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As election eve in the United States approached, scarcely anybody in Europe thought it possible that someone like Donald Trump ever really could be elected president in the world's one-time model democracy, the »city on a hill« looked up to by the entire globe, at least where human rights and democracy are concerned. After all, we thought, Trump is a person who erratically flouts all the rules of civilized politics, a friend of lies, insults, racism, and even torture. His personnel choices, announced well before he is scheduled to take office, confirm expectations that – bland assurances to the contrary notwithstanding – things will not simply turn out as badly as feared. They will be worse. The United States, that former beacon of human dignity and democracy, is now sending out very different signals: that civilized politics will be discarded and democratic accountability ignored, while the commitment to truth and respect for the other will be cast aside. What impact will all this have on the rest of the world? Will populist agitators lurking in the wings and awaiting their big chance, especially those recently active in Europe, be encouraged to launch authoritarian power grabs and instill in their voter base new enthusiasm for dangerous experiments?



It is true that the reasons for Trump's victory – inequality, insecurity, a feeling of having been left behind by economic progress and ignored or scorned by the elites – have taken roots in many different societies. In the worst case scenario, the American elections could trigger a change of mood: Rage might now be expressed in desperate deeds rather than quiet resignation, thereby normalizing certain emotions such as unalloyed anger, contempt, and uncontrolled hatred. They could become, as it were, the new laws of politics. As we know, outrage can be a motive for refusing to accept repression and injustice any longer. Yet rage and hatred are not reliable guideposts on the way toward overcoming the ills that, over the past couple of decades, threaten to become the »new normal« even in some of the world's wealthier societies. After going through decades of »cowboy globalization,« are we now going to experience the onset of an equally disorderly popular backlash from below? If so, it might feature growing support for identity politics, isolation, discrimination, and the quest for national autarky. And, to make all that happen, should we expect to see a resurgence of authoritarianism? There is much evidence to support such a prognosis, from the USA and Europe to Turkey and Russia. These are all areas in which the Western civilizational consensus prevailed until recently, or was at least a major point of orientation. If that is the case, then it is time to marshal and mobilize our forces wherever such danger threatens, in order to defend human dignity, democracy, equality, and global cooperation.

Thomas Meyer

Thomas Meyer
Editor-in-Chief and Co-Publisher

Simone Reperger

Uruguay: A Laboratory for Social Democratic Policies

Over the last ten years Uruguay has become a laboratory for progressive policy-making in several fields. For anyone who has been thinking about how to reinvent and streamline social democratic policy in the era of globalization, it is worth taking a look at this small Latin American country.

As the country's former president, José »Pepe« Mujica, so often emphasizes, »the origins of social democracy are to be found in Uruguay.« He governed this nation of only 3.5 million inhabitants and 176,00 square km until 2015. Today he is a senator and political star celebrated worldwide for his remarkable political legacy and modest life style. The ex-horticulturist and guerilla fighter donates 90 % of his salary to good causes and continues to live on his small farm outside Montevideo. But what makes him so interesting is not only his closeness to the soil and citizenry, but even more the political achievements chalked up by his governing party coalition, the Frente Amplio.

In 2004, for the first time in the country's history, a center-left coalition known as the Frente Amplio (Broad Front) consisting of around 40 parties and social movements, seized the reins of power. From the very outset the Frente swam against the current of today's neoliberal orthodoxy. Within a remarkably short time this coalition helped transform what had been a crisis-plagued country into an attractive location for both employees and employers. And it did so after experiencing many of the same economic problems that Europe is facing today: financial and economic woes, austerity, and deregulation. However, the Frente Amplio government did not follow the recommendation of organizations like the International Monetary Fund or World Bank, both of which advocated a further liberalization of markets, free trade agreements, and austerity measures to surmount the crisis.

Instead, Uruguay adopted a different paradigm that managed to initiate a rapid and sustainable social recovery. It took advantage of an economic tailwind – as an exporter of primary products, the country profited from the high world market prices for its crops until 2014 – to embrace a holistic conception of reform that cut across many policy areas. One crucial aspect of that reform scheme was an active labor market policy, implemented through 35 new laws. It occasioned a shift in the balance of power between the recently empowered role of the state and the hitherto dominant market. In this way, broad sectors of the population were enabled to share in reinvigorated economic growth. In its Global Rights Index for 2014, the ILO classified Uruguay, alongside Denmark, as one of the »countries with the highest labor standards« in the world. This is proof of its success. The country also has succeeded in modernizing its labor relations. There have been improvements in both the quantity and quality of jobs. Today, the unemployment rate sits at a historic low of 7 % while per capita GDP has taken a significant leap forward to 18,970 US dollars a year. These policies cashed in a campaign promise: that the populace would be compensated for the losses it suffered during the crisis of 2001-2002.

An active minimum wage policy, the struggle against the shadow economy, and strengthened collective bargaining laws are widely seen as the keys to this success. The

foundations for the latter were laid as early as 1943 with the establishment of so-called wage councils. These tripartite organs, consisting of labor unions, entrepreneurs, and government, were charged with negotiating regularly about standard wage rates and working conditions. The wage councils were suspended in the 1970s in the context of deregulation and flexibility policies. It was not until the left-wing democratic head of state Tabaré Vázquez took office in 2005 that the system was revived. In this manner, the state returned to the arena of industrial relations after a neoliberal intermezzo in the 1990s, a move that strengthened union interest groups and institutions. Since that time the wage councils have been negotiating wage increases every six months on behalf of some 20 professional groups. They have managed to secure wage agreements for about 90 % of wage-earning employees. This level of coverage is exceedingly high for South America, and not only for that continent. Major waves of strikes and protracted labor conflicts generally have been avoided, which in turn has helped make Uruguay more attractive from an economic standpoint. As a result, the wage councils have earned a reputation for being successful mediators, using an extremely effective instrument: the social dialogue. Since the councils were revived, real wages have risen by around 40 %. This achievement moves the wage councils a giant step closer toward their ultimate goal: making sure that employees gain a fair share of a company's profits. The multi-dimensionality of this system is worthy of note. Besides handling classic wage negotiations, the tripartite organ is also responsible for issues involving the improvement of labor standards. It is consulted about everything from gender equality, safety and health in the workplace, and the maximum number of hours in the work week to vocational training and continuing education. Thus, the government is attempting to improve every facet of the quality of work. Although critics feared that these programs would have a negative impact on productivity, that is not what happened. Instead, there have been productivity gains in Uruguay over the last few years.

When work is enhanced, social cohesion is reinforced, because labor is the key factor that decides whether a person will be excluded from or included in society. Both European and Latin American societies are confronting the same problem: social inequality is reproduced generation after generation. The single most effective strategy for breaking that generational chain is to bring about full equality of opportunity in the world of work. Social mobility is achieved only when children's occupational opportunities no longer depend on what their parents did for a living. We cannot allow precarious work or work in the shadow economy to be passed down from one generation to the next.

That is the reason why the Frente Amplio has tried to enhance equality of opportunity by combating the shadow economy and pursuing an active minimum wage policy. There are laws in almost every Latin American country that prescribe a minimum income threshold. Nevertheless, there are major differences among those countries in the level of the minimum and their willingness to enforce it. In some countries, such as Mexico, the minimum wage is essentially meaningless both because it is set so low and because little effort is made to enforce it. By contrast, in Brazil it represents a successful instrument for regulating the labor market and combating poverty. Today, Uruguay is one of the countries with an especially positive experience

in this area. Every year the government issues a decree stating how high the minimum wage for employees must be. According to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (CEPAL), the real value of the minimum wage increased by around 60 % between 2006 and 2011. The wage standard was enforced by wage inspectors, tough sanctions against violators, and a bond posted by employers. What makes the program so effective in alleviating poverty is the fact that it is not regarded as a stand-alone political measure, but is embedded in a set of broader social programs. Recipients usually also receive basic social insurance plus food stamps for themselves and their family members. The purchasing power of lower income groups has also risen as a result of these measures, a trend that strengthens the domestic market and increases the state's revenues. The gross domestic product (GDP) recently has grown by 5.4 % a year. The Uruguayan example shows that stronger workers' rights can go hand in hand with economic growth. Citizens who have been marginalized and shunted aside for decades have been given a second chance.

The Frente Amplio aims to reinforce social cohesion in other policy areas as well. They quickly implemented free basic health care, a legally mandated old-age pension system, and progressive taxation of income and capital gains. The result speaks for itself: the share of the richest 10 % in national income in Uruguay dwindled from 34 % to 31 %. For the first time in the country's history the gap between rich and poor began to narrow. The GINI coefficient, a key measure of social equality, improved from 0.47 in 2004 to 0.38 in 2014. Neither Latin America nor the Caribbean has ever witnessed anything like this turnaround in the trajectory of social inequality. Uruguay's success in development policy is attested not only by objective economic and social indicators, but also by the citizens' subjective perceptions. Here, approval of democracy is the highest in Latin America. Parties and labor unions are recognized actors, and political cynicism is lower than it is in many of the European Union's member-states. Nor has the Frente Amplio shied away from taking on multinational corporations and their interests when the health of its citizens is at stake. In 2016 it toughened tobacco laws, forbade smoking in restaurants and public places, increased cigarette prices. In addition, packs of cigarettes now must bear labels in large letters carrying dire warnings.

The Philip Morris Company sued the government over these rules, choosing as a venue the International Centre for the Settlement of Investment Disputes, a private arbitration service affiliated with the World Bank. Because the company believed its investment in Uruguay had not been protected and its interests in profit-making had been infringed, it sued for damages in the initial amount of two billion US dollars, around one-sixth of Uruguay's national budget. In the end, the plaintiff in the lawsuit reduced its demands to 25 million dollars in damages. The international press saw little chance that the country would prevail, yet surprisingly, in July of 2016, Uruguay was vindicated. The current president, Vázquez, stressed that »the fundamental right to life and health thus has been ranked above commercial interests.«

This case is also interesting in connection with the free trade agreement abbreviated as CETA (recently approved between Canada and the EU) and the TTIP (still being negotiated between the EU and the USA), since the role of private arbitrators has been a sticking point in the trade pact negotiations. Critics fear that precedents

will be set if corporations can use those services to rid themselves of unwelcome laws in countries where they do business – a strategy that now has failed in Uruguay’s case.

