mobile phone as the favored locus of communication, is just right for the snotty anti-message of two lines, and thus encourages »mob democracy« (Constanze Kurz). It is difficult if not impossible to disseminate constructive policy positions of similar brevity. The abbreviations and filter bubbles of digital social networks represent a regression from enlightenment back toward self-incurred digital immaturity. We should be the first to pave the way for new businesses and startups in media and ethical journalism and to support them in their battles against the quasi-monopolies of Facebook and Google, which have cornered the lions' share of the advertising revenue that once financed press pluralism. We need a communications environment that is still able to convey our policy positions, while fostering the human capacity to absorb knowledge and engage in dialogue about it, rather than allowing that capacity to atrophy. Furthermore, we should support both the classical »quality press« and public broadcasting as two of the cornerstones of democracy.

7. The digital media's »dumbing-down« of political discourse, so inconsistent with the idea of enlightenment, mirrors the dumbing-down campaigns of populists. They reinforce and outdo each other in the radical yet crude and unsophisticated tone of their messages. Just now we are seeing how Donald Trump fails to solve the world's problems or offer reasonable global policies because he relies on simplistic slogans (»America First«) and 140-character tweets (now 280 characters). For the future of democracy and social democracy, it is essential that we form a loud and critical chorus pointing out the failures of Trump and the conservative Brexiteers: the main power players of the new populism. There is no better learning experience than the spectacle of populism failing in the real world.

8. We wish to oppose the fragmentation of the party landscape into radicalized mini-parties focused on just a few issues. As an alternative, we propose a new

approach that would emphasize the coherence and credibility of a comprehensive policy package offered by a catch-all party guided by the idea of the common good. In fact, a great deal of the complexity of our new world, and thus of politics in that world, arises from the fact that so many things are connected to so many other things. Digitalization furnishes an example of a higher-order political task that demands an exceptional degree of coordination among many specific measures and that extends into every specialized niche of policymaking. The most crucial credibility advantage held by a catch-all party vis-à-vis the narrower programs offered by small, special-interest-oriented parties is to be found in the make-up of that comprehensive package and its commitment to the common good. Although the smaller parties may stress their narrow objectives, they won't be able to enact them into law or even guarantee the consistency of their policies taken as a whole. We, as a catch-all party, must assume responsibility for the whole range of policies, not just special interests. The closeness of fit among our values and their long-range political vision are our principal strengths. We should build on them.

A party of values and world-views

9. Traditionally, the SPD has been identified with consistent efforts to work for a program that has been broad-based and designed to achieve long-range objectives. That long-term focus also has helped to raise the standards of our members, which in turn has made the party more attractive. We again should invest more of our energies into work in behalf of our program since it enhances the quality of both our membership and the policies we offer. To accomplish that task, we need to close ranks with today's technical intelligentsia. But we will win over the acolytes of the new digital technology to our side only if we are consistent in completing the transition from class party to a party of values and world-views. This is so because many people from that milieu think of themselves as entrepreneurs and work for free or in startups. Even when they are stuck in precarious, short-term work situations, they do not see themselves as a part of the workforce traditionally represented by the SPD. Anyone who shares our values is welcome! In this context it is unimportant whether a person chooses to join because of his or her own economic or personal situation, or whether that person's convictions come from religious or political doctrines, personal ethics, or a moral code. The reasons why people come to social democracy are and will remain highly diverse.

10. The classical doctrines of social democratic policy on the relationship between the market and the state (»as much market as possible, as much state as necessary«) need to be supplemented by a new theory on how to deal with digital power. In global digital capitalism, a few entrepreneurs combine three core elements of power in their hands: formidable economic clout, a tightening stranglehold on the press and forums of public discourse, and a terrifyingly detailed knowledge of our individual habits that may have the effect of provoking self-censorship in our own behavior (»chilling effects«). As a champion of freedom and civil liberties, and the party that advocates limitations on private and state power in favor of freedom and democracy, the Social Democratic Party must develop new theories and action

plans to gain competence and credibility in this area, which has become such a vital part of globalization. In the process, let us not forget that, when global corporations gain access to personal data, such knowledge represents a tremendous redistribution of wealth; hence, limiting digital power is also part of the effort to achieve social justice.

