ENDURING VALUES

HOW PROGRESSIVES ACROSS EUROPE CAN WIN

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FABIAN SOCIETY

EDITED BY: KATE MURRAY
AND ANIA SKRZYPEK

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Ania Skrzypek
Introduction
Integrity, inclusiveness, and imagination: How to make progressive ideology matter again **4**

Christian Krell
1 | Progressive: changing lives for the better **11**

Patrick Diamond
2 | Ambition: making the case for radical reform **18**

Kaisa Vatanen
3 | Unity: addressing social division **24**

Marcin Duma
4 | Pragmatism: balancing action, expectations and needs **29**

Andreas Scheider MEP
5 | Competence: being fit to govern **33**

Anneliese Dodds MP
6 | Solidarity: Responding to the renewed appetite for collective action **39**

Thijs Reuten MEP

7 | Democratic: the rule of law at the core of a social, green and free Europe **46**

Preet Kaur Gill MP

8 | Compassion: working together for a better world **51**

Panny Antoniou

9 | Intergenerational: bridging the gap between young and old **58**

Jon Bloomfield

10 | Sustainable: meeting the climate challenge **64**

Tomáš Petříček

11 | Outward-looking: building new global progressive alliances **70**

Marius S. Ostrowski

12 | Forward-looking: building a better world one step at a time **76**

Endnotes **82**

Contributors **87**

Ania Skrzypek

Introduction
Integrity, inclusiveness, and imagination: How to make progressive ideology matter again

In June 2022, a group of political scientists met for a seminar at the University of Gothenburg. All had devoted their professional lives to research on social democracy. The symposium was long overdue because of Covid. This meant that several of the seminar themes had to be tweaked. Still, there was one question from the initial outline that remained and was the red thread running through the three days filled with presentations. It was: what makes social democratic policies distinctive?

For politicians, who take multiple decisions daily, this might seem a superfluous preoccupation. Their somewhat instinctive answer might be that what they try to accomplish is defined by their affiliation within the social democratic movement. But were that the case would there be such pluralism within the movement, fuelling successive splits and mergers over the course almost two centuries? If all were clear, would there be a need for grand ideological debates and entirely new party programmes? And would there be so many regrets after lost elections in the form of remarks such as: "Our parties would win (again) if only they had remained faithful to the social democratic credo?" Probably not. Therefore asking what defines social democracy, what makes its policies stand out, and what makes people trust it – is neither an exclusively academic preoccupation nor a philosophical exercise. It is about defining the overall mission and equipping political parties with the means of reaching their goal.

That is particularly important, when – like now – the political landscape is changing fast and is marked by a number of crises. The ideological debate matters. That is why this essay collection has been put together, to

serve as an inspiration for conversations about progressivism both in the UK and the EU.

The authors come from different backgrounds: some have served the progressive cause as leaders in European and British politics, whilst others are outstanding academics or renowned experts on public opinion. Each of them was asked to elaborate on a different social democratic value: looking either at its importance across Europe or at its practical application in everyday politics. Their contributions feature an incredible variety of reflections on progressivism today. But there is a clear theme running throughout the collection: that social democrats will thrive if they prove to be a movement of integrity, which fights for inclusive societies and which dares to imagine a fairer, better future for everyone.

Integrity

Undoubtedly the pandemic years have changed the face of Europe. Too many of us have seen people pass away, suffer from the long-term effects of the disease and struggle through tough times. Many have lost jobs and prospects. And while in some ways the pandemic exacerbated problems which already existed, new challenges have emerged. The Russian invasion of Ukraine has brought peace and co-operation in Europe into question, as well as sparking an energy crisis and growing poverty. There will be no quick fixes. What is required is a sensible, coherent and sustainable strategy that will deliver a new social deal and a different and better world.

Winning the trust of voters to deliver on such big ambitions is never easy, but it is even harder when everything seems so gloomy and uncertain. Some might say it is almost irresponsible to dream big when the world is falling apart. But before we take the pessimistic path, we should recall one of the most important lessons from the pandemic experience. Regardless of how long we have lived with conservative stigmatisation of certain groups or liberal laissez-faire, in the moment of need it was the instinct for solidarity that prevailed. People realised that it was essential to work together to support each other and to be there for one another. These genuine instincts are the same ones that once laid the foundations of the workers' movement and were indispensable in defining our common cause. That said, the challenge is not to simply say: "We always stood for

these values" and hope that the renewed sense of solidarity will simply favour the centre-left. If progressives are indeed to become the force that people turn to once more, they need to prove their own integrity by acting now with solidarity and equality.

That is the spirit of Anneliese Dodds' contribution to this collection. As she argues, individuals grew closer to one another during the pandemic, aware that joint efforts helped them through the hardest of times. International cooperation and much sacrifice from across the globe made it possible to develop a vaccine in a record time and the support of neighbours and in some cases strangers ensured that the most vulnerable received the food or medication they needed. This sense of togetherness continues to be a powerful bond, underpinning the solidarity in our communities which social democrats must connect with.

Forging new connections is important because the shift in public attitudes represents a more profound transformation. The desire for more collective action may well be a turning point after three or four decades of growing individualism. The increasing demands for more and better public services, enhanced labour market regulations and more gender equality are prompting debates about the role of the state and welfare state in the 21st century. And it is not just about new policies, but about the conduct of those who define and deliver them. That is why the campaign of the SPD in Germany in 2021 focused around the word respect, resonated so strongly. And this is also why the argument by Panny Antoniou in this collection that there is a need for more understanding and appreciation between the generations is so crucial.

And there are two other related observations. First, we need to go beyond some of our comforting assumptions. We must drop the habit, seen in many centre-left parties after unsuccessful elections, of saying: "Our programme was great, our campaign splendid, it was just that the voters did not understand…". Not only is it arrogant, but it also shows a clear failure to make a comprehensive connection with voters. Instead we need to adopt a new approach, focused on getting closer to the citizens we represent. As Marius Ostrowski writes in his chapter, we have to think about our big, long-term vision while also trying to meet more pressing current expectations. The ability to turn a programme into a story that people can share, connect through and eventually write together could work here well, as Marcin Duma shows in his chapter.

Second, the readiness to learn more about each other also means being straightforward about oneself. Of course it is never easy to put oneself out there, especially in an era of slick political marketing and the professionalisation of political parties. But the public thirst for what is personal, genuine and values-driven should encourage social democrats. As Preet Kaur Gill argues in her chapter, this is the time to be transformative and to aim high. But delivering, especially in the field of international development and aid which she discusses, will only be possible if social democrats demonstrate confidence in what they believe and by extension, in who they are.

Inclusiveness

Integrity is about the power of conviction, being true to oneself, and in that sense it is also about being predictable. This last characteristic should not be underestimated, especially in our crisis-ridden unstable times. People need to be reassured if they are to dare to entrust their hopes to a political party. But although integrity is a crucial quality it is not in itself enough to build the deep connections with people that we will need to succeed. It must be accompanied by a bold commitment to inclusiveness.

And inclusiveness must be a conscious and continuously explained choice. For, despite the solidarity and compassion we have seen over the last few years, a legacy of antagonism and stigma towards the most vulnerable remains. This negativity has been nurtured by the right and the extreme right and thrives on confrontation, just as we saw with the infamous march on the Capitol in the US. We know that we are in the midst of a vicious cultural war – and it may be taking a new turn.

In her chapter, Kaisa Vatanen explains how radicalisation, polarisation, and the weakening of democracies have been possible. She is right in pointing to the exploitation of fears about the future, fears which are frequently focused on being both left alone and left behind. These anxieties are likely to intensify again soon, as many countries' economies have not recovered after Covid, the energy crisis is upon us and more people are set to fall into poverty. The way forward must be to fight inequality and build more cohesion. This is a positive response that allows people to hold onto hope – a strong protective shield when faced with the narratives of right-wing extremists.

Importantly, sustaining such hope also requires an understanding that although times are difficult, we must hold on to the standards we have. This means not only our minimum social and economic standards but also our commitment to democracy and the rule of law. These issues have recently been in the spotlight, particularly in Poland and Hungary. When we see how many checks and balances have been dismantled in these two countries, and why in other places too politicians have begun to abuse power and act in a repulsive manner, ignoring the rules set in the interest of all, we need to recognise that it is a mistake to think that democracy can always defend itself.