But the center-left government has been vindicated not only by this controversial court, but also by academic studies. Since laws were toughened, the percentage of smokers in Uruguay’s population has fallen from 40 % to just 23 %. Only 13 % of 12-17 year-olds now smoke, versus a previous figure of 33 %.

Not only has the substance of politics (policy) been successful in Uruguay, at least from a social democratic point of view; political processes (politics) and political institutions and procedures (polity) have also worked well. Another secret of the Frente Amplio’s success has been its remarkable capacity to forge coalitions. The multi-party coalition seeks to remain close to the citizens and be sensitive to shifting interests within society. It continues to regard itself as a corrective, as the mouthpiece of social developments, and as a source of inspiration and ideas for the government, albeit a critical one. In this respect it continues to perform the paramount task that parties in a democracy ought to undertake. Even when assuming the responsibilities of governing, it has never lost sight of its ties to society.

Dialogue between the left-wing parties and social movements, unions, and grassroots organizations works in Uruguay. The FA seeks alliances, but does not want to co-opt its partners. The affiliated social actors appreciate that. Many organizations continue to feel represented by the FA and believe that it speaks for them. Thus, the FA’s term in office is also »their« project. Compared with other left-wing parties around the world, the FA appears to be a fortunate exception. The left-wing bloc is still highly innovative in developing its programs, and it quickly seizes upon new issues. Its toolkit includes such practices as holding participatory budget-making sessions and citizens’ congresses, encouraging an open culture of dialogue and devising modern forms of party membership. These new forms of participation help to heighten political awareness and engagement throughout society. Many Uruguayans have become aware of their own rights and voice, and today defend their own interests to a greater degree than they did before the first center-left government took office. For example, when Mujica was still the president, demands for new civil rights such as the right to abortion, same-sex marriage, and a progressive drug policy quickly got transformed into specific reform schemes. Uruguayan society is on the move and politics is along for the ride.

It is also certainly worth noting that in this tiny laboratory for social democratic politics, the commitment of Uruguay’s left to democracy is not merely tactical. In contrast to other countries in the region, it resists the temptation to misuse political structures and processes to maintain its grip on power and refuses to vitiate democratic procedures. The juridical order, justice, and law are respected. The separation of powers works. According to Transparency International’s 2015 corruption index, Uruguay is the »cleanest« country in the Latin American region. In the global rankings, it stands at about the same level as countries such as France. Neighboring countries have had their share of major, systemic corruption scandals. In Brazil and Chile these have involved illegal campaign contributions and party finances. In Argentina, both President Néstor Kirchner and his wife, President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner,

have been accused of questionable dealings in which they used their offices to enrich themselves. In Uruguay such scandals are rather uncommon.

Both leftist presidents from the Frente Amplio are trying or have tried with some success to combine markets with social democratic redistribution. As José Mujica declared during the 2009 electoral campaign, «We are not against the rich, but the wealth must be shared.» That attitude helps explain why Uruguay today has the highest quality of life and approval ratings for democracy of any country in the region. It came as a great surprise to the modest Uruguayans that their land, of all places, was selected in 2013 as the country of the year by the neoliberal British magazine, the *Economist*. In short, not only are the origins of social democracy to be sought in Uruguay; the future of innovative social democratic policy-making may be found there as well.

Of course, all that glitters is not gold, even on the Rio de la Plata, and in Uruguay, too, the future is uncertain. Trends in the global economy as well as the behavior of its two neighbors, Brazil and Argentina, limit the leeway and scope for action that the Frente Amplio will enjoy. Despite all its efforts Uruguay still displays all the characteristics of an economy that relies on the export of primary products. Hence, it is highly vulnerable to external shocks and oscillations in prices on the global market. Its reinvention as a knowledge- and service-based society is proceeding at a snail's pace. It is unclear whether previous modifications in economic policy will suffice to launch a durable and positive transition toward a more highly diversified economic structure.

But there is another shortcoming that should not be underestimated: the Frente Amplio's political project has entered its twilight years. The coalition desperately needs a generational turnover. Both the political star Mujica and his successor Vázquez have long since reached retirement age, while the current Uruguayan cabinet is thought to be the oldest in the world. In Uruguay they say that no one under 60 can hope to have a political career. The left should abandon this tradition. It is now time to let the younger generation have a chance to shape the future of their country.



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The Politics of Equality

The 21st century threatens to become a century of inequality. Everywhere in the world the wealthy are getting richer while the poor fall deeper into poverty. 62 super-rich individuals today hold as much wealth as the poorer half of the world's population. South Africa is the most unequal country, followed by Colombia, Brazil, and China. Among the members of the club of industrialized countries (the OECD), Turkey, Chile, Mexico, and the USA display the greatest disparities of wealth and income.

Income inequality has increased in almost all countries during the last 30 years. In fact, the gap between poor and rich has widened in both good times and bad. In many places income differentials by now have reached record levels. In the industrialized countries, the share of real household income going to the top ten percent is now ten times greater than that accruing to the bottom ten percent. In the 70s the ratio stood at only 7:1.

Increasing inequality has been driven mainly by rising incomes among the top earners. Until the global financial crisis hit in 2007, the real household income of the richest 10% had been rising faster than that of the poorest 10%. In the wake of that financial crisis, the upward trend of top incomes slowed down for a while, only to accelerate again once it had passed.

Wealth is even more unequally distributed than income. Moreover, disparities in this area have been growing more rapidly in the last three decades than have income differentials. The chief cause of this trend has been the protracted boom in the securities and real estate markets. In the industrialized countries today, the richest 1% own nearly a fifth of all the wealth and the richest 10% command over half of it. Such rising inequality is socially harmful. Greater inequality damages health, reduces educational opportunities, leads to increases in crime, and lowers levels of social mobility. Finally, more inequality is bad for the economy. The OECD estimates that, between 1990 and 2010, the industrialized countries lost fully five percentage points of growth due to increased inequality. According to the same organization, one reason for this is that low-income people are unable to spend more on education. Consequently, unequal economies fail to take full advantage of much of their growth potential. Furthermore, the unequal distribution of income restricts purchasing power. But then if cash-strapped consumers decide to buy on credit, the economy becomes more susceptible to crises, as the crash of financial markets recently demonstrated in such an impressive fashion.

What is behind increased inequality?

There is considerable controversy over the reasons for the comeback of inequality. From the point of view of liberal economics, ongoing divisions within society are the inevitable result of an economic shift: Technical advances and globalization allegedly have stimulated growing demand for skilled workers, whose incomes have risen as a result. At the same time less skilled employees have had a hard time finding any jobs at all, and their incomes have fallen. But when one considers actual practices, this is not a satisfactory explanation. Although all industrialized countries have been affected in equal measure by globalization and progress, inequality has not increased at the same rate in every country.

There is no question that a more extensive international division of labor has enhanced the negotiating position and assertiveness of management and the owners of capital. At the same time, the dominance of financial markets has ratcheted up the pressure to boost profits and intensified redistribution in favor of the top earners. Also, it is impossible to deny that a massive restructuring of the world of work has taken place in the digital age. Yet political decisions continue to shape the ways in

which this transformation of economic structures affects the distribution of wealth.

Politics makes all the difference. The set of rules governing the institutions of the labor market is of crucial importance in this context. They determine how the income pie will be sliced. Moreover, the level of wages and salaries depends greatly on the negotiating power and assertiveness of workers and their unions. In turn, their negotiating position is determined by the state of the economy, the employment picture, the labor market, and the influence of state-sponsored social welfare programs.

At bottom, the most recent rise in inequality can be traced back to two interrelated trends: Labor is not valued as highly in political circles as it once was, and no longer takes place within a well-defined legal and conceptual framework. Wage levels for irregular, hard-to-categorize work are, on average, a fifth lower than the compensation paid for regular employment. The erosion of regular employment relationships has undermined the collective bargaining system and weakened unions. Since the beginning of the 90s, collective bargaining coverage in industrialized countries has declined by ten percent. At the same time, wage-setting has been shifted aggressively to the level of the individual plant. Employees with insecure labor contracts and in new service sectors are much harder to organize. Consequently, unions have lost many members and their rate of organization has fallen.

The weakened negotiating position of the unions has had considerable fallout for the primary distribution of income. Wage ratios – the share of wages and salaries in national income – have plummeted. Simultaneously, a disparity has opened up in market incomes as well. The shift of available labor toward precarious circumstances does nothing to bolster the market power of employees. That is one reason why inequality in 21st century capitalism is on the rise despite increasing employment.

As if that were not enough, labor unions have also lost much of their political influence. As a result they have been unable to stop cutbacks in unemployment compensation, health care payments, and pensions, nor have they been able to prevent the large-scale awarding of tax breaks to the rich, e.g., on inheritance of a company's assets. The neoliberal dismantling and reconstruction of the social welfare state is responsible for the fact that the tax and transfer system in most industrialized countries has not kept pace with the challenges posed by increasing inequality.

More equality is possible

As is well known, inequality has not risen everywhere in the world. A few intrepid countries have learned to defy the neoliberal *Zeitgeist*. By pursuing different policies they have managed to achieve a higher degree of distributive justice.

For example, in the recent past Uruguay has gained international recognition for reducing inequality. Ten years ago, while the country was going through its worst-ever recession, the center-left alliance Frente Amplio won national elections and repeated that feat twice more.

To begin with, the new government under the leadership of Tabaré Vázquez reformed the labor market. The establishment of wage councils reinvigorated collective bargaining. The wage councils bring together representatives of labor unions, employers' associations, and the state. Together they decide on official wage rates and set

minimum standards for working conditions. Many Uruguayans who had previously worked in the informal sector were included in the collective bargaining sessions. Today Uruguay has Latin America's smallest informal employment sector. Furthermore, the expansion of collective rights facilitated union activity in and outside of plants.