11. To establish the credibility of the Social Democratic Party as a problem-solver for Germany and Europe, we should enhance trans-border cooperation in working to enact the party's program and in electoral campaigns. Nobody believes anymore that the challenges posed by digital power, migration, financial markets, or war and peace in the world can still be solved by the nation-state. Instead of the tentative and sometimes defensive posture toward Europe exemplified by parties such as Labour in Great Britain, we should encourage a more pro-active, practical cooperation in programmatic work among social democratic parties and within the Social Democratic Party of Europe (SPE). Such cooperation should be based on a reform of the European party structures and trans-border organs of intra-party communication and decision-making. The SPD will not be able to reinvent itself in a Europe where social democracy in other member countries either is disappearing or seems lukewarm toward the Union. Thus, it is both right and important for the SPD to assume responsibility for – and help think through – both its own renewal process and the renovation of social democracy in Europe generally.

(This article reflects the author's personal opinion.)



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Maria João Rodrigues

A European Pillar of Social Rights

Since the 19th century, and especially after World War II, Europe developed the most advanced social model in world history. Objectives such as decent working conditions, comprehensive social protection, and reasonably good public services for a large part of the population have been achieved. The European social model has boosted Europe's competitiveness and stimulated important productivity gains, based on a healthy and skilled workforce with enough purchasing power to sustain a sophisticated internal market.

Enlargements of the EU have enabled an upgrading of the newly joined member states' social standards and supported gradual upward economic convergence, partly through EU structural and cohesion funds. The European social model has been an important factor in the success story of European integration, which has brought several decades of peace, security, and widely-shared prosperity. Welfare-

state institutions and social dialogue also have helped this continent weather the global recession that began in 2008/09.

Since about 2010, the social dimension of European integration has suffered a heavy blow from the protracted Eurozone crisis. Nearly two trillion euros of taxpayers' money were spent in state aid to the financial sector between 2008 and 2014, triggering a debt crunch for several member states. At the same time, many member states were forced to implement harsh fiscal consolidation and internal devaluation measures, largely due to the lack of common stabilization mechanisms within Europe's incomplete Economic and Monetary Union. These policies resulted in severe social hardship that is still acute in many countries.

As a result of these austerity policies, the EU itself has come to be seen by many citizens as a machine for divergence, inequality, and social injustice. A project associated for decades with convergence, prosperity and progress now is being blamed for the downgrading of welfare systems and is regarded as a threat to people's well-being. Waves of populism and euroskepticism and a decrease of support for the socialist and social-democratic parties across the continent have ensued.

Demographic change, technology, globalization and social inequalities

At the same time, Europe is confronted by a number of well-known structural trends and challenges such as globalization, demographic changes, climate change and natural resource constraints, as well as the consequences of the digital revolution, which deeply affect the functioning of labor markets.

These are the basic problems to be addressed in defining a European Pillar of Social Rights and seeking to update the European social model for the 21st century. We need our welfare state structures to cope with demographic change, technology, globalization, and a significant recent increase in social inequalities. At the same time we need to overcome the damage wrought by the long recession. We need to strengthen »Social Europe« significantly as well as improve economic policymaking and redesign the Economic and Monetary Union.

To meet this challenge and respond to citizens' expectations, it is vital to recognize that the state has an indispensable role to play in shaping markets and managing social risks. The state does so through regulation, income redistribution, and provision of (or support to) collective social insurance schemes, social assistance programs, public services, and services of general interest. The EU once again must become a supportive force in this respect, strengthening its member states and helping them to promote the European social model in a global context. It likewise must resume its role as a facilitator of serious social dialogue between companies and workers, helping to ensure fair sharing of incomes and risks even in markets shaped by digitalization and global competition.