Democracy is an ideal which societies pursue to ensure that everyone's rights and freedoms are respected equally, that decisions are taken by the majority with the respect and protection of minorities, and that rules of co-existence and mutual responsibilities are laid out in a social contract. Democracy is also a culture in which relations among individuals and communities should be defined by permanent dialogue, mutual respect, pluralism, and openness. Thijs Reuten is right to stress in his chapter that one cannot be casual about principles or expect them to be upheld by default. And while inclusiveness should be a progressive answer to any attempt at exclusion, boldness must also be a strategy to promote and defend democratic principles once they are under attack.

Imagination

Integrity and inclusiveness are key ingredients in translating the progressive vision into principles that can help social democrats build new kinds of connections with communities. But while integrity should ensure predictability and hence trustworthiness, and inclusiveness should enable mutual understanding and forge a sense of collective action, we also need a sense of direction. And that requires imagination.

One might ask whether this is naive, especially taking into account the difficult circumstances we face in today's world. I would argue that it is not. Creativity is key to building back better. It is a way to escape short-term politics and to create a transformative agenda which offers a better, fairer future for everyone.

Imagination offers us the opportunity to think unconventionally – which is exactly what progressives need after years of having been accused of being too moderate, too cautious, and too subservient to either neo-liberal thinking or the limits set by the traditional formats of politics. Daring to use our imagination is about having the courage to propose an alternative, something which not only young people, but all of our citizens – exhausted after the pandemic years and worried about the ongoing war in Europe – want to see. The debate over our future policy programme should be a forward-looking and refreshing one.

There are evidently many dimensions to this policy debate. To start from the global level, Tomáš Petříček is right in promoting a conversation over international solidarity. In the face of today's challenges, we will need to make choices – between consolidation and tolerance, between immediate relief at any cost and more difficult long-term solutions. The decisions we make will be historically significant, and progressives need to anticipate them.

Furthermore, even if in the EU plans such as Next Generation EU offer a reason for cautious optimism that an economic recovery will take hold and that this time it will be paired with substantial modernisation, that is not enough for social democrats to be complacent. As Christian Krell argues in his chapter, in order to be trusted to deliver now and in the future, they need to do more to define what they mean when they say "social progress for everyone". And here, Patrick Diamond proposes enlarging our scope. He suggests we need to ensure equality, productivity, and prosperity. His deliberations offer some key reflections regarding access to services, knowledge, and technology. This connects well with the arguments of Jon Bloomfield, who in his contribution looks at the fight against climate change. His proposal about *continuity in change* is particularly relevant, especially because it takes account of the fact that the green transition agenda is a very pluralistic one. That seems to be another key issue for socialists to ponder on, given the debate in some countries over how far social democracy will become more of an ecologist movement.

Acting with integrity, prioritising inclusiveness, and pushing the borders of imagination in our policymaking will all be central to the future of social democracy.

For many years now, we progressives have been confronted with the possibility of our own demise. Electoral defeats and vicious criticism portraying us a relic of the past have shaken our confidence and made us focus on the short term. It has sometimes felt like there was little to hope for – especially given that some argued that we were witnessing the end of the partisan system and that there would be no longer be space to pursue an ideologically anchored kind of politics.

Yet now the mood has changed. Progressives are allowing ourselves to hope that we could once again be entrusted again with fulfilling the hopes of our citizens. But in order to truly anchor our re-emergence, we need to address the questions that divide us and to recognise that indeed *we do have more in common.* And we need to consider what Andreas Schieder writes in this collection, namely that old solutions will not fix old problems. Instead we need to look beyond traditional assumptions and deliver fairness in new ways. Then a better future for everyone is still possible.

Christian Krell

1 | Progressive: changing lives for the better

Progressiveness is an age-old political value and it is key to the social democratic tradition. As political apathy grows in the face of lockdowns, war and a worsening climate crisis, the centre-left must offer hope that life can improve under its governance.

Ralf is one of my neighbours and has become a friend over the years. He is in his late 50s and has made his way in life. He started his professional career in the nearby engine factory. Now he is a caretaker in a big apartment building and more than happy with this job; the work is less stressful and he profits from his natural talent to get along with all kinds of people.

Ralf is not a political junkie, but he is always well informed. I love to talk to him about politics. I benefit from his blunt analysis. During our last chat, something unexpected happened. I asked him about some political issues, and he answered: "I don't know". When I asked why not, he replied with a sigh: "I have stopped watching the news. Too much bad news." I tried to bring in some optimism: "But Ralf, there have always been tough times, it will get better." But he was not convinced at all: "No, this time it is different. Too many crises at the same time." After a while he added: "I just hope we can pay the gas bill by the end of the year."

Is progress possible in times of crisis?

Ralf's sober assessment can be empirically justified. The Stockholm-based SIPRI Institute[1] is known for its annual overview of global defence spending. It sees itself as a peace research institute that takes a comprehensive look at the conditions for peaceful coexistence of people. In its recent report, Environment of Peace: Security in a New Era

of Risk, the institute urgently warns of twin crises unfolding at breakneck speed around the issues of security and climate.

The numbers on the security crisis alone are dramatic: a doubling of armed conflicts from 2010 to 2020, taking it up to 56; and a corresponding doubling of the number of refugees and displaced persons – and this was even before the war in Ukraine intensified. There is growing military spending in almost every part of the world. In 2021, global military spending surpassed $2tn for the first time, and there is no sign of a turnaround.

This escalation of security policy is closely related to the rapid acceleration of climate change. Extreme weather is increasing; the overexploitation of forests and seas continues unabated; around a quarter of all species are threatened with extinction; and there is a dramatic decline in pollinating insects. These developments are not only frightening because they threaten the basis of human life in the long term, but also because several of the security conflicts are already closely related to the climate crisis here and now.

Last, but not least, there is also a democratic crisis. We are witnessing a trend towards democratic regression in all corners of the world. The idea that democratic regimes will continue to spread in the long run has become more than fragile. And not only because younger democratic states, like Poland or Hungary, are showing authoritarian tendencies again, but also because in established democracies democratic processes and institutions are under pressure. The erosion of voting rights in the US is just one sad example of many.

Against the background of these multiple crises, how can something like 'progress' still succeed? Shouldn't politics be more about managing crises? Doesn't every claim to political progress have to be given up in favour of reacting to these crises?

From this point of view, the slogan of the recent German coalition sounds somewhat questionable.

In 2021, the coalition of Social Democrats, Liberals and Greens in Germany agreed on their coalition treaty under the slogan "Dare more progress". It tries to outline a progressive roadmap for the coming years.[2] After the

standstill of the Merkel era, the idea is to accelerate green transformation, modernise the state and its institutions and focus on social justice.

It is much more than a coincidence that those three parties formed their common programme around 'progress'. Since the development of modernity, there has been a close connection between progress and specific political forces in the political arena. While the right-wing political spectrum was associated with the concept of 'conservative', ie wanting to preserve, the political left is closely associated with the concept of 'progress'. It wanted to change things, demanding a better future, whereas conservatives had fond memories of the 'good old days'.

This dividing line is still used today as a categorisation to describe a political camp. Socialists and social democrats, some green parties and – depending on the respective circumstances – also liberal parties are regarded as progressive. And it is no wonder that today's institutions and structures of the political left are often labelled with reference to the progressive narrative, like the Progressive Alliance or the Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS). Progress is part of the DNA of the left-liberal spectrum.

What is progress?

Ferdinand Tönnies, a German sociologist, wrote in the 1920s that progress means to overcome a state of deficiency.[3] In that sense, progress is not just any kind of personal or historical development, but an evolution towards a higher aim. The state that should be achieved is better than the one which exists.

At the same time, Tönnies' definition leaves open what exactly should be improved, and gives space for various ambitions in changing times. Your state of deficiency might be characterised by a lack of respect for your sexual orientation, or by fear of losing your job or by being unprotected from the next heatwave. Thus, progress can be very different, depending on various times and needs.

The history of progress as a philosophical thought dates back to the ancient times. But the modern notion of a continuous higher development of mankind and human coexistence spread during the 19th century

and is linked to liberal as well as socialist thinkers. The Marx-Engels interpretation that there is progressive economic development, in the course of which not only productive forces grow but also people's opportunities for freedom, has become famous. In the third volume of Capital, Marx wrote of a 'realm of freedom' that could emerge.[4]

The labour movement developed in Europe during the 19th century as well. It was a time of massive transformation. Social democrats regarded themselves as the political force that not only wanted to understand the upheavals of that time, but wanted to translate them into progress. Two developments in particular shaped the understanding of progress in social democracy in its early days: the emergence of modern capitalism with industrial production and the spreading of ideas after the Enlightenment.