Minimum wage policy constituted another cornerstone of labor market reform. The real minimum wage rose by 60 % between 2006 and 2011. Labor inspectors, tough sanctions, and a broad contractor's firm liability insured that the minimum wage would be respected. In addition, the center-left government raised unemployment compensation rates.

The policy of upgrading labor strengthened the unions, the number of whose members has quadrupled over the last ten years. And, because of the new balance of power in the labor market, real wages have increased by 40 %. Reinvigorated domestic demand stimulated the economy. To be sure, this powerful economic growth owed much to the boom in raw materials markets. However, the fairer distribution of the benefits of growth also produced better results. In this improved economic environment business enterprises and the state both created new jobs. The number of jobs covered by social insurance rose by more than 50 %. At the same time the jobless rate fell from 20 % to 7 %. The favorable economic trend made it possible to finance extensive social reforms. The Frente Amplio successfully combated extreme poverty through social programs. What is more, it introduced free primary health care services while also investing a great deal of money in education. Finally, the legally mandated pension system was bolstered while progressive taxes on income and capital were levied.

In short, political actors desired to reduce inequality and they did so by adjusting the primary and secondary distribution of income. The key to achieving greater distributive justice in Latin America's oldest democracy was to restructure the labor market.

Consider the example of Brazil as well. In 2002 Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, a union man and member of the Workers' Party (PT), was elected president in Latin America's largest economy. He was succeeded in 2010 by his fellow PT member Dilma Rousseff. After Lula took the reins of government, the real minimum wage rose by 70 %. Regular employment replaced informal work. The proportion of regular jobs in the total employment picture increased from 45 to 60 %. Two out of every three Brazilian employees were brought under the protection of collective wage agreements.

Just as in Uruguay the labor unions' enhanced negotiating position led to rising real wages. The boost in purchasing power reinvigorated the entire economy and brought greater prosperity with it. Under the center-left governments GDP increased at a rate of 3.5 % a year. At the same time around 20 million new jobs were created. The unemployment rate fell to the lowest level in history.

During these »golden years« the Lula government combated extreme poverty through social transfers with strings attached. 50 million Brazilians were the recipients of social welfare benefits. Meanwhile, the government was investing on a grand scale in education, health, and the construction of subsidized housing. Rural areas got electricity and family farming was supported. Social welfare policies such as these made it possible for 35 million Brazilians to move up from poverty into the middle class. The poverty rate fell from 25 % to 7 %.

Brazil's center-left government narrowed the gap between rich and poor. During the previous decade the income of the poor – the bottom 10 % – increased by four times as much as that of the top 10 %. Today, a continuation of this kind of social progress has been rendered more difficult by many factors, including a political changing of the guard, a demanding middle class, a combative upper class, and less room for maneuver when it comes to issues of distribution. But none of that affects the record of political success chalked up by the PT-led government.

It is always easy to learn from one's neighbors. South America is not Europe. Developing countries are not industrialized countries, and labor market institutions always have their own national histories. Nevertheless, the redistributive accomplishments of the center-left governments in Latin America show one thing clearly in spite of all social, economic, and cultural differences: The best antidote to inequality is strong unions plus a regulatory regime for the labor market that favors employees. A policy that promotes greater equality requires a broad alliance of progressive parties, labor unions, and social movements. Only by cooperating can employees improve their negotiating position and show more assertiveness. As everyone knows, efforts in that direction have gone awry here at home. But for some time now the Social Democratic Party has tried again to improve its ties to the unions. The adoption of a legal minimum wage, pensions at 63, and making collective wage agreements easier to apply industry-wide were important confidence-building measures. However, given the limitations set by the Grand Coalition, it was not possible to undertake any more far-reaching correctives.

Of course, simply because we focus on labor market institutions as the main arena for combating inequality does not mean that other policy areas can be neglected. Policies involving taxation, social welfare, health care, and education all exert a powerful influence upon the distribution of opportunities. Even weakened social welfare states still correct inequality to a considerable extent. Moreover, welfare states influence the balance of power in the labor market both directly and indirectly.

So all over Germany an equality-oriented policy should concentrate initially on re-configuring the labor market. There are other items on the agenda as well: continuing to strengthen the system of negotiated wage-setting, raising the minimum wage, mini-jobs, addressing unequal pay for temporary work and replacing involuntary part-time work and contracts for service with regular employment. In addition, co-determination ought to be expanded. Finally, the pressure to take on paid employment should be relieved by making some changes in the Hartz laws. There are other important demands that would affect the politics of distribution as well, including the expansion of the social welfare state, more education for all, a poverty-proof pension system that would insure a decent standard of living for recipients, and heavier taxation of the rich, etc. But the chances of seeing any of these measures adopted will be remote until labor unions have gone on the offensive.



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A Conversation with Ralf Stegner

»The Social Democratic Vision Is More Relevant Than Ever«

The Social Democratic Party of Schleswig-Holstein has laid out its views clearly in the »Ten Theses on a Just Society« and a position paper entitled »Let's Take a Chance on More Justice.« In a talk with Thomas Meyer, Ralf Stegner, the SPD party chair in Schleswig-Holstein and deputy federal chair of the party, explains what its weak points are, what approaches might lead the party out of its current doldrums, and how social democracy might go on the offensive once again.

NG/FH: For some time there has been a striking anomaly all over Europe: 80 % or more of respondents tell pollsters that they favor basic social democratic values and goals. But in spite of that, social democratic parties more and more are being forced into a defensive posture just about everywhere. What do you think is causing this strange situation?

Ralf Stegner: In Germany as well some three quarters of citizens agree with the substance of our policies: fair wages, the security in old age, a reasonable health care system for all, our peace and detente policies, and so forth. But in the polls we only garner the support of roughly a quarter or less of the respondents. To some extent that anomaly is due to the success of social democratic policies: Many people think that a lot of things already have been settled, even though they actually have not been, and indeed in some cases are once again in jeopardy. This is the case with international peace, issues of global justice, and the current flow of refugees. It is also true of the question of how to provide good work for all human beings such that they can also make a living from it, how we should organize the collective representation of interests in the digital world, and how to prevent finance capitalism from prevailing everywhere. And it involves the issue of how we should counteract the serious threat to our liberal, tolerant democracy emanating from the right.

On the other hand, this is a problem for which we ourselves bear some responsibility. There are a lot of people who have forgotten that they owe their own upward mobility to social democratic educational policies. The party of those who already have climbed to the top sometimes forgets about those who are still on the way up. So we must ask ourselves seriously what right we have to deny our children and grandchildren the future prospects that we ourselves had.

NG/FH: All across the globe outrage is spreading – whether in politics, civil society, or even the scholarly/scientific community – about growing inequalities of income, wealth, and opportunity. Shouldn't social democracy now take the lead in launching a debate about concrete policies that would lead to a sufficient and decent level of equality?

Stegner: I have been influenced strongly by the discussion about the »two-class society« and why we should want to prevent it. Today we have this two-class society and that is a real problem, because quite a few people do not expect anything more from politics, since they perceive it as a part of what »the people on top« do. On one hand,

Germany is a country with problems that a majority of the world wishes it had. On the other, even here obscene wealth and obscene poverty coexist.

Right here in this country we have childhood poverty and miserable conditions for single parents. Many people who have worked hard all their lives cannot even maintain what is often little more than a modest standard of living in their old age. In the 21st century we are now willing to put up with the fact that this inequality is intensifying on a massive scale. Capital is taxed less than labor, mail-drop companies and tax havens aid and abet tax evasion. Some very large firms pay no taxes at all. We look the other way as people suffer discrimination due to their gender, religion, social origins, or sexual orientation. We look the other way when some people start work at age 15 or 16, toil much longer than an academician, have a considerably lower salary, and on average sacrifice ten years of their life expectancy. And we tolerate a two-class system of medical care in which a doctor who operates on a high earner gets two or three times as much for his work as he would receive for the same operation on a person who earns much less.

The one great difference that separates today's global conflicts from those that took place in the previous century is that nowadays people, whether in Eritrea or Iraq, in Syria or Afghanistan, can check their cell phones and see how life is in Paris, Berlin, or London. If we don't learn to share, the inconceivable magnitude of global inequality will end up making us lose the peace and freedom we enjoy here at home.

NG/FH: Lately there have been quite a few social democratic initiatives. For example, Christian Kern, the new chair of Austria's Social Democratic Party, pleaded in a very persuasive speech for a new social democratic offensive, perhaps a Europe-wide one. Sigmar Gabriel [chair of Germany's Social Democratic Party, ed.] has recently come up with some very interesting ideas for setting a new agenda. And in Schleswig-Holstein you yourself presented a paper at the party congress last year entitled »Let's Take a Chance on More Justice.«

In 1983 Ralf Dahrendorf offered the now-famous diagnosis that the social democratic century had come to an end. The most important social democratic objectives, he said, all had been attained, so the party had become superfluous. But now it seems that a kind of quiet revolution has been occurring, such that the clock has been turned back in many areas where so much had been achieved: economic democracy, social security, basic equality, equality of wealth and income. You also mentioned a few other points. Hasn't the time finally arrived to say: We need a new social democratic century, if for no other reason than to regain what we have lost and, in addition, to do all of the things that have been put on the shelf?

Stegner: Basically, we have had a proper rollback. The *Zeitgeist* of the last few decades has said: liberalize, privatize, deregulate. The phrase »common good« has acquired a strikingly pejorative connotation, while selfishness has been glorified. No one should think that something like this can go on for decades and not have consequences. I believe that it has led to an enormous erosion of communitarian thought and of everything that constitutes social democracy. The principle used to hold that »we are stronger when we stand together as a community.« The focus was on enacting what was in the public interest, not on individual self-seeking.