Of course, the European social model displays many national variations, and each country has its own specific arrangements, in line with historical developments and the principle of subsidiarity. However, in the face of globalization and technological change, EU member states are highly interdependent (especially given the bond of a common currency), and they can deliver broadly-shared prosperity to

their citizens only by working together. Without a common European framework, member states are bound to be trapped in destructive competition based on a race-to-the-bottom in social standards. The European social model is therefore a shared project, whose central objective is *upward social convergence*: a sustained improvement in well-being for all people in all EU countries, based on sustainable and inclusive economic growth and on measures ensuring that no individual or country is left behind, and that each person will have a chance to participate in shaping the society and economy.

Upward social convergence can be achieved only through collective action by member states. Toward that end, the EU already has enacted a body of legislation regulating labor, product, and service markets and put in place policy coordination mechanisms and relevant financial instruments. The *acquis* applies to all member states, and fundamental social rights apply to all people in the EU; therefore the process of updating social standards through the European Pillar of Social Rights also should involve all EU member states. For this to happen, it is necessary to overcome conservative resistance put up by some of those countries. The discussions about the European Pillar of Social Rights have revealed a deeply divided continent: a conservative Europe that is content with social standards as they are and does not want the EU to move forward, and a progressive Europe that wants to upgrade social rights for all citizens in light of globalization, digitalization, and immigration.

That said, it is clear that, with its present macroeconomic framework, the Eurozone faces certain obstacles that stand in the way of achieving the employment and other social objectives set out in the Treaties. The loss of several national economic instruments due to Eurozone membership has created pressure for tougher and swifter internal adjustment, such as through wages, working conditions, unemployment, and the rollback of social expenditures. Restoring adequate socio-economic security to compensate for this increased flexibility within the euro area therefore requires introducing specific social targets, standards, and/or financial instruments.

Citizens certainly want to keep the European way of life and want to be able to have confidence in Europe's sustainable development, enabling well-being for present and future generations. This means that the EU and its Member States need to:

- prepare and empower people in terms of knowledge, skills, time, and space for meaningful economic participation;
- conduct an economic policy that helps to create high-quality jobs with decent working conditions and enables people to achieve economic security and self-fulfillment;
- protect people against social risks arising over their lifecycles;
- reduce the current high level of social inequalities; and
- encourage citizens' active participation. The welfare state needs to be understandable and accessible, enabling people to feel a sense of ownership and offering sufficiently open structures of social dialogue and democratic politics.

The ideas and energy of young people will be particularly important for updating and innovating welfare state structures and ensuring broadly-shared prosperity. The so-called millennials are probably the best-educated generation Europe has ever had, but they face much longer and more precarious transitions from school to work

than previous generations, which is eviscerating a great deal of their potential. We need to prevent this by better organizing their economic, social, and political inclusion. All these challenges require changes in the toolbox available to the European social model.

The concept of »social investment« can help to guide this evolution, based on the insight that prevention and early intervention are cheaper than ex post facto cures of social ills. Social investment consists of public (support for the) provision of services that enable all people to participate in the economy and society over their entire lives, e.g. through high-quality childcare, education, lifelong learning, health care, active labor market policies, social insurance, minimum income schemes, and programs to eradicate digital illiteracy. Social investment is mainly the responsibility of the public sector, but it also can be delivered effectively by social economy enterprises and other actors in the »third sector.«

Europe also will need to redesign its labor laws and social insurance schemes to ensure decent, fair working conditions and social protection for all types of workers. Demand for labor is becoming – and will likely remain – more fluid and diversified, which in some cases can be beneficial for productivity and the work-life balance. However, »atypical« employment often can involve prolonged economic insecurity and precariousness, and those are flaws that the public sector needs to address.

Fair distribution of economic value

Furthermore, changes will be required on the revenue side of our welfare states, which currently rely on four main mechanisms for fair distribution of economic value:

- capital-labor negotiations on the distribution of gross income, including through collective bargaining, underpinned by minimum wages and other state-supported mechanisms;
- social insurance schemes, framed by legislation and built up with contributions from workers, employers and the state;
- taxation and public spending; and
- regulation of the international financial system and the battle against tax avoidance.