Accordingly, the social democratic idea of progress was closely linked to technical and industrial progress. But it was not limited to this. Rather progress was also regarded as a political process that should bring civil rights. An understanding of progress developed that was closely based on the concept of freedom. It was about improving material and social conditions: resilient employment contracts, eight-hour days, health insurance, continued payment of wages in the event of illness, right down to a minimum wage that one can live on. All of these were prerequisites for a free life, to be achieved through progress. But the political conditions for a free life were also part of the social democratic idea of progress. Equal voting rights for men and women, freedom of opinion and religion, right up to the recognition of different gender identities, for example.

This dual understanding of freedom was at the heart of the progressive narrative. The freedom of the individual should increase through progress. This idea was outlined in most of the socialist or social democratic party manifestos in the late 19th and early 20th century.

The demands that the SPD developed in their Erfurt programme in 1891 read like a catalogue of progress based on this pattern: occupational safety, gender equality, free health care and much more. All this seemed utopian at the time. In the 20th century, however, it was possible to translate a large part of these ideas into real practice, step by step, and thus achieve noticeable progress for millions of people. Paid holidays, a little car to make a trip, access to higher education, the right to same-sex marriage – progress was made and it changed people's lives for the better.

Progress became green

The idea of progress changed over the years. At the beginning of the labour movement, its vision of progress was closely linked to industrial growth. The social democratic notion of progress had a heartbeat of steel.

However, as early as the 1970s, the debate on the planetary boundaries of growth influenced social democratic politics. In Germany, the former head of the SPD's basic value commission Erhard Eppler pushed this debate. According to Eppler, constant further economic growth in industrialised countries was no longer possible even then. Our planet simply cannot give up anymore. At the same time, it is not necessary. After all, purely quantitative growth is not decisive for the quality of life or even the happiness of the individual, at least above a certain threshold of prosperity.

Rather, new standards are needed beyond GDP growth in order to achieve a better quality of life and thus real progress. Since then, there have been countless commissions, conferences and initiatives to develop indicators for progress in our societies that go beyond purely quantitative economic growth. None of these have knocked GDP off its throne. And of course, this area was and still is contested within a labour movement that includes trade unions as well as green activists.

However, something certainly changed in the social democratic programme: progress is not just about industrially produced, material prosperity or its multiplication. Material security is certainly a crucial condition. And progress means ensuring this. But there is more to a successful or even happy life for the individual. This debate helped the old parties of the labour movement to develop an understanding of progress for the post-industrial era.

The early 2000s led to a more sceptical view on what could be achieved. The neoliberal era stopped the expansion of the welfare state – and even reversed it in many cases. Individual progress was much more difficult to achieve and people in industrialised countries much more often experienced a downward trend in their lives: job security was loosened, health care was privatised and the trend towards more liberal and free societies came to an end.

The British-American historian Tony Judt addressed this idea of politics in the time of fear in his last book Ill Fares the Land.[5] The social contract of post-war Europe had been given up, security, stability and fairness were under massive pressure and given these circumstances it might be progressive not to demand more, but to defend those earlier achievements. People felt fear in their lives. It is no surprise that he called for a return to social democratic ideals.

Today we are actually witnessing a slight comeback of social democracy, both as a political movement and in public discourse. In some European countries – Spain, Portugal, Germany – social democrats are back in power. Neoliberal thinking has lost its dominance and the public debate focuses not on competition but on resilience and collective action to ensure social and physical security. This comeback is fragile, of course, but it might contribute to a new era of progress.

Is there a future for progress?

To be progressive is the cornerstone of the political centre-left. Depending on the time and circumstances, the measures to achieve progress have varied. But to cope with the current crises we face, we need a new era of progress, based on three assumptions:

1. **Progress is the key to overcoming fear**
   The politics of fear is back in times of crisis: fear of rising costs, fear of climate change, fear of war. But fear undermines the trust that societies are based on. To hold our societies together will be one of the biggest tasks of our age. Progress, as well as the will and belief that we can change things for the better, can counter fear and apathy, leading to constructive engagement and common action.

2. **Progress is about freedom**
   The essence of progress is emancipation. This means increasing the scope for freedom for the individual in such a way that is compatible with others and their freedoms. What exactly that is varies widely. It can be to love the one you love, to bring out your best talents, to speak out freely or to be not afraid of the next heating bill.

3. **Progress needs common structures**
   Progress is about more personal freedom for the individual. But to achieve this, it needs collective structures. A working healthcare system, open and inclusive education, reliable state institutions, resilient infrastructure. No one can achieve individual freedom on its own.

The day after we had our sobering conversation, I talked to Ralf again. I asked him: "I see your point, but don't you think we can do anything about it?" After a while he nodded and said to me: "You're right. Closing our eyes is no good. And we should do something. A world without optimism is no option." I think, he is right. And it is precisely the hope that things can change for the better that is the magic of progress.

Patrick Diamond

2 | Ambition: making the case for radical reform

UK Labour must look outwards as it seeks to define a new vision for Britain. By learning the right lessons from Europe, we can build a more productive, more equal and more environmentally sustainable economy and society.

The standout policy problem confronting the United Kingdom over the last 40 years has been the alarming rise in economic inequality, which has undermined growth and eroded social cohesion. It is a fact that inequalities in Britain are higher than other advanced European economies. The OECD reported that the UK became the fourth most unequal country in Europe over the last decade. Economic inequality leads to glaring disparities in life chances, perpetuating stark divisions across classes and generations. Worst of all, according to recent Bank of England forecasts, the UK is set to enter a painful recession that will hit those on lowest incomes hardest.

In Britain, the relentless rise of inequality since the 1970s has been economically and socially catastrophic. On the one hand, inequality undermines growth in the economy's productive capacity and weakens personal prosperity. On the other, the long-term effects of inequality inflict significant harm on the UK population. Research by the Institute for Public Policy Research has demonstrated that mortality rates in the North of England are worse than those in Turkey, Poland and Romania. As a consequence, the UK is once again in danger of becoming literally 'the sick man of Europe'.

Given the sharp rise in inequality and in the wake of the great financial crisis of 2008, intellectual debate on the British left has increasingly focused on how to reform British capitalism along egalitarian lines. Among the favoured models are, not surprisingly, those seen in Nordic countries, notably Sweden and Denmark, that have combined high levels

of economic growth with a strong redistributive welfare state; and the German social market that uses industrial partnership and corporatist arrangements to maintain economic competitiveness while ensuring a high level of security and cohesion among its population.

It remains the case that social democrats in Britain have long drawn inspiration from alternative models of managing capitalist economies. The post-war minister and leading Labour intellectual, Anthony Crosland, insisted that for the British left, Sweden was the country most worthy of emulation. He sought to chart a new direction for the Labour party following the demise of the Attlee governments. Controversially, Crosland insisted that the state ownership of industry was no longer necessary given the redistributive 'Keynes plus Beveridge' welfare state that was being erected in Britain.

By the 1990s, the political commentator, Will Hutton, argued in his seminal tract, The State We're In, that Britain should imitate the institutional framework of Germany that provided its economy with the ingredients for long-term success. Rather than focusing on short-term profit maximisation that benefits shareholders, German firms were investing for the future, not only in plant and machinery, but in workers and their communities. For a brief period, Hutton's concept of the stakeholder economy defined the terms of debate about economic policy on the British centre-left.

Such efforts by left intellectuals to learn lessons from beyond the shores of the UK over the last 70 years have been extraordinarily important. They continue to offer a rich source of inspiration and innovation. The British left has always been prone to insularity given the tendency towards British exceptionalism that runs deep in the political culture. In the aftermath of the UK's withdrawal from the European Union, the Labour party needs to search for ideas elsewhere. But in so doing, it needs to identify the right lessons.