The point of the social democratic agenda was never simply to demand the minimum: to be content as long as people were no longer starving and were somehow being taken care of, if necessary by social transfer programs. The social democratic vision always held that anyone who puts in the effort should be able to make something of himself or herself. That vision is more relevant than ever, because the specters of times past have returned: nationalism, resentment, etc. The actions of the right-wing populists are to some extent a response to this erosion of communitarian feeling. It's just that they are the responses of yesterday and yesteryear.

NG/FH: Looking at the various forms of inequality, is there a common approach that could be taken?

Stegner: We need to devote equal attention to each of the different dimensions of the justice deficit. The first dimension includes quite practical issues of equality and justice, e.g., concerning good work from which a person can make a living and not get sick, that affords equal pay to both men and women, and that guarantees enough to live on in old age and finances the social security system. In Germany, good work is the only path to having social security.

The topic of education, including vocational education, also belongs in this discussion because it determines what opportunities a person will have in life. Here in Germany, the opportunity to earn a more advanced degree than your parents did is one-third lower than the average among OECD countries. If that is not changed, we won't get anywhere near the big questions of justice. In this area the situation actually has grown worse rather than better.

Another element concerns ways of strengthening the family, with the proviso that the family has to be defined differently today. You have a family wherever people make a commitment to assume long-term responsibility for each other. On the one hand, exorbitant fees are being charged for early childhood education; on the other, we are talking about raising the family allowance by three euros. That would cost billions and yield no benefits. Abolishing the solidarity surtax would cost billions but bring no benefit to the average wage-earner. Eliminating bracket creep would cost billions, but would yield the average taxpayer a benefit equivalent to the cost of a carton of cigarettes.

Other points are equally clear. Let's get rid of two-class medical care and introduce a citizens' insurance plan that offers equal care to all. Here, the SPD needs to say: Unless this is enacted, we will not participate in any more coalition governments at the federal level. This is so because it is really inconceivable – and inconsistent with the principles of a social market economy – that employees rather than their employers should assume additional risks such as health and long-term care. A further important component of justice concerns pensions. They should be regarded as benefits that a person deserves to receive after a lifetime of production, not as a social service delivered according to the person's ability to pay. The statutory pension system should be shored up once more in such a way that it compensates for the structural disadvantage suffered by those who have a long working career, earn far less money from it, and have a shorter life span. At the very least they should be able more or less to maintain their accustomed standard of living in their retirement years. Incidentally,

women are especially hard hit by this gap, which is the reason why the pension issue is so closely tied to what I have said about good work.

In order to finance all of these reforms, there is a sixth point that must be added: distributive justice in the sense that those with the highest incomes and wealth will have to contribute more. The catchphrase here is tax justice.

Social democracy should bring the whole issue to a head so that the difference between basic commitments and everyday compromises will be obvious. It ought to produce a vision for a new society, while simultaneously bringing about practical progress in the real lives of human beings.

NG/FH: Perhaps the most scandalous inequalities, ones that have preoccupied scholarly studies recently, no longer involve those who actually »deliver the goods«, who keep this form of capitalism going. Among the chief profiteers are those heirs who have not made any productive contribution to the commonweal at all. In this case, the words patrimonial or feudal capitalism often come to mind.

But this group also includes managers who effectively can set their own salaries, because the structures of power allow them to do so. By now the gap between their obscene salaries and average earnings has grown shockingly wide. In light of that situation, there has been much discussion about establishing an upper limit to the ratio between top and average incomes.

In both cases the appropriate tax regulations could be adopted. Are these topics on the radar screen of social democratic debates?

Stegner: Absolutely! When it comes to the issue of taxes, the idea is not to reach into people's pockets to extract tax money. A variety of social patriotism rather than envy is at work when we see to it that we not only eliminate indecent poverty, but also refuse to put up with indecent wealth. Here, taxation is a crucial means to an end. Economic gains not earned by superior performance have to be taxed. That is the only way for us to finance a state that truly is capable of getting things done: for example improving education, making pensions secure, and building infrastructure. That is a point that is easily overlooked.

But there are other kinds of »justice deficits« that need to be addressed, especially those which concern structural discrimination against specific groups in a society. Social democracy first got involved in politics in order to remedy the disadvantages suffered by the working class. Today, disadvantages have become structural and touch not only those in precarious employment, but others as well, including women, people with different social or ethnic origins and sexual orientations, and the handicapped. All suffer from structural discrimination. In other words, more and more people feel less and less welcome in this society. The task of a modern social democracy is to overcome this sort of discrimination. We are not talking about a policy toward minorities in this context; we are talking about diversity instead of homogeneity.

Resistance against right-wing populism, which represents a serious threat, is closely linked to the last point. Throughout human history there have been repeated attempts to pit the badly off against those who are presumably even worse off. The attack on liberal democracy is again emanating from the right and must be repelled.

There is yet another dimension of the justice deficits we already mentioned that is inextricably intertwined with this one. In the globalized world we inhabit today, social democrats must become the advance-guard committed to shaping a more social-welfare-oriented Europe. The European Union should be something more than an economic and monetary union; it should fight for shared values and carry on a joint peace policy. Peace, too, is in jeopardy once again. A renaissance of social democratic detente policy is more important than ever. And this Europe is still the continent in which, relatively speaking, people are the best off. Things will not stay that way unless we combat global injustice.

NG/FH: For more than a hundred years now social democrats have been fighting for social rights. Ever since 1966, basic social, economic, and cultural rights have been given detailed form in an international agreement. They would certainly constitute a quite far-reaching egalitarian social democratic program. But in the current debate they play no role whatsoever, even though they are very important for two reasons.

For one thing, people would worry less if they knew that they enjoyed social rights to, let us say, a free education or a decent kind of health care. And for another, those rights would be a great starting point for international efforts as well. All over Europe, and perhaps even worldwide, depending on the situation in other countries, there would be a specified minimum level of rights and the highest possible base-level of equality. Of course, social democracy has been attacked for ignoring this issue. Supposedly, that is where the left has failed. Why is it that social and economic rights no longer play any role at all?

Stegner: To some extent it has to do with the fact that the virus of selfishness has penetrated even our own ranks. Many social democrats have experienced upward mobility, and that has blunted their sensitivity to the plight of other. They fail to see those who are not doing as well.

Furthermore, the political left is fragmented. Their divisions eventually may be healed as they confront the danger from the right wing, but then that is merely a hope. Perhaps it is only threats from outside they might forge somewhat greater unity rather than any shared, progressive agenda.

In addition, there is a cultural difference involved. The reforms of social welfare programs carried out by the alliance of red and green parties have led to a drastic decline in membership numbers for the Social Democratic Party, and reduced its voter base by half. They have also caused a certain kind of alienation: some people are starting to wonder how important it is for us to worry about the marginalized fringe of society. We are already hearing complaints like: »Sure. Of course we are in favor of integrating the refugees' kids, but do they have to be in my daughter's class?« No one quite comes out and puts it that way, but you can read it in their faces.

I don't believe we are condemned to accept a kind of international finance capitalism that rides roughshod over everything we value nor are we doomed to throw away food here while people elsewhere are starving. I don't think we are condemned to deliver weapons to war zones and dictatorships or that we have to accept an industrial policy that is causing environmental catastrophes in other places. And I am

convinced that we can win over young people, too, for ideas such as these. Justin Trudeau in Canada, Bernie Sanders in the United States, and even – to some extent – Jeremy Corbyn in England have been able to galvanize young people in favor of social democratic parties or progressive ideas. That is a great opportunity for us.

NG/FH: A number of social scientists – and not only they – think that we are now witnessing the emergence of a major new fault line in European societies, one that involves conflicts over the politics of identity. A superficial glance at Europe seems to confirm the impression that this is indeed the case in some countries. The identitarians, as they call themselves, are now winning a quarter to a third of the votes in some countries, and many of their supporters are former »labor voters.« August Bebel coined the nice phrase: »Anti-Semitism is the socialism of the dimwitted.« These people actually want something quite different than that which meets the eye in their Anti-Semitism. The members and voters of the Social Democratic Party fall into two groups: communitarians and cosmopolitans. Does this line of conflict make sense, or is it misconstrued? Is it something permanent or is it ephemeral? Aren't most members and voters more likely to be a mix of the two categories, depending on what their own experiences have been?

And where do we establish a *cordon sanitaire*? Should it be against the Alternative für Deutschland party voters? How should Social Democrats handle that problem? It is one that could tear them apart and force them onto the defensive in forthcoming elections.

Stegner: In this instance I think that the old saying, »When times of trouble and need lie ahead, those who choose the middle way will end up dead,« fits the circumstances. Sometimes you have to make clear decisions. If the Social Democratic Party thinks that a bit of right-wing pub-style politics will help, then we are truly lost. That does not mean that one should ignore social problem-areas or fail to recognize that people have anxieties. But we have to distinguish between legitimate anxieties and their incendiary, nationalistic, and resentment-driven exploitation.

But how do we reach these people? We need to get away from a technocratic style of politics and communication and adopt a more passionate approach. We should once again take a harder line toward the conservatives – tough, unambiguous, clear. We can't allow parliamentary democracy to be talked or written to death. The difficulty consists in the fact that, in matters such as these, there are no simple answers that can be offered, because they are almost always wrong. Still, we have to use a language that people who don't read three newspapers a day can understand. By the way, the conservatives fail on this account as well, because they follow the CSU in believing that they can score points of their own out on the right fringe.

Integration is hard work. If a pluralistic society like Germany's wants to make sure that everyone enjoys equal opportunities, then that means it cannot allow people to be marginalized. That is true for all of Europe. If in some countries 40 % or more of the youth cannot find a job, then no one should be surprised to see them turn against democracy.

Diehard conservative voters don't need arguments to be convinced that they should vote for the right. Their voter preferences are now deeply ingrained. In the end

right-wing demagogues have their best opportunity to win over people who have no future prospects, or at any rate feel that they don't. Those are the people we should be concerned about.

NG/FH: Sigmar Gabriel has said that the battle against the right would be a good platform for uniting the center-left. From a historical perspective we are indeed in a new situation. The right-wing parties are no longer simply protest parties; they are trying to seize power everywhere.