All four of these mechanisms are indispensable for ensuring welfare state sustainability and an adequate level of public investment. However, it will be necessary in the future to rely less on labor-based contributions and more on general taxation, financial regulation, and a dogged struggle against tax avoidance. Accumulation of social insurance entitlements through one's job is an important aspect of decent work, as it motivates workers and contributes more to longer-term economic and social stability than means-tested benefits or an unconditional basic income scheme would do. However, today's high level of inequality, the rise of »atypical« employment, and the increasing capital intensity of economic production suggest a need to reduce the tax wedge on labor (including social security contributions) and to co-finance social insurance schemes more from other sources (e.g. taxes on capital gains, wealth, or pollution) in order to provide an adequate level of social protection for all.

European economic governance ought to be rebalanced further, with greater consideration of social indicators in economic policymaking. As for the Eurozone, a new virtuous cycle should be started with higher investment leading to the creation of high-quality jobs, giving people economic security and contributing to higher aggregate demand and additional investment. Higher employment and greater social protection coverage also would increase the amount of revenue collected, improving welfare state sustainability. The euro finally should become an engine for upward convergence.

After very difficult negotiations, the European Parliament, European Commission, and the Council have reached an agreement on a text for the proclamation of a European Pillar of Social Rights which is composed of 20 Principles. Together, these principles represent a step forward towards a fairer Europe. But it was no easy task to forge the agreement. I have been involved in these negotiations as European Parliament Representative, and I had to fight until the end, against the resistance of several conservative governments and members of the Parliament, for a Pillar that ensures concrete results.

Principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights

The 20 Principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights which were proclaimed at the Social Summit in Gothenburg on November 17, clearly bring an added value to the existing *acquis*, updating social standards for several target groups. These include:

- 1) Atypical workers: the Pillar guarantees the right to equal treatment and access to social protection to all workers, regardless of their type of work contract;
- 2) Unskilled workers: the Pillar sets out a general right to education and training throughout life;
- 3) People with low incomes: the Pillar sets out a right for everyone who lacks sufficient resources to access minimum income benefits;
- 4) People in need of Long Term Care. The Pillar affirms for the first time at the Union level the right to long-term care services for persons who are reliant on care;
- 5) Parents and people who have the responsibility of caring for others. Parents and people with care responsibilities have the right to suitable leave, flexible working arrangements, and access to care services. The Pillar goes beyond the current *acquis* by providing rights for all people in employment who must care for others. Hence, it also will apply to people in employment who are not parents but who may, for example, care for elderly or disabled family members.

In addition, the European Pillar of Social Rights should envisage a better use of the EU's foreign policies for the realization of social rights in Europe and the achievement of the U.N.'s Sustainable Development Goals. Europe has a clear strategic interest in stronger social dialogue, implementation of International Labor Organizations Conventions and Recommendations, and improvements in social protection schemes and social services worldwide. Therefore, it should pursue these interests through its trade agreements, strategic partnerships, development policies, neighborhood policy, and the European Agenda on Migration.

To conclude, the European Pillar of Social Rights is an important and urgent initiative, which the European Commission and European Parliament rightly have put at the top of their list of political priorities. But this project and the idea of »Social Europe« cannot be confined to a small group of EU specialists. Social Europe is lived by all persons through the rights they have at work, the social services they can access, the social investments they receive, the policies that influence their economic prospects, and the social protection on which they can rely when something goes awry in their lives.

Social Europe is and must be for everyone, bringing tangible improvements to people's lives. The strength of the EPSR therefore ought to disperse throughout the entire multi-level structure of the EU, including municipal, regional, and national governments and their cooperation with companies, trade unions, and civil society.

We need to push harder for a social action plan with concrete measures, for which we ought to bring on board conservative member states, including Germany. That is the only way we can regain the confidence of European citizens: planning and carrying out concrete actions that can improve their living conditions!



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