To state the obvious, the UK isn't Sweden or Germany. British capitalism has its own distinctive institutions and culture. The UK economy will continue to evolve on a path heavily inscribed by past experience – what social scientists call 'path dependency' – reflecting Britain's comparative strength in high-value service sectors. In his illuminating book on the long history of the British economy, Two Hundred Years of

Muddling Through, the economist Duncan Weldon remarks that: "The past does not determine the future, but it does shape it." The scholar of political economy, Andrew Gamble, also emphasises that: "The UK cannot change many of the inherited characteristics of its political economy", notably its dependence on global trade and investment, the importance of financial services, the extent of urbanisation, as well as the long-term decline of the manufacturing sector. The UK has been experiencing deindustrialisation for many decades, while it has long enjoyed comparative strength in finance. The British economy is unlikely to again become a manufacturing powerhouse that generates millions of industrial jobs.

The residual strength of the UK lies in the dynamic service sectors. As the Resolution Foundation recently demonstrated, the UK is among the largest exporters of services in the world, second only to the United States.[6] It concludes: "Britain is a broad-based services economy, built on successful musicians and architects as well as bankers. We're about ICT, culture and marketing." While successive structural shocks unleashed by globalisation have fuelled a yearning to return to traditional industrial jobs that afforded secure livelihoods to working people, those sources of employment will not be recreated on a mass scale in the UK. In truth, Britain's economic future lies resolutely in knowledge and technology. And as the Resolution Foundation highlights, service-based economies are invariably richer and more equal than manufacturing economies.

Away from what passes for political debate at Westminster, the core intellectual task for the British centre-left is to design a prospectus for a high-growth, service-orientated economy that is simultaneously more productive, better able to achieve egalitarian outcomes, and enriches economic security, particularly for workers with low to intermediate skills.

The wave of political populism in western post-industrial democracies highlights the fragility of the current economic settlement. Yet the resilience of the liberal economic system should not be underestimated. The political economy scholar David Soskice has shown that the knowledge economy when fused with liberal democratic institutions creates strong electoral coalitions that favour the economic status quo, despite the shocks inflicted by populist political victories and growing antipathy to the European Union. There is little indication voters are ready to jettison the fundamental axioms of the market economy. Yet they want

the system to work more effectively, with greater efforts to counter rising inequalities and to distribute opportunities more equitably.

The global centre-left and proponents of the third way in the late 1990s undermined that effort by wrongly concluding that the service-orientated economy necessitates radically curtailing the range of policy choices available to a social democratic government. The demise of the industrial age economy and the emergence of globalisation fed the apocalyptic belief that the era of state activism had ended. Governments could no longer directly intervene in the economy. Moreover, welfare state spending must be restrained since international financial markets would punish profligate governments. The role of public policy was to maximise flexibility in capital, product and labour markets, while maintaining strict budgetary and fiscal controls.

These shibboleths were hardwired into centre-left thinking not only in the UK, but in the United States and across Western Europe. Over the last decade, there have been sporadic efforts within the Labour party to challenge the received wisdom of the third way era. Yet what was so often lacking was a credible analysis of the institutional and path-dependent context in which the modern UK economy was operating. During Jeremy Corbyn's leadership, there was a belief that somehow the post-war industrial economy could be recreated through a return to indicative state planning and a large-scale public sector.

The centre-left has to accept the reality that the British economy in future will be powered by services, knowledge and technology, predominantly in the private sector. But to maximise the UK's productive potential and ensure countervailing pressure on inequality, activist states have to use the full range of policy levers, eschewing longstanding shibboleths about the limits on what social democratic governments can do.

Specific examples illustrate this point. The first concerns the commitment to labour market flexibility. There may be a case for 'flexicurity' as pioneered by countries such as Denmark, with its emphasis on boosting employability through investment in training and skills. Yet excessive labour market flexibility explains the UK's relatively poor productivity performance since the 1980s. If firms are committed to their workers and cannot downsize by making job cuts, they will be compelled to invest in technology and innovation to improve performance. Countries with

stricter labour market regulation, notably France, have surpassed UK productivity performance in recent decades.

The second shibboleth was the belief that education and skills alone would solve all the problems of low growth and inequality in advanced capitalist states. New growth theory pioneered in the 1990s preached that growing the supply of human capital would increase demand for skilled workers. Yet in many structurally disadvantaged parts of the UK, education investment did not increase the proportion of skilled jobs. Other factors were influential in driving growth, notably the quality of public infrastructure, investment in technology, capacity for innovation, and so on. As important is the leadership role of government in pursuing an industrial strategy that incentivises firms to invest over the long term.

The next shibboleth is the claim that there is little meaningful role for social partnership in a hi-tech service-orientated economy. As such, trade unions are viewed as a relic of the past. Yet a key characteristic of the service-based economy is the risk of labour market polarisation and the growing division between 'lovely' high-skilled, well-paid, secure jobs and 'lousy' low-paid, low-skilled, insecure jobs. Research by the London School of Economics suggests that the low level of 'worker power' in the UK holds down wages by £100 a week for the average employee. Trade unions are essential to avoid a race to the bottom in the labour market, maintaining dignity for workers. There is a strong case for social partnership embodied in sectoral wage agreements, where improvements in pay are matched by productivity gains through workplace training.

The final shibboleth is the belief that major utilities and assets in the knowledge-orientated economy are necessarily managed best in the private sector. Where access to information and knowledge are the focal point of economic activity, there is a strong case for greater state involvement. Labour's 2019 manifesto commitment to extend super-fast broadband to every household in the UK through partly renationalising British Telecom was among the first of its kind anywhere in the world. The plan was said to significantly underestimate the costs of guaranteeing full fibre connection to every home, while it was not viewed as credible by voters. Yet it is almost certain that greater state intervention in the telecommunications market will be necessary to improve domestic and small business access to the internet. Elsewhere, the energy sector is clearly ripe for new models of public ownership given sharply rising prices

for consumers alongside the ignominious collapse of a litany of smaller energy companies.

As such, the task for social democrats in Britain is to create a political economy framework in which the UK's service-based economy not only becomes more productive and dynamic, but more equal and cohesive. At the same time, both growth and redistribution need to become more environmentally sustainable given the existential threat posed by catastrophic climate change.

Despite the UK's withdrawal from EU membership, Labour can continue to learn from policies tried and tested elsewhere on the continent. The party needs to recognise that the centre-left is highly unlikely to achieve its long-term objectives on economic growth and social justice if the UK remains wedded to the Brexit model negotiated by the Johnson administration. Despite the pressures imposed by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Europe is among the world's richest economies. The UK under a future Labour government must identify an effective model of economic partnership by seeking a trade deal that immediately recreates a customs union between the EU and Great Britain.

Recent geo-political shocks, successive electoral defeats and deep inter-party divisions have made the prospects for British social democracy appear unduly gloomy. Yet the vision for the centre-left in Britain, as elsewhere in Europe, of combining economic efficiency, social cohesion and environmental sustainability remains achievable in the decades ahead. As the Labour party navigates the treacherous landscape of contemporary UK politics, the party should reflect on how to build the strategic alliances that swept it to victory in 1945, 1964 and 1997. Britain has never been an intrinsically Conservative country. Progressive change is still possible if the British centre-left is prepared to reach out to all sections and classes in society, making an audacious case for radical reforms of our economy and society.

Kaisa Vatanen

3 | Unity: addressing social division

The populist right has exploited the fears of those citizens who feel they have been left behind. To heal the divides in our societies, progressives must listen to the people and address their concerns, wherever they are.

In a global comparison, all European countries are socio-economically very equal. And in a European comparison, the Nordic countries are even more so. In international rankings, Finland comes on top or close to the top of the list on welfare, low inequality, low income differences, happiness and on many other measures. The support for a wide and deep welfare state, extensive public services and relatively high taxation is high. Yet the experience of inequality continues to exist and has a strong impact on the politics of the country.

Yet when surveyed, rising inequality and especially the exclusion of children and young people regularly come high on the list of concerns for the Finnish people. There is a feeling that we are not all that equal. That some of the people are thriving and some are left behind. Despite the statistics, international rankings and comparisons, there simply is a sentiment – an understanding – that not everyone has the same bright future prospects ahead of them.

And that feeling is something that the progressives across Europe should take very seriously. We should do so for at least two reasons:

First, because it is correct.

And second, because the fact that it has not been taken seriously up to now has created room for populist and extremist political forces to capitalise on it.

The only way for the political left to become stronger sustainably is to find answers to the concerns of ordinary people who feel left behind.

I will briefly cover both reasons for a united response to inequality and conclude by suggesting some responses.

Inequalities continue to exist

Even in the most advanced welfare states there are inequalities. In different countries these are very different. Where there are vast income inequalities, they usually result in many other kinds of inequality as well. And often we tend to concentrate just on income equality.