Stegner: I think that, if we do not comprehend the danger now, it literally may be too late to do so later. If right-wing populists come into parliament with double-digit support, then it will be impossible to form progressive majorities.

But we should forget about polls and engage fervently in favor of our own ends. As mentioned earlier, three quarters of the people support the substance of our policies, while only a quarter of them or even fewer vote for us. That must also have something to do with credibility. Do we actually do what we say?

Incidentally, that is a question that also must be answered on an international level. Where is the new Socialist International? There is certainly the Progressive Alliance, but where is it speaking out and saying that we won't allow our Europe to be shattered by finance capital or antediluvian nationalists? But we won't succeed if we rely exclusively on old men in leadership positions. We have to rekindle some passion among younger people.

Wolfgang Merkel

The New Dictatorships

Hannah Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, which appeared in 1951, still bore the deep imprint of the recently dismantled National Socialist terror regime and the most extreme excesses of Stalinism. The distinguishing features of totalitarianism as a regime type were then readily identifiable: an elaborate ideology of domination plus terrorism, both of which characterized the »short twentieth century's« history of political rule and warfare. Both Hannah Arendt and Harvard University scholar Carl Joachim Friedrich distinguished carefully between authoritarian and totalitarian regimes. Authoritarian regimes, Arendt said, curtailed freedom, whereas totalitarian rule did away with it entirely. In essence, the notion of totalitarianism focused on the untrammled control that those in power wielded over their subjects. Under such circumstances not even the state should be regarded as the principal locus of power. According to Arendt that role was played by the party – and of course its leader – that articulated the official word-view. Both totalitarian systems sought to legitimize their rule by deploying a grand ideological narrative, whether of the »classless society« in the case of Stalinism, or »the superiority of our race and nation« in the case of Nazism.

From the very outset, neither the concept nor the theory of totalitarianism was free of inconsistencies and over-hasty analogies. It was always a problematic move to

equate (at least implicitly) a Promethean idea of the »realm of freedom« (Karl Marx) with the darkness of a National Socialist ideology of annihilation. Of course, in practice these regimes displayed certain parallels – despite the dissimilarities – in respect to the uses of terror. Both erected Leviathan-like apparatuses that destroyed freedom and carried out deadly repression against Jews and class enemies, respectively.

During the Cold War the concept of totalitarianism continued to lose analytic clarity as it was used prematurely to describe all communist regimes and, increasingly, any dictatorship whatsoever. Not infrequently, it degenerated into a political rallying cry. In reality, truly totalitarian regimes were not that common in the 20th century. Nevertheless, the Soviet Union from 1929 to 1956, Nazi Germany from 1934/38 to 1945, some of the Eastern European satellite regimes in the 50s, China from the early 50s up until Mao Zedong's death in 1976, the genocidal Pol Pot regime in Cambodia, and the autocratic Kim family dynasty in North Korea furnish irrefutable examples of totalitarian rule. In the early years of the 21st century the People's Republic of North Korea is the only totalitarian regime left. The theocratic Islamic regimes in Iran and Saudi Arabia or of the Taliban in Afghanistan never have become fully totalitarian. Although their fundamentalist dogmas were intended to penetrate deeply into the everyday lives of the faithful, those governments lacked the mature state development that would have allowed them to translate their ambitions of complete control into a full-blown totalitarian reality.

Dictatorships in the 21st century

The long-lasting third wave of democratization that culminated in the collapse of the Soviet empire at the end of the 20th century altered the national and international conditions for political rule. If we disregard the more radicalized versions of Islam that have been emerging in some places, grand ideological narratives of political rule have disappeared. Given the globalized economic and communications networks that have emerged, it is an anachronistic fiction to imagine that autocracies could hermetically seal off a zone of political control. Political authority increasingly requires forms of justification that take freedom, political participation, and respect for human rights into account. New forms of autocratic rule came into being that scholars now classify under the heading of electoral authoritarianism, i.e., autocracies with elections. Such elections are quite distinct from those that were held in the Eastern Bloc in the era of »really existing socialism,« in which voter turnout exceeded 99 % and the communist candidates and those of their satellite parties typically won about 99 % of the votes cast. That kind of election is now a quaint relic of the past. Today, elections in authoritarian regimes in Africa or Asia no longer can be so easily managed as they were in the former Eastern Bloc. To be sure, they are manipulated, orchestrated, and rigged, but they also offer the opposition a welcome opportunity to mobilize, make alliances, and appeal to a national and international public. The new authoritarian desire to establish a formally democratic residue of legitimacy in the domestic and foreign arenas carries with it a risk to the legitimacy of those in power.

Formerly clear boundaries between prototypical democracies and dictatorships have grown increasingly blurred. Leaving aside merely polemical use of terms, who

would want to say exactly which of the following regimes should be counted as an autocracy or merely classified as a defective democracy: Russia under Vladimir Putin (or Boris Yelstin), the Turkey of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the contemporary Ukraine, Venezuela, the Philippines, or Singapore? Scholarly research on regimes has grown more cautious. Increasingly it avoids clear typologies and locates really existing regimes along a continuum between the ideal of democracy under the rule of law on the one hand and »perfect« dictatorship on the other. Such classifications thus leave many political regimes in a gray area between the ideal-types. Accordingly, researchers in the field are now talking about »gray area regimes.« These are then subdivided into hybrid regimes (Russia), »democraduras« (Venezuela), or defective democracies (Hungary). Furthermore, the gray area regimes are more stable than is commonly assumed, in that they do not move over time in the direction of becoming closed dictatorships or open democracies. They have long since established their own equilibrium, one that is sensitive to both historical and political contexts. Today, Putin, Erdoğan, and Orbán enjoy greater popularity among their respective citizen bodies – and the non-elites within them – than the chancellor of Germany or the President of France’s Fifth Republic, although both of the latter govern democratic countries under the rule of law. This paradox is one aspect of the postmodern jigsaw puzzle: all across the globe forms of political authority are growing more differentiated.

How stable are the new dictatorships?

If we assume the tripartite division of political regimes into autocracies, hybrid regimes, and democracies, we can distinguish, among the 200 or so countries in the world, about 65 democracies under the rule of law and 45 unvarnished autocracies. Of the remainder, the majority are hybrid regimes in all of their different permutations.

So how stable are political regimes really? How durable are dictatorships? Statistically speaking, over the past 60 years democracies have been the most stable, followed by dictatorships, and finally by hybrid regimes. What is the reason for the relative stability of dictatorial regimes? In a study recently carried out at the Berlin Social Science Center we assumed that political rule in dictatorships, as incidentally in hybrid regimes as well, rests on three pillars: legitimation, repression, and cooptation.

Legitimation always derives from two sources, one normative and the other performance-based. Anti-liberalism, racism, nationalism, religiously anachronistic ideas of salvation, as well as Marxist visionary schemes all can generate at least temporary normative approval among those on the receiving end of political rule. However, in the early years of the 21st century fascist and communist ideologies have lost much of their appeal. If any ideologies still have the ability to create strong ties among their adherents nowadays, it would be the variants of Islamic political fundamentalism. But for them, restrictions on basic human rights are part of the canon of principles upon which their claims to rule depend. And, for that very reason, in the long run the well-springs of their promises of salvation will likely dry up and the enchantment of their world will fade in the cold light of a repressive reality. Because the normative side of legitimation is sapped in this way, dictatorial regimes rely for support especially on their performance in the areas of the economy, security, and order. But autocratic regimes

also face risks if the economy and society modernize too rapidly. When that happens, middle classes form, workers unionize, educational levels increase, civil society emerges, and discourses get underway that invite broader political participation. However, this is not a trend that culminates inevitably in a successful process of democratization in the way that modernization theory optimistically still claims. That other outcomes are possible is confirmed by diverse countries such as Singapore, the People's Republic of China or the petro-dictatorships of the Gulf. The latter of course maintain enormous numbers of Southeast Asian slave laborers deprived of all rights, which enables them to evade the challenge of dealing with a self-confident domestic working class.

Second, autocracies rely on repression, which can assume different forms and levels of intensity. We distinguish in our research project («Why do dictatorships survive?») between »soft« and »hard« repression, although their boundaries are shifting. Whereas the first of these primarily aims to restrict political rights such as the freedoms of assembly, expression, press, and employment, the latter is designed mainly to attack the core of human rights, such as the right to life, physical integrity, and the liberty of the individual. It can be demonstrated empirically that elites in authoritarian systems of rule frequently react to threats to the status quo with intensified repression. Yet repression alone is scarcely capable of stabilizing a political regime in the long run. This is so because a great deal of legitimacy is being sacrificed. When repression is ratcheted up, its deterrent power is enhanced, but simultaneously there is a loss of legitimation and thereby of popular consent. High levels of hard repression are expensive, and ultimately they undermine the foundations of political authority. During the period that we examined (1950-2008), statistical evidence shows that soft repression was the most successful factor in stabilizing hundreds of dictatorships.

The third pillar of political domination is cooptation. It may enable elites in autocratic systems of rule to induct influential actors and groups outside the regime proper into the inner circle of the dictatorship. Strategically important elites of this type are generally recruited from among the economic elite, the security services, and the military. They are usually offered offices, political privileges, resources, and economic concessions as a quid pro quo for their loyalty. Corruption, clientelism, and patrimonial networks are their instruments.

Nevertheless, the availability of resources places limits on the duration and extent of »purchased« collaboration of broad groups with the regime. In our analysis we show that weaknesses in one of the pillars of rule can be offset by shoring up the other ones. Yet in some instances cracks in one pillar can overburden the others. Then spaces of protest open up that, if employed on a grand scale, can lead to the collapse of the entire regime. Of course, there are no guarantees that the rule of law and democracy will ensue from its demise. The many unsuccessful processes of transformation in the eastern portions of Eastern Europe, Central Asia, and the Arab Spring all confirm this.

It is also possible to overestimate the stabilizing influence of cooptation. As a rule, the ideal equilibrium state for the survival of dictatorships would combine a high level of legitimation derived from ideology and performance, the least possible application

of »hard« repression, extensive »soft« repression, and a moderate degree of cooptation. Singapore approaches that equilibrium state most closely, while China is clearly headed in that direction. But even hybrid regimes such as Putin's Russia are not so far removed from an equilibrium of this sort.

Francis Fukuyama's thesis that we are witnessing the irreversible triumph of democracy (1991) proved to be a half-baked fantasy. The envisioned export of democracy from the West to the rest and of military regime change in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya has failed dismally. The free societies of the West, East, and South will have to continue living and negotiating with dictatorships. There are no panaceas. Trade-offs have already been programmed in. A magical polygon still has not been devised that would accommodate values, interests, human rights, economy, democracy, and stability. There are no short cuts in dealing with dictatorships. It will take tedious negotiations, value-based pragmatism, and the proverbial long, hard road to get there.



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György G. Márkus

Hungary's Invalid »No« to Solidarity, Human Rights, and Europe

The Hungarian government under Prime Minister Viktor Orbán has used a referendum to signal its opposition to the quota rules set by the EU's refugee policy. What it all came down to were 1,300 asylum applications. Large sums of money were spent on a xenophobic, nationalistic campaign of incitement and hate. Fidesz, Orbán's party, mobilized people from the parliament on down to small, rural communities. Threats were issued, extortion attempted, and bribes handed out. Fidesz used both direct and media propaganda to whip up the Hungarian population. The party roused fears of Islamization and created the impression that Hungary might be swamped by foreigners, all of which evoked something close to a wartime atmosphere. Orbán's slogan was that the continent should remain European, while Hungary should stay both Hungarian and Christian: »We refuse to allow foreigners in Brussels to decide with whom we are going to live.«

The tactic of stoking fear worked very well. In September, 2015, 56 % of the population still expressed solidarity with the refugees; by contrast, a year later 80 % were directly hostile to refugees and did not want to allow them to settle in Hungary (any longer). Among supporters of Fidesz, 92 % told pollsters that refugees were dangerous and should not stay in the country, while among supporters of the far-right party Jobbik, this figure reached 94 %. That opinion was shared even by a staggering 69 % of those who back the Socialist Party (MSZP). The good news for Europe, an-

nounced on October 2, was that only 43 % of eligible voters turned out, below the 50 % required for a valid result. The bad news: 98 % of those who did vote opposed the EU refugee intake quotas.

However, the extremely high level of xenophobia throughout the Hungarian populace is not just the result of the right-wing nationalist government's hyperactive propaganda. On the contrary, Viktor Orbán did little more than reinforce and harness a xenophobia that has been a prominent feature of Hungary's history. For him, the refugee crisis is heaven-sent, since he can now present it as an issue that overrides everything else. By the first half of 2014, there had been an appreciable drop in Fidesz's approval ratings and the party had lost a few local elections. Low living standards, inequality, deficiencies in the health care and educational systems as well as economic underperformance and out-of-control corruption combined to cost the party votes. Some of those went to left-wing alternatives, while others were cast for the far-right party, Jobbik.

Fidesz's aggressive, xenophobic campaign of incitement and its rapid, decisive response to the refugees caused a reversal in those unfavorable trends among a populace the majority of which is nationalistic. Jobbik and Fidesz drew closer to each other. The political and ideological differences between them narrowed, especially in regard to refugee policy. Fidesz became more aggressive while the party chair of the extreme right-wing Jobbik sounded a more conciliatory tone, although he did not gain any particular political advantage from doing so. Even one segment in the Socialist Party's spectrum of support sympathized with the refugee policy and the xenophobic culture of hate adopted by the government.

What did Orbán expect to gain from the referendum? One advantage it would offer the government was the likelihood that domestic and economic worries would fade into the background. Measures against refugees (such as the border fence) as well as propaganda in »defense of the nation« and of »Europe's borders« served to legitimize the authoritarian, autocratic Fidesz regime. In terms of European policy, Orbán wanted to win credit for his historic »battle for liberty against Brussels,« intended to prevent any deepening of European integration. In addition to his alliance with Vladimir Putin, Orbán also hoped to appeal to allies inside the European Union. Among them, the Visegrád group, which he tends to dominate, could be especially important. Here, the conservative Polish governing party PiS follows him more closely than the Czech Republic or Slovakia. By virtue of his curt behavior toward the Democrats in the United States, support for Donald Trump, and opening to the East (especially toward eastern post-Soviet countries such as Azerbaijan), Orbán is attempting to play a role on the global stage as well. But paradoxically, he is also making a profit by selling residence documents to Islamic businessmen.

Viktor Orbán exploits a syndrome that is deeply rooted in Hungary: »group-focused enmity« or collective prejudice, in order to expand and reinforce his authoritarian, autocratic rule. According to the *European Values Survey* (2010), the dissemination of prejudices and of »affluence chauvinism« [over-identification with national economic interests, especially in defending them against outsiders hoping for a piece of the pie, ed.] have been on the rise. As calculated by this study, the in-

tolerance score for Hungary stood at 48 %, while for Greece it was 46 %, for Germany, 16 %, and for Sweden, 4 %. The Orbán regime may look democratic from the outside, but in essence it is profoundly undemocratic and autocratic. In a speech at Tusványos, a town in Transylvania, Orbán appropriated the originally pejorative term, »illiberal democracy,« from Fareed Zakaria, the editor of *Foreign Affairs*, while giving it a positive spin. The Hungarian leader proclaimed his own version of the »illiberal state« in the mold of Singapore, China, Russia, India, or Turkey.

In the opinion of the Hungarian writer Rudolf Ungváry, the most significant features of the illiberal authoritarian state include the special role of the leader (the leader-state), a dominant party (state party) in the center, a permanent »struggle for freedom« in both domestic and foreign affairs, shifting images and marginalization of enemies, transcendental legitimation, the hollowing-out of liberal institutions, and ultra-nationalism.

Many observers concur with Hungary's previous minister of education, Bálint Magyar, who has described the country as a »mafia state.« What he has in mind is a symbiosis of power and money. Some of the elements of this system of power include: the weakening of democracy across the board, distortions of the electoral system and vote-rigging, centralized control of the media, a highly centralized educational system featuring ideological indoctrination, the dissemination of fear, the expansion of a vassal system, ideological interference in the arts and sciences as well as an ideologically driven architectural reconstruction of the capital, and falsification of history under the aegis of a »culture of memory« suffused with nationalism.

The paradox is that Hungary had played a leading role during the 1980s in the transition from communism to democratic capitalism. Now it is the first society in Eastern Europe to carry out a regime change in the opposite direction, i.e., toward a post-communist authoritarian system. A process is occurring here that has been well-known for several centuries in the history of Hungary and East-Central Europe generally. The great Hungarian poet Endre Ady, writing near the beginning of the 20th century, hit the nail on the head when he described Hungary as a ferry society, moving back and forth between the East and the West. On which bank will Hungary tie up and remain?

The *World Values Survey* provides an answer. There is a widespread conviction among Hungarian and Western historians, political scientists, and of course progressive politicians that Hungary and Central Europe more generally are a part of the West, even though they have gone into some blind alleys, suffered setbacks and traumas, and endured mental distortions in their societies and value structures. But the facts and empirical research results tell a different story. They show a Hungary that is remote from the core of Western culture on a geopolitical map of values. And Hungary is continuing to wall itself off from those values. This is not true of the entire population, but certainly of the majority. Furthermore, one finds intellectual affinities between Hungary and Orthodox cultures, especially the Russians, Moldavians, Ukrainians, and Bulgarians.

The mentality of the ruling elites and the territorial location of the country on the periphery of Western European capitalism meant that Hungary would modernize

late and that the formation of the bourgeoisie would also be delayed. Cultural minorities, particularly the Germans and Jews, left their imprint on the country's bourgeoisie. A few centuries earlier, Hungarian politics had been dominated by conflicts over territory and culture. At stake was the country's location as a buffer zone between North and South (Reformation vs. Counter-reformation) as well as between the West (industrial capitalism, the urbanization belt) and East (agriculture, pre-capitalist communities). Nationhood and progress were at odds. Around 1790, under Emperor Joseph II, the Hungarian aristocracy split into Westernized and national traditionalist factions. Once the dualism of imperial and royal rule was ended, this split perpetuated itself in the form of a hegemonic party system. After the collapse of communism in 1989, a culture war between adherents of urban and folk culture dominated domestic politics. The landslide victory – by a two-thirds majority – of Fidesz in the 2010 election practically eliminated this division. The outcome of the culture war seemed to have been decided. The national populism of Fidesz largely has marginalized all the other parties. Moreover, those rivals are fragmented and caught up in internal bickering.

However, the final chapter of this story has not yet been written. As the refugee quota referendum has shown, signs of disenchantment with Fidesz are mounting, just as they are in respect to the incompetent, weakened parties of the left. Despite the populist ideology that legitimizes the current regime, an increasing number of groups in Hungarian society are experiencing downward mobility and social injustice. With a growing sense of alarm, people are feeling the pinch of poverty, the backsliding of the middle class, and the fear of a precarious existence. Poverty in Hungary has not been so rampant since World War II. One can discern an ominous material divide, in which the few wealthy Fidesz loyalists have profited handsomely from their support for the state party, while the lower classes in society are clearly slipping into poverty. In the last six years, the risk of poverty has risen sharply especially among children and young people, the less educated, and the Roma minority. Perhaps half of all Hungarians live in dire want. Without financial support from the EU, the situation would be worse still, even though a large chunk of that funding has flowed into corrupt pockets or else into projects closely associated with Fidesz.