In the Nordic countries we have long been very proud (and rightly so) of our low income and wealth inequalities. This has been used as an explanation for why there is such high social cohesion in these countries. It has also allowed the political right to argue that there are no real inequalities in our societies that demand such strong state intervention and welfare policies. And yet, in all of the Nordic countries the populist right has gained large electoral success by tapping into the emotion of unfairness, inequality and lack of opportunity, and by claiming to be the voice of the forgotten people and their worries.

The important question we have to ask ourselves is: why do populists gain such support in countries which have been among the most successful in providing equal welfare and prosperity to our people?

The answer to this question is not exactly the same in different places, but it starts with the same realisation. The feeling of inequality is rooted in something real. We have to recognise that it is not just income or wealth inequality that matters to a society and its cohesion. For example, in Finland, which, as mentioned, is one of the most successful countries on many rankings, the picture changes when you change the perspective from national statistics to regional or municipal comparisons.[7]

The Friedrich Ebert Foundation and Foundation for European Progressive Studies, together with a number of other think tanks, conducted a large project on inequalities in different European countries over the past couple of years. The studies took a wider perspective on inequality, moving from just economic indicators to education, health, employment and many others measuring the width and depth of inequality in the case study countries. Crucially, the studies looked at spatial disparities instead

of concentrating on national averages. The picture that emerged was important: "Upon examination of the district or municipal data in all the countries studied, what becomes clear is a pattern of social and economic differences that cumulate into spatial disparities. Stark differences in economic structure, local labour markets and social development become apparent between central growth regions and peripheral regions. This polarisation between population centres and peripheral areas occurs both socially and spatially." [8]

So even in countries where the national statistics show a fairly equal society with comparably small disparities, there are larger geographical differences between areas of growth and prosperity and those with declining job opportunities and future prospects. This is certainly the case in Finland. In a large country with a small population (5.5 million inhabitants) these differences get quickly emphasised. The difference between the southern cities with their opportunities, jobs and services and the 'lagging regions' that cover more than half of the country creates frustration and hopelessness that breeds anger and populism.

A similar pattern has been found in many other studies in Europe.[9] People's feelings of hopelessness or disillusionment are not driven by hate or xenophobia: they are caused by real, substantive fears about their lack of opportunities, security or expectations of a better tomorrow. These are all real issues that social democrats used to have answers to, but now seem too often unable to offer concrete visions of improvement and solutions. That allows the populist right to offer simplified narratives that blame both the 'political elites' and 'others'; whether that be in the form of immigrants, other minorities or whatever group fits the populist message. In the UK it was the EU and Brexit, in Finland (with one of the lowest migrant populations in the EU) it is often immigrants.

How to tackle populism and extremism?

The important question for social democrats and other progressives is: how do we tackle these concerns? The answer is not to get caught up in the accusations the populists and extremists are making. By debating migration, the EU or minorities we are not tackling the root causes of people's disillusionment and frustration, but playing on the field of identity politics we can never win on.

To say that is not to yield on the issue of human rights. We should never compromise on these. But our politics should also offer comprehensive answers to the concerns of those people who feel left behind. Our politics should actually work to improve their lives rather than engage in populist games.

The recent election victories by social democrats in different European countries support this approach. When social democrats speak directly and concretely to the ordinary people, like they did in Norway or Germany, they succeed. In both Germany and Norway, the social democratic campaigns were rooted in respect for ordinary people, listened to their concerns and responded by offering solutions that really made a difference to people's day-to-day lives. The same was the case in Finland in 2019: SDP won with a campaign and manifesto that tackled the big issues of climate change and digitalisation, but most of all offered answers to some of the biggest concerns in the everyday lives of ordinary people. The increase to the smallest pensions, the extension of free of charge education to 18-year-olds, faster access to health care and more staff at elderly care services – all of these policies address the issues faced by ordinary people in every corner of the country.

Policies to create better futures

Feelings of unfairness and rising inequality are exacerbated by the current economic circumstances where many are still feeling the impact of the uncertainty caused by the pandemic – both on their personal economic situation and their health and safety. That is now accompanied by inflation and uncertainty caused by the war in Ukraine.

The geographical position of Finland obviously has an effect on the way people look at the situation and on the discussions we're having. But the rising prices at petrol stations and grocery stores are affecting some more than others. The ones suffering the most are often those who have the least to begin with. In May 2022 inflation in Finland was 7.1 per cent.[10] It was the second lowest in the eurozone, which tells us more about the fact that Finland has been less dependent on Russian energy and fossil fuels than anything else. Yet when that inflation rate is combined with only around 2 per cent pay rises in most public sector and blue collar jobs this year, there is reason for concern for many households in Finland.

Inflation and war also increase more general concerns over the economy and the possibility of recession. Fears over job security and income have risen again in polling this spring. And again, the concerns are more strongly held in areas where the feeling of being left behind was stronger to begin with. In other words, the polarisation and socio-economic disparities that existed pre-pandemic are only widening in this post-pandemic era of war in Europe.

For social democrats all of this is a reminder of why we are needed. We were needed more than a century ago to build societies that were more equal, where everyone had opportunities and where the background of your parents or the postcode you were born in should not define your future. That is as needed today as it was in the past. But we should rebuild our policies so that they truly benefit all of the people, in big cities, in rural villages and in everything in between. In the recent past, we have not been as good as we should have been in addressing the spatial aspect of inequality. We have too often relied on the idea that economic growth will trickle down to more rural, isolated or deprived areas by itself. We need to change that thinking and find policies that create opportunities for all of our citizens.

Investment in education everywhere is key to offering opportunities in areas where hopelessness resides today. Taking advantage of digitalisation and the changing nature of work post-pandemic by building facilities and fast connections (both online and transport) will help to revive communities and to allow people to choose where they live and work. Building more affordable housing will help address cost of living concerns everywhere. Investing in innovation and research into a green transition to make sure Europe remains at the forefront of the global competition will create better jobs in the long run. None of these are particularly new ideas, but they are inherently social democratic ones. They are part of the solution to keep everyone with us in the constantly changing world. We must not leave any more people behind and we must keep listening to the needs of ordinary people, the people who should be pushing our societies forward.

Marcin Duma

4 | Pragmatism: balancing action, expectations and needs

Now is the time for social democrats to be pragmatic. Parties must adjust their political vision to suit society's mood and expectations, get their communication right and, crucially, master the art of compromise.

Contemporary politics is seen as an area where pragmatism takes precedence over ideas, where efficiency is paramount and everything else is just an accessory. This vision is fully realised in the concept of 'post-politics' – nihilistic, cynical politics, based on artificially created, sterile axes of dispute, far from real problems. Where media coverage in the tabloids suppresses any problematic or ideological discourse. Does functioning in such a paradigm allow us to give up ideologies? Freely focusing on the form of politics without particularly worrying about its content? Can the centre-left make alliances with anyone, so long as it can justify it somehow and explain it to its voters?

Political ideas for political parties are like the skeleton and their agenda and narrative are stretched over it, much like muscles and skin. The political vision sets the direction in which reality is to change and society or, more broadly civilisation, are to develop. It is a vision based on values and the political expression is the current programme – a set of specific demands.

The programme is also the first step towards pragmatic politics: it should be based on specific public expectations and needs, and at the same time, it has to be grounded in the political idea of a given movement or political force. Pragmatism is about adjusting proposals – and thus the political story – to the current mood and social expectations, both of one's own voters and the wider electorate which is being wooed by competing parties.

Approaches to creating this political story vary. It can be built through consultations within a political party in the form of conferences, which at different organisational levels propose, discuss and forge specific policy solutions. You can also develop a story like this based on sociological research among voters, paying particular attention to your potential electorate. The results of such research are then adapted and fine-tuned by the political party. The latter approach gives greater opportunities to meet public expectations and a more accurate choice of political narrative, which allows for the ideological imperative to be reconciled with the pragmatism needed in an election campaign.

This approach to politics is currently dominant in European democracies, even in countries where liberal democracy appears to be under threat. It is quite aptly shown in the 2019 film Brexit, which is about Dominic Cummings and the Vote Leave campaign. The ability to convince people of one's own political vision by creating a story attractive to voters is the first version of political pragmatism. It is the art of hiding or displaying specific elements of a political idea depending on the public demand to address specific social needs. In the film, we see how a story is created that presents a specific political goal as a response to public demand over seemingly completely unrelated problems – this is pragmatism in politics at work. And the ability to be completely flexible in your political communication with voters often determines the success of a given political force.