Critics of Fidesz consider it beyond dispute that, since 2010 – when Orbán won the election with a two-thirds majority – Hungary would no longer qualify to be a member of the EU. It is by no means certain that the country adheres to the so-called »Copenhagen criteria« that establish the preconditions for membership. The democratic and juridical order is merely a facade. Rather than having a functional market economy, the country is ruled by an arbitrary, clientelistic regime marked by declining competitiveness. There are no fair elections. Ties to the West have been attenuated, while Hungary has forged a closer partnership with Vladimir Putin, whose mindset is the same as or similar to that of Fidesz. Rather than solving problems peacefully, the government's principle is to escalate them. Thus, just a few days after the refugee quota referendum, the biggest opposition newspaper, *Népszabadság*, was shut down.

And how do the much-maligned and frequently humiliated EU and other EU states respond to these developments? There has not been an efficacious response.

The answers have varied dramatically, depending on each country's political ideology and calculations of its national interest. Many social democrats and most leftists and greens want to see Hungary expelled or suspended. The Social Democrat Martin Schulz, President of the European Parliament, has offered some sharp criticism of Orbán. But in the end he would prefer negotiations leading to a compromise rather than force Orbán to play something resembling a martyr's role. The left wants to bring Orbán to his senses by shutting off the spigot of funding. The European People's Party has to pull off a true balancing act. Angela Merkel heads the more humanistically-inclined wing, which tends toward Realpolitik and reconciliation and paralyzes the more reactionary forces in the CSU that would opt for cutting off funding.

And then there are the groupings that oppose Europe within the EU, the right-wing extremists and populists. Their stance is clear. Daniel Cohn-Bendit summed it up succinctly in remarking: »Fidesz – that is what the AfD would look like in government.«

In this impasse the EU has been almost paralyzed and forced onto the defensive. This is happening just at a time when Europe is enduring its worst crisis, a time when the actors that previously played starring roles in Western politics, the big catch-all parties, have shown themselves to be splendidly powerless. In this situation Orbán steps forward with his refurbished 1930s-era model and proclaims the decline of the West (at least its moral imperialism). He assembles the troops and tells them confidently that he is the leader and the »new normal« for Europe, both East and West.

Dear friends and esteemed gentlemen in Brussels and Europe's capitals. I am sending you a warning from frustrated Central Europe, where the »national-Christian« course of isolationism and nationalist hierarchies has made a comeback. You continue to play the role of Chamberlain. But it's time you opened your eyes. Time is running out.



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Authoritarianism and Security in Central Asia

In autocratic political systems, transitions at the top of the power hierarchy represent a caesura, betokening an uncertain and potentially unstable situation. They sometimes can be accompanied by disintegration of the political system or even of the state's unity. Because regularized procedures for the transfer of power are usually lacking, even when an autocrat dies of natural causes, his passing leads to an exceptional, transitional situation that is often highly precarious. Struggles over power and policy directions may erupt as well as those over key positions and the country's future poli-

tical orientation. The entire political system almost seems to be suspended in midair. For outsiders, i.e., any observers outside the inner circles of power, the situation remains open-ended. Moreover, the contingency and opacity of the situation as well as the lack of certain knowledge normally do not permit reliable prognoses about the outcome.

The former Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic is now passing through just such a phase. Tension and indecisiveness haunt the transition on account of the death of its president, Islam Karimov, who ruled the country with an iron fist since independence in 1991. His Kazakh presidential counterpart, Nursultan Nazarbayev, has also ruled his own country autocratically – albeit less repressively – since its independence. Due to the latter's advanced age, Kazakhstan too may be on the brink of a transfer of power and state authority in the coming years. Finally, it is likely that the presidency of Tajikistan, now held by Emomali Rahmon, will be coming to an end in the not too distant future. Like the other two, he has relied on a high level of repression to maintain control of Tajikistan since 1992. In addition, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan carry considerable regional weight among the five Central Asian states that emerged from the breakup of the Soviet Union. Their importance derives from both their geographic and geopolitical location and size, and their endowment of fossil energy supplies. The prominence of Kazakhstan also reflects its higher level of socio-economic development, which has left all the other Central Asian states far behind. Uzbekistan, by contrast can claim pride of place on account of its large population, which constitutes fully 45 % of the total for all five ex-Soviet republics. In short, two of Central Asia's key actors as well as Tajikistan are at this moment (or in the foreseeable future) facing a power shift at the very top that could have serious consequences not only for them but also for their relations with the region, as well as with Germany and Europe. Certainly, it would be a hopeless and perilous endeavor for the West to try to influence the outcome of the power shift. But German and European policymakers should seize the opportunity to pay closer attention to the Central Asian region than hitherto.

To be more specific, for reasons of security policy alone, it is imperative to pursue an active policy in Central Asia. At stake is a region in which diverse and yet closely intertwined dangers to international security are lurking. Here, it is advisable to recall that, in addition to the five former Soviet republics, Central Asia also includes parts of Russia, Xinjiang in China, Afghanistan, and, through Kashmir, parts of Pakistan and India as well. Thus, post-Soviet Central Asia lies within a nuclear armed neighborhood that Iran and Turkey also regard as part of their respective spheres of influence. The region is a powder keg for other reasons too: border disputes inherited from the past, conflicts over national water rights, ecological problems, unresolved issues with minority populations, and serious economic inequalities between and among the countries. In this situation the European powers should certainly avoid pursuing any policies that might seem like saber-rattling. But at the same time it is in the interest of Europe and Germany to remain politically engaged in the region. They could contribute actively and conspicuously to initiatives and structures that promote the peaceful accommodation of interests and management of conflicts. They also might be considered mediating actors and should put considerable effort into that role.

Transnational terrorism is yet another security problem that ignores borders. Citizens of the Central Asian countries, especially Uzbeks, furnish numerically one of the largest contingents of foreign jihadists in Syria and Iraq as well as in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Not only are these fighters contributing to the violence in such conflicts (not to mention the flow of refugees out of those countries), but in addition their activities in their countries of origin are calculated to destabilize governments there and ultimately to bring about the disintegration of Central Asian states. Although from the German or European perspective the repressive governments in that region do not seem worthy of protection, the preservation of the integrity of Central Asian states is strategically valuable. State failure, especially in the immediate vicinity of Afghanistan, would cause or worsen security problems far beyond the region itself. The problem of drug trafficking is closely linked to that of transnational terrorism, particularly as long as narcotics policy in Europe puts the primary emphasis on prohibition and prosecution. Without the close cooperation of Central Asian states, it will be impossible to interdict drug smuggling and consequently also the financing of terrorist groups. Because the latter are also fighting terrorism and worried about domestic drug use, they have a major interest in combating trafficking.

Germany and Europe have an interest in developments in Central Asia for at least two reasons: national or regional security and the protection of human rights. The latter cannot be ignored, to the extent that policymakers see their mission in normative terms and not solely as a matter for *Realpolitik*. Hence, they must pay attention to political repression, ecological exploitation, and corruption in Central Asia too. Political, ethnic, and religious repression and violence, paired with widespread corruption and an economy set up to benefit elites alone, contribute to strengthening the terrorist opposition while exacerbating economic, ecological, and ethnic sources of conflict. In Central Asia, the latter can quickly escalate beyond national borders. So far, of the Central Asian countries only Kyrgyzstan has opted for the path of political and social democratization. Compared to the rest of the region, Kazakhstan displays a notably higher commitment to international openness and transparency in its social policymaking. Moreover, it exhibits a stronger inclination to permit the populace to share more fully in the country's wealth, although it has been unreceptive to any movement in the direction of democratization. By contrast, the essentially kleptocratic governments of Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan so far have shown no interest even in a low-threshold notion of good governance, one that is intended solely to improve the operation of government from a technical, administrative point of view, i.e., in the sense of enabling it to solve problems more effectively and display a minimal level of responsiveness.

Now it must be admitted that exogenous pressure cannot induce authentic processes of transformation in domestic or social policy. That is in fact the reason why the idea of direct Western intervention to bring about regime change must be dismissed out of hand. Furthermore, the autocratic regimes in the region indeed may be partially responsible for regional security problems – or for exacerbating them – but because such problems cannot be solved without functioning state structures, they may also be part of the solution. Considering the regional situation as a whole,

Western powers will have to cooperate on both a bilateral and multilateral basis with some unsavory governments and involve them as much as possible in the regional accommodation of interests and conflict resolution. In doing so, the West must realize that international and foreign policy cannot be exclusively and solely about human rights, but must always include the pragmatic assertion of interests and the art of the possible as well. This is of course contrary to the impression one gets from German public discourse, in which human rights trump every other consideration.

Devising incentives for respecting human rights

It is one thing to realize that we have to cooperate with autocratic Central Asian governments; it is quite another to adopt an attitude of indifference – however much it is disguised as pragmatism – toward systematic repression. Cooperation is not tantamount to abandoning a policy based on normative criteria. Such a policy should include a number of instruments. To cite several possible examples, we could start a dialogue about the rule of law, initiatives to strengthen (liberal) civil society actors, and especially efforts to cultivate future regional elites through academic training and exchange programs. Furthermore, the kind of policy suggested here calls for continuing work in the context of international institutions and the covert financing of the liberal opposition (this is an open secret: autocratic governments in the region expect nothing less). But in addition to these traditional instruments, the German and European policymakers should devise serious, attractive incentives that would encourage these countries to improve their human rights record of their own accord. Such an incentive structure would be carefully calibrated to favor and offer advantages to those states in the region that commit to making progress in this area. A policy of positive pressure points could address problems concerning the rule of law as well as other basic concerns in a nuanced way appropriate to each individual country while treating relationships with each Central Asian country according to a political hierarchy. Such a policy would avoid running the risks of confrontation inherent in a mainly negative, sanctions-based approach. The idea here is not to design a policy of selective conditionality dangling reward morsels in front of countries for progress in specific policy areas. Instead, it would amount to a far broader policy of strict preferential treatment, broad-gauged support, and rapprochement with those countries that were making progress in instituting the rule of law. Here, too, it should be possible for Germany and Europe deliberately to exploit regional rivalries, consciously fomenting them so as to promote the cause of fundamental human rights. The economic interests of Europe and Central Asia are mutually supportive yet asymmetrical. For that reason, a strong system of incentives might provide a structural boost to the policy of strict preferential treatment. But then Germany and Europe really would have to be prepared to live up to their own self-image as the practitioners of a normative foreign policy, and not just for the sake of their credibility, either. And they would have to be willing to pay a price for doing so. For example, they would have to act on principle in banning arms deals with autocratic regimes and prohibiting the importation of products made by child or forced labor. Both measures would make it clear that European principles are binding on Central Asian countries as well without following the

seldom successful confrontational logic of selective penalties and sanctions. The same approach would be adopted when it came to granting broad rights of asylum to groups of persons from Central Asia that were subject to persecution and repression by the state.