Today's political communication is of course also influenced by the information revolution. Thanks to the internet – and in particular social media – political communication takes place almost in real-time, while the time for reaction and possible corrections to a strategy have been drastically shortened. Every mistake at the initial planning stage of a strategy – when a story is designed – is far more expensive than it was a decade ago. This heightens the importance of a pragmatic approach to the preparation of political campaigns.

However, pragmatism is not only about election campaigns, but also politics in the strict sense: building pre-election and post-election agreements, including ad hoc agreements. These generally require making a deal on the vision and political offer, including concessions on the political programme. Parties might have to give up some policies of their own and adopt their partner's solutions. Politics is the art of

compromise, and that is exactly the core of this aspect of pragmatism in political action.

In Poland, where there is a sharp dispute between the current ruling right-wing populists and the opposition made up of parties with a Christian Democratic, liberal and left-wing origin, the left faces some difficult choices. On the one hand, the current government is responding to social demands taken almost directly from the social democratic agenda, but on the other, in terms of civil rights and liberties, its offer is absolutely unacceptable to the contemporary left. On the opposition side, dominated both at the level of political entities and among groups of voters by a liberal way of thinking about social and economic relations, it is difficult to find allies in matters of social policy, but much easier in matters of culture and civil liberties.

This poses a great challenge to the Polish left, which, due to the sharp polarisation encompassing not only the political sphere but also the media, is unable to choose a third way or to find a balance between different parties in the political dispute. It is doomed to declare exactly what side it is on. Both from the Polish and European perspectives, such a choice seems simple and obvious, but one should be aware of its far-reaching consequences. It is also the moment to look at political action from a pragmatic perspective.

Because of its fundamental values, the left is firmly positioned against those currently in power in Poland. The consequence of such a choice, however, is the negation of the policy of the current government, whose essential foundation is social and welfare policy. This policy aims to support the poorest factions of Polish society through social transfers. Such a policy is the object of sharp criticism from many in the opposition, influenced by liberal or neoliberal ideas. Adopting this narrative, even if it is tempered, means the left loses the opportunity to engage 'blue collar' voters and is doomed to compete with liberals for very volatile young voters or simply to 'borrow' liberal voters from other parties, voters who may well switch back to other parties before the next election.

This picture may seem quite depressing, but it should be said that despite the challenges for the left in Poland, it has been able to achieve certain of its goals. The attitude to civil liberties – including reproductive rights and minority rights – is subject to dynamic changes. Polish society is

undergoing a progressive revolution at an accelerated pace. Along with this transformation, the positions of the mainstream opposition parties are also changing: they are abandoning conservative dogmas on abortion and LGBT+ rights and trying to keep up with the progressive revolution of Polish women and men. The pragmatic choice of the Polish left, aware of the costs and consequences of an alliance with liberals, allows for the effective implementation of a left-wing agenda in Poland, which has been rather conservative so far.

How can pragmatism be managed after the parliamentary elections that are to be held next autumn? This will be a test for the Polish left because perhaps it will need to govern in partnership with liberals at a time of recession and still high inflation. It will need to make some pragmatic political choices, balancing the fragile political stability of a multi-member coalition with a tough defence of the left-wing economic and social agenda.

Andreas Scheider MEP

5 | Competence: being fit to govern

In an age of crises, social democrats in the UK and the EU need to rethink their approach. Across Europe, policies to tackle injustice and the climate crisis can rebuild trust with the people.

What are the challenges for European social democracy? And what are the keys to social democratic renewal and victory? Before posing those questions, we need to step back and ask ourselves: what is social democracy and what is it for? What kind of society does it seek to create? Because society is changing – and so must social democracy.

Multiple crises: the Covid-19 pandemic, climate crisis and war

The Covid-19 crisis has been a wake-up call. The pandemic has exposed the underinvestment in key public services, especially in health and research. Today, GDP-led policies and fiscal consolidation are no longer the only option on the table – austerity is a failed political choice and EU leaders are working towards change. Covid-19 has affected our lives in major and unprecedented ways, socially, economically and culturally. Existing inequalities in almost all sectors of society have worsened.

What is more, society is experiencing the effects of the climate crisis more than ever. Not only in the regions of the Global South, but in the heart of Europe. It is increasingly recognised that the climate and ecological crisis will unleash a whole new source of social injustice. If this growing injustice is not addressed, more inequalities will arise and deepen our social crisis.

Additionally, the Russian invasion of Ukraine is destabilising the whole continent and the whole world.

These multiple crises call for a common progressive response: our answer cannot be found in a 'business as usual' approach, but rather it requires a radical rethinking of our society and economy. Citizens expect politicians to provide new and concrete answers. So what kind of alternative paths can social democracy offer to manage the multiple crises and gain people's trust?

Welfare instead of destructive competition

Growth means nothing if it does not make people's lives better: people and their problems need to be at the heart of public policies. European economic policy must focus on the wellbeing of all. Its objectives must be based on quality of life, employment, distributive justice, sustainability, public goods and innovation.

Harsh and short-sighted austerity policies must be scrapped. Instead, we need public investment and initiatives for employment. Imagine a society that puts people and their wellbeing first. Imagine a society where economic growth is not the only measure of success. This form of progressive society must not just be a utopia.

More people are aware that capitalism has become an unfair and inhumane economic paradigm: we are taking our planet to its limits, creating bigger gaps between the rich and the poor and undermining our social models. Across Europe, counter-movements are forming themselves: recent success stories have been seen in Germany, Portugal, Spain, Malta and Italy. Traditional progressive values are in demand again.

Working together across Europe

However, Europe is not only made up of the European continent and it is vital to also look at the UK, even more so in the wake of Brexit.

The Brexit debate in the UK has often been treated as a purely British concern, but taking a closer look at its origins one can see that instead of proving the case for national isolation, it instead proves the necessity of progressive collaboration across Europe. The anger that led to Brexit started with social cuts, populist lies and a Conservative obsession

with power. The tragedy is that Brexit will solve none of these problems for people living in the UK – and will even create new problems.

It is important that the British learn these lessons, and quickly, if further social and economic damage is to be averted. Yet the lesson learning goes both ways. On this side of the Channel, we in the EU must take the UK as a cautionary tale and ensure that populist lies are also defeated here, so that our continent is not set back on its journey to prosperity and security.

As social democrats, our political family has always fought for a fairer, more egalitarian and more sustainable society. And given the current crisis, we are more determined than ever to deliver a society that works for all.

But we not only need to find new ways to ensure that knowledge-sharing and working together continues across Europe – even though I am convinced that we could all profit, particularly from more cooperation on more technical issues, such as campaigning or data management. More importantly, we all also have to review the answers to many policy questions we so long took for granted, as they obviously have not passed the test of time.

So what are the most pressing policy areas that we have to rethink? What will it require to establish society's wellbeing, manage the economy and be fit to govern?

Taming globalisation and ending poverty

> "Fifteen per cent of the EU workforce live on wages that are below the national poverty line, despite working full time. More than 90 million citizens, almost 21 per cent of the EU population, are considered to be at risk of poverty and social exclusion."[11]

We have to find a solution to tame globalisation. That means shaping it in such a way that workers' rights are strengthened, exploitation and slave-like working conditions are reduced, and fair wages are made possible around the globe. Achieving sustainable wellbeing for all will require reforms in the financial sector and the digital economy, the two sectors in which the paradigm of limitless and extractive growth continues to ravage most forcefully, and which continue to shape the entire economy

along these lines. We need tax fairness, a fight against the climate crisis and at the same time we must tame globalisation and consign poverty to history.

But our response to these serious problems cannot only be to appeal to consumer consciousness and to take part in solidarity actions. The climate crisis and the social crisis force us to redefine our trade policy from scratch. Social and climate issues have to be at the core of a newly defined trading system. We have to create a framework where trade relations are conditional on compliance with certain rules and regulations that ensure sustainable and fair working conditions on both sides of the agreement. Only then will it be possible to ensure rising living standards and sustainable production around the world.