Considering the situation in Central Asia as a whole, there is a difficult balancing act between necessary pragmatic cooperation with the autocratic states on one hand, and the (limited) options for exerting a normative influence on them, on the other. Furthermore, in the medium term the prospects for systemic change in a democratic direction do not look good. Still, we should not pass up the opportunities presented by the transfer of power in Central Asia. The region is too important for European security policy for us to continue to neglect it.



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Farah Dustdar

The Emotional Basis of Political Action – Danger or Opportunity for Democracy?

In nearly all Western democracies, political communication has been relying increasingly on emotional and popular appeals. Because the experts have become enmeshed in dependency and political ties, political parties have felt the need to reach their audience by deliberately reducing the level of complexity and forging affective bonds between themselves and their audience. Often, this approach leads them to offer soothing lies and false promises that merely tell the voters what they want to hear. Populism is omnipresent. What worries political scientists is not merely the upsurge of right-wing populist parties, but the way that many top mainstream politicians take over the populists' communication techniques and rhetorical methods. Untruths instead of facts, emotions rather than rational considerations dominate politics. Social theorists from Max Weber to Jürgen Habermas have described political processes in ideal-typical form, stressing their rational and discursive qualities and stoking exaggerated expectations. But the populist style has laid to rest lofty hopes about reasoned discourse. Actors who act rationally have a constitutive meaning for democracy. From this perspective, an act counts as rational if it is done on the basis of logical and deliberate premeditation with full awareness of the facts, in contrast to irrational behavior, i.e., that is determined by emotion. Theorists who relied on notions of rationality were aware that, in reality, there was and is no such thing as a purely rational discourse or action. Indeed, by now the deficiencies of their model have been highlighted often by scientific analysis. Above all, the model of rational utility maximization, rational choice theory, has proved to be counterfactual.

The effort to fit emotions and sentiments into the theory of action goes back as far as the philosophy of classical antiquity. A long line of thinkers extending from Aristotle to Niccolò Machiavelli, John Locke, Max Weber, and John Rawls, has noticed the power of passions and affects. But they have never enjoyed much success in integrating emotions and feelings into their theories as factors that influence conduct. For scientific researchers and physicians, emotions and feelings could not be understood because they could not be assigned to a specific location. It seemed impossible to explain how emotions functioned in the process of action. Their workings seemed to be locked away in a black box. Surprisingly, the key to opening up the black box of action theory was discovered not by social science but by natural science: specifically by brain research. New MRI procedures since the 1990s have enabled neurologists to look inside and decode the process of decision-making. Numerous experiments carried out in a variety of research centers all have reached the same conclusion: In the preliminary stages of the decision-making process, the part of the human brain responsible for emotions and feelings is activated. Rational thought and emotion are not mutually exclusive. As a first step, the emotion centers in the brain evaluate and sign off on rational judgments. Thinking and feeling are not opposites; they are complementary forms of cognition. The regnant dichotomy of rationality and emotionalism, which has influenced theories of action from antiquity down to the present day, has been bypassed by the new knowledge attained by brain research.

The missing link between cognition and judgment

Emotions do not relieve us of the need to think, but they do help people to see negative choices in the correct light and rule them out in all further deliberations. The »background feelings« that resonate in nearly all higher cognitive activities serve as a »missing link« between cognition and judgment and must be taken into account by science. The »background emotions,« which consist of positive or negative feelings, trigger the same sort of pleasure and pain reactions in the brain as physical pleasure or bodily pain do. In other words: psychic injury can be just as painful as bodily injury. The use of MRIs to discover the location of pleasure and pain as the most important varieties of emotion will have far-reaching implications for the theory of action. The concept of »pleasure« should not be restricted to the pleasurable sensations that occur when instinctual desires are satisfied. When we achieve something or put a great deal of effort into accomplishing tasks, when we solve problems or eliminate risks and thus convert uncertainty into certainty, we are rewarded by a state of contentment and well-being. Such feelings are grouped under the abbreviated heading of »pleasure.« The brain of any normally developed person operates a system of rewards made up of sectors in the brain, nerve tracts, and a system of semiochemicals that regulate the quest for happiness and contentment. As a reliable warning system, »pain« is crucial to our survival. »Painful feelings« have both bodily and psychic components. Neurological observation shows that emotional injuries such as disappointment, rage, fear, and so on trigger the same kinds of reactions in the body as physical suffering does. The human brain has common interfaces to process both bodily and psychic pain. Scientific studies clearly reveal that the emotional impact of, say, being excluded from a social commu-

nity or suffering injustice, generates a neuronal activation pattern in the brain similar to that which shows up during the perception of physical pain.

Ever since Aristotle, political theory has recognized the mechanism of utility maximization. Aristotle began with a non-controversial premise from evolutionary biology: Human beings strive primarily to gain pleasure and try to avoid pain. When applied to economics, the model of rational utility maximization – rational choice theory – is restricted to measurable material gain. In politics, utility maximization is defined mainly in terms of acquiring influence and wielding power, especially during elections and in the formation of coalitions. Experimental findings from brain research show clearly that pleasure and pain pervade all our experiences. They constitute a frame of reference that enables us to evaluate data and events. It would be unnatural or even – from the viewpoint of brain research – impossible for us to display emotional indifference or to judge matters from a neutral stance, as notions of rationality assume. As a rule, agents make the choice that seems more advantageous from the standpoint of their subjective sensations, i.e., one that will maximize their pleasure or enjoyment or minimize their loss or pain.

The reward and punishment system

Experiments on the brain's reward centers, where pleasure is perceived and the chemicals that carry happiness messages are emitted, or pain stimuli arise, constantly produce new insights. Brain research sheds light on numerous mental and social phenomena, that have not been accessible to experimentation until now. It shows unequivocally that »rewards and punishments« – the foundations of the legal system – are not shaped by culture alone. Their origins are to be found in the activities of the human brain. What uses can be made of the recent findings of brain research for other research areas, e.g., studies of voting behavior, extremism, or democracy?

First, we must acknowledge the fact that liberal democracies have reached the outer limits of their efficacy, as they try to deal with unstable majorities, crises of confidence, citizens' protests, and more. The integration of emotions and sentiments into our theories might lead to greater effectiveness of policymaking in a variety of spheres. When we try to conceptualize mental processes, we rely on more than intellect or reason. Our own needs and attitudes also influence the way we regard those processes; in fact, that is how they become meaningful to us in the first place. Whether we are aware of it or not, our rational judgments are formed against the background of our attempts to improve our situation and avoid unpleasantness. The dimensions of pain minimization and pleasure maximization are more or less implicit in all of our political judgments and actions. For political actors, the system of »reward and punishment« has fundamental significance. Politicians do whatever leaves them feeling good: the feeling of contentment, performance of duty, the savoring of power, material gain, or conquest and dominance.

By the same token, voters are guided primarily by their emotions. Acting rationally means making the choice that, in the final analysis, maximizes feeling good and being happy. There are scarcely any political events in which »background emotions« and the dimensions of pleasure and pain play no role at all. Without pleasure and happiness,

without that pleasurable tingling sensation in the gut, a human being would freeze up inside. Feelings of well-being or anger, which may be occasioned by material or non-material factors, play a vital role in shaping voters' preferences.

By including background emotions in the process by which judgments are reached and by taking into account the pleasure/pain mechanism, we arrive at a formula for recognizing populist intentions and distinguishing them from legitimate democratic statements. Populists exploit human emotions and needs for their own ends. By proposing simplistic solutions, they awaken feelings of happiness in the voters. By contrast, a democratic politician is supposed to understand the voters' emotions, their hopes and fears, in order to create an affective basis for addressing the complicated problems of our time. Still, all things considered it would be wrong to dismiss every emotional expression or action as a manifestation of populism. And not every politician who caters to the feelings and emotions of citizens deserves to be stigmatized as a populist. A democracy that stakes everything on rational discourse and fails to take seriously the fears, concerns, and hopes of its citizens leaves a void in which populist politicians and parties can thrive. The wish for comfortable feelings and contentment is an essential component of human nature and, as a fundamental motive of human action, reflects evolutionary development.

Rationality and emotionality are not polar opposites. The opposite of »rational« is not »emotional«; it is »irrational,« and the opposite of »emotional« is definitely not »rational« but rather »emotionless.« A rational position, i.e., one that is well-founded, can certainly be defended emotionally and passionately. Similarly, it would be equally possible to advocate a totally irrational viewpoint without the slightest stirring of emotion. Coldness and callousness in a person by no means indicate a first-rate intellect. By the same token, when a person is unable to make use of his or her intellect, it is not a sign of emotional depth. To display and talk about emotions is just as important for rational discourse as are pragmatic modes of argument.

Democracy is based on more than just the rationality of its citizens. In equal measure it requires empathy, participation, public spiritedness, solidarity, justice, fairness, and the willingness to engage in teamwork. These are all attributes that include powerfully emotional components. The objective of political education should not be simply to promote the development of rational judgments. Rather, it should be to recognize the emotions and feelings that are accessible to democracy and to integrate them into its educational program. By overcoming the dichotomy between rationality and emotionality, we open the door to a new political order. Because brain research investigates human beings with all of their biological and mental, as well as their rational and emotional dispositions, it paves the way for us to conceptualize a universal theory of action, one that can transcend differences of confession and culture, and yet still be normative.



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