Tax fairness: needed more than ever

"The world's richest 1 per cent, those with more than $1 million, own 44 per cent of the world's wealth".[12]

From the north of Scotland to Italy, from Poland to the French provinces, the people experience how wealth in the glass palaces of corporations in the big cities keeps rising to ever more dizzying heights. And at the same time, the same people see how schools are closing, local suppliers and local shops are closing, bus services are being discontinued and jobs are being cut. Out of this injustice grows an anger that threatens to break the European Union.

Inequality threatens social cohesion

The richest 5 per cent of Europeans own almost half of all private wealth. The rich benefit from deregulated financial markets, tax competition, tax swamps and waves of privatisation. Multinational corporations, but also wealthy private individuals, take advantage of European welfare states, but abdicate their social responsibility.

It doesn't matter whether it's a sausage stand or an online corporation – everyone has to make their fair tax contribution. In Europe, we are missing out on up to €1,000bn a year in tax revenue through tax fraud and aggressive tax tricks by corporations.[13] This money could be used to

answer crucial questions about the future of the EU and at the same time nation states would have sufficient resources to solve national challenges in housing, education and care.

Digitalisation that works for the people

The EU needs an updated social contract for the digital age. Its citizens need a digital economy based on rules and principles that are necessary for a free, inclusive and just digital society and which will also address existing gender and territorial digital gaps.

A proper digital charter outlining these rights would guide the EU's legislative work as the digital transformation progresses, including working towards the recognition of access to the internet as a human right. Fundamental rights must also be safeguarded in the digital sphere. Fair digitalisation must go hand in hand with strong labour and trade union rights, by improving working conditions, collective bargaining, data protection and privacy, and prohibiting discriminatory treatments based on biased algorithms.

Enabling peace and fighting the climate crisis

In order to achieve sustainable wellbeing, we need to address the social-ecological nexus: the Green Deal needs a red heart. The fight against climate change will only be successful if every single measure taken is accompanied with a just transition for workers: stricter environmental standards must go hand in hand with fair working conditions along the whole production chain. Climate justice is social justice. For too long now, global corporate profits have been internalised while environmental and social costs have been shifted to society. But the EU as a whole has a direct interest in promoting wellbeing, because wellbeing is a vector of peace worldwide.[14]

In order to make sustainable transition work, we need to ensure social fairness and territorial cohesion. Irrespective of where people live, no one should be left behind: when dealing with climate change, the content, and also the process, of transformation are both essential, with a narrative addressing all needed elements in a more systematic way. Democracy at

work, social dialogue and collective bargaining at all levels are the right tools to achieve just transition. Social democracy must address this.

Moreover, climate goals also have a security policy aspect: and that is why – in the wake of the Russian invasion of Ukraine – we must now step up a gear. It is currently very clear that our dependence on fossil fuels is a key geopolitical weakness of the EU. So while fighting the climate crisis, and ensuring that this is not funded by the average person's income, we must also bring forward our geopolitical agenda and stabilise the European continent.

How to move forward

Socialists and democrats across Europe have to find sources of political, cultural and philosophical vitality and new ways of thinking and organising as social democratic parties EU-wide. We need to advocate as a strong movement, which is also able to form governments, which offers a viable political alternative. Listening to people is the first step – and I'm very proud to emphasise also how well the EU's Conference of the Future of Europe worked. The conference, which closed in May, left us in the end with more than 300 concrete proposals, directly made by European citizens themselves. This dialogue must now be the basis for building trust in the social democratic movement, which by addressing these key demands will be subject to the most significant systemic change since its formation.

The improvement of people's lives throughout Europe will be only possible if we lead with a strong and progressive agenda. And coming back to the UK, we always have to keep in mind that the reason for Brexit was not true anger against the EU, rather it was that the Conservatives were able to make the EU a scapegoat for the deep social divide that runs through Britain, which they were the primary authors of.

I am deeply convinced, that when we are able to find a way to intensify collaboration, to rethink major policy areas and to lead by example in countries where social democrats have come to power, Europe will not only see a major rise in people's living standards, but also will become a shining example of a community that even some of the 52 per cent of Brits who voted leave will aspire to join once again. Let's start that journey.

Anneliese Dodds MP

6 | Solidarity: Responding to the renewed appetite for collective action

The political right promotes division but it is completely out of step with the shifting public mood. Time and again in times of hardship – be it the pandemic, cost of living crisis or war with Ukraine – people have chosen to act in solidarity with one another. Now, Labour in the UK and social democratic parties in the EU must push this common endeavour forward.

The UK Labour party's membership card features a section of Labour's rulebook, the famous Clause IV.[15] This clause recognises that "by the strength of our common endeavour we achieve more than we achieve alone" and commits the party to pursuing a future community where "we live together, freely, in a spirit of solidarity, tolerance and respect". It therefore recognises the two meanings of the concept of solidarity: the unity that can result from a recognition of common interests and the supportive action propelled by such a recognition.

Developments over recent years in the UK, and many other nations, seemed especially unlikely to foster either form of solidarity. The populist right was in ascendance, with Donald Trump's rule-breaking ways finding echo in Boris Johnson's laying aside of international law. Many other right-wing leaders followed suit, from Jair Bolsonaro – with his catastrophic attacks on Brazil's environment – through to Viktor Orbán and his systematic attacks on the vibrancy of Hungarian democracy and the country's minorities. In the UK, both the EU and Scottish referendums cemented deep ideological faultlines, which were then reflected in people's friendship groups and use of digital and traditional media.

New ideological communities formed, especially on the political right, but those communities tended to define themselves against other groups, rather than being based on 'solidarity, tolerance and respect'. These and other developments were often portrayed as leading to a situation where

social democrats' electoral coalitions were fractured, at odds with each other, shrunken and ultimately in terminal decline.[16]

Fast forward the last three years, and unity and mutual aid – even if only infrequently badged as 'solidarity' – have arguably been in the ascendance, albeit at the same time as divisions remain entrenched. Indeed, as I will go on to argue in this chapter, the political right's push to atomisation has seemed out of step with the solidarity displayed during and required by the pandemic and other current challenges.

Of course, the impact of the Covid-19 period must not be romanticised, when in countries like the UK, disabled and Black, Asian and minority ethnic people suffered so disproportionately,[17] and when outbreaks were associated with an increase in racism towards people of Asian and South East Asian descent.[18] In addition, many arguably 'solidaristic', or at least, collectivist, mechanisms were dismantled in the UK almost as quickly as they were built.

Nonetheless, the Covid-19 period repeatedly demonstrated the efficacy of action based on 'common endeavour', resting on an awareness of mutual interest. In my home city of Oxford, a large proportion of the population from all walks of life were engaged in the development of the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine: not just scientists and technologists, but also hundreds of workers from the local NHS, including nurses and doctors, porters and cleaners.

The thousands of healthy local people who agreed to be guinea pigs during the trial arguably acted not only on the basis of solidarity but on the basis of altruism – 'gifting' their time and potential health for the sake of others, with little gain to their personal interest.[19] Belated attempts by the Conservative government to set up a national volunteering scheme came far later than grassroots solidarity created by communities themselves.

Social media's promise in fostering solidarity as well as fracturing it was also revealed during the crisis. Anti-vaccine propaganda pitted different groups against each other, often on the basis of wild conspiracy theories which had nothing to do with mutual or even individual interests. But people also used social media to foster and enable solidaristic action – facilitating the WhatsApp and Facebook groups that directed volunteers

to elderly and needy people requiring deliveries of food and medicine on their street. Neighbours who barely knew each other came, in many cases, to understand much more about each other's lives, as part of these new communities which blended in-person and internet-based connections.

Even Conservative governments were forced to intervene to prevent catastrophic economic dislocation. In the UK, the iconic demonstration of this was a Conservative chancellor courting a photocall with the leaders of the peak associations for both business and labour (the CBI and TUC) after accepting their calls for a so-called 'furlough' or wage-replacement scheme. This scheme was speedily dismantled following the first lockdowns, and tripartite structures abandoned even in areas like health and safety, let alone industrial policy.

In other areas, the Conservatives adopted an approach based on 'divide and rule', rather than the solidaristic recognition of common interest. This was particularly clear when it chose to taunt regional leaders when their areas required financial support, rather than work with them. But the principle – that government could work with business and labour, for the greater national good – had been clearly demonstrated.

A similar point can be made over the response to rising energy costs. In the UK, the Labour party has been ahead of the government at every step in the cost of living crisis – from the mission to insulate homes that Keir Starmer announced at annual conference last September, to the windfall tax Rachel Reeves proposed this January, to the party's policy to freeze bills unveiled this August. The Conservatives have been slow to recognise that the energy crisis problem could not be solved by individuals being left to fend for themselves, and have been dragged by Labour and by public opinion towards elements of a solidaristic response as a result (taxing windfall profits made by energy companies, and providing some targeted and universal assistance with costs). Yet they still retain an instinct against help for those who need it most – disgracefully dubbed 'handouts' by the new prime minister Liz Truss during the Conservative leadership campaign.[20]

Repeated opinion polls show, however, that the UK public is ahead of Conservative politicians on this, quite properly seeing it as the role of government and of energy companies to shield our population from the impact of these spiralling costs. These public instincts are at odds with

claims that, in diverse societies, instincts of solidarity diminish, and that public support for social security cannot be sustained.[21] Indeed, this is not just a UK phenomenon. For example, in Germany, measures founded on a recognition of the common good, including one-off payments to those on lower incomes and cut-price public transport, have proven popular, while politicians urging subsidies that provide greater benefits for the best off have proven out of step with the times.

When it comes to solidarity between nations, evidence from the pandemic is, of course, extremely mixed. There were heartening moments of cross-border co-operation in sharing scarce hospital capacity; and scientists from Wuhan who shared details of the virus with their international counterparts demonstrated a responsibility to the greater good that was lacking amongst regional Chinese government officials.

However, the willingness of some vaccine programmes, like Oxford AstraZeneca, to make the vaccine available at cost price for countries in the Global South was not replicated by solidaristic action amongst countries when supply was short. Indeed, the scramble amongst nations for vaccine shots – sadly being seen again now during the Monkeypox outbreak – was one of the least edifying periods of the crisis. Measures like the Gavi programme, and greater global datasharing, should reduce the potential for these types of zero-sum games in the future.[22] At the same time, a greater focus on increasing European production of essential materials (from vaccines to personal protective equipment) is needed, rather than relying on an unpredictable international market.

Time and again, therefore, people's commitment to solidarity, and its practical worth, were demonstrated during the crisis. The question for social democrats now is, of course, how we can foster solidarity during current circumstances. Labour's policy review, which I chair, is entitled 'Stronger Together' – precisely because it is only parties like Labour, motivated by social democracy, and not the political right, which can carry the spirit of solidarity from the pandemic and use it to tackle the challenges that face our communities.

Stronger Together identified six such challenges facing the UK up to the end of the current decade: securing our green and digital future, and better jobs and better work; ensuring a future where families in all their diversity come first, public services work from the start, and communities

are safe and secure; and crafting a new role for the UK in the world, following Brexit and future global risks.

The green and digital transitions must reflect mutual interest, just as they can only be achieved through solidaristic institutions. Transitions can only be 'just' in reality and not just in rhetoric, if workers are engaged so that existing jobs are decarbonised and digitalised, upskilling existing workers in the process, not just requiring new workers with new skills while abandoning those from more polluting, carbon-intensive, analogue workplaces.

Better jobs and better work cannot be produced by outsourcing all production from countries like the UK to those in the Global South with lower labour standards and environmental protections. Instead, we need to aim for more goods and services to be made, bought and sold in the UK, to high standards not least in the labour market, while ensuring that our future trading arrangements are based on the mutual benefits from high standards, rather than promoting a global 'race to the bottom'.

Severe periods of extreme heat should have served as a powerful reminder of the urgency of the global race to combat the climate emergency, and the UK must be at the forefront of leading global efforts to reduce carbon emissions: here, too, the recognition of our common interest can be our watchword.

Common interests are also critical to improving the world of work. Labour has committed to a 'new deal' for working people – one where fair pay agreements will embody the principle of solidarity amongst workers in different industries. This development is in line with that in many other nations where social democrats have sought to improve living standards, for example with the new higher minimum wage under the Social Democratic party (SPD) in Germany.

Public services across all industrialised nations are challenged by demographic change, and here solidarity again will be critical – both across generations and between and within families and communities. Indeed, the Covid-19 period powerfully demonstrated the failure of the political right's approach to public services, which has so often been based on fragmenting delivery and dismantling preventative services.

In the UK, communities have also become in many cases less safe over time, with rates of violent crime rising while convictions have fallen. Community-based approaches, recognising our mutual interest in shared security, will be critical in the future – hence Labour's commitment to reintroducing neighbourhood policing to every community.

Finally, at international level too, there is more need now than ever to foster the recognition of mutual interests in working together – for international security, against the climate crisis, and to promote security against future global risks. Once more, it has been those turning their back on solidarity who have looked out of pace with the times.

In contrast with the approach following Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, with national responses arguably reflecting domestic factors, NATO's stance towards the Ukraine crisis has obviously been far more unified. It is heartening that there has been complete unity across UK politics in supporting the Ukrainian defensive effort. The UK may be less immediately affected by Russia's aggression, both as it relied less on Russian energy, and because it is less obviously in the frontline compared to Russia's immediate neighbours such as the Baltic states and Poland. However, it is absolutely right that the UK stands in solidarity with Ukraine and with its NATO allies: allowing the egregious trampling of international rules and norms by Russia is against all our interests, and its appalling recklessness towards nuclear power stations poses a grave environmental threat.

Yet this solidarity has not just been at the level of governments. Thousands upon thousands of people have opened their homes in the UK to Ukrainian refugees, even if the Conservative government's Home Office has been exceptionally poor at processing these refugees' applications to come to our country. This openness may be different in degree to the massive population movement of Ukrainians into Poland, for example, but it is not different in kind – and is, ultimately, rooted in solidarity. For the UK, such international solidarity will look different in the future following our departure from the EU, but it is more important than ever.

Far from reflecting a new political norm, the atomisation, fragmentation and division promoted by the political right is out of step with public opinion and with the needs of our times. Current crises – economic and

geopolitical – require us to respond in a way that recognises our mutual interests in security, prosperity and respect for each other.

Now more than ever, social democratic parties must push forward 'common endeavour', achieving far more together than we ever could alone – and reflecting in that practical solidarity not the spirit of the past, but the spirit of our own, very challenging, times.

Thijs Reuten MEP

7 | Democratic: the rule of law at the core of a social, green and free Europe

Across Europe, the rule of law is under threat – and not just in Poland and Hungary. But we must not give in to the merchants of fear: social democrats must stand up for our democracy if we are to support the most vulnerable and build a better and more free Europe.

"Democracy is not the law of the majority but the protection of the minority." With this quote, French philosopher Albert Camus summarised precisely why a democracy cannot function without a proper rule of law. Protecting the rule of law is about women having the autonomy to make decisions about their own bodies. It is about the LGBTI+ community being free to live the lives they desire. About journalists writing what they want to write, about judges doing their work independently and about minorities having their rights protected. But it is much more than that: we need the rule of law to defend workers against exploitation and abuse in the workplace, to be able to implement a fair, socially just climate transition and to bring forth a credible European foreign policy. That is why protecting the rule of law should be at the core of any social democratic agenda.

What is social democracy about? Most people will answer this question with our classic core values: workers' rights, solidarity, social justice. But if the past decade showed us one thing, it is this: it all begins and ends with the rule of law. Without a proper rule of law, there is no chance of any policy being properly implemented and put into practice. This should be of the gravest concern to the centre-left in particular. In line with Albert Camus's words, social democracy is about protecting the most vulnerable people in society. And they are precisely the ones first hit by authoritarian developments, as we are now witnessing.

During the 'big bang' EU enlargement of 2004, optimism prevailed. The new member states did not all perfectly meet the criteria for joining, but

they would surely up their game soon enough once they were part of the European Union. European leaders perceived democratisation as a linear process: once a country is on the right track, it will automatically move in the right direction. They were not sufficiently aware that EU membership is not the democratic Holy Grail. Over the years, authoritarian tendencies started to gain ground within the European Union. Democratically elected leaders such as Viktor Orbán started to replace 'rule of law' with 'rule *by* law'. This is an entirely different concept, with politicians placing themselves above the law by using legislation however it suits them under the guise of having a 'democratic majority'. It is an alarming development, aimed at oppressing minorities and curbing civil liberties instead of protecting them, at capturing the state to remain in power and at serving private interests. At the same time, it began to emerge that the EU does not have measures in place to counter anti-democratic developments in its member states.

Was it a mistake to let Eastern and Central European countries into the EU? No, it was not. However, it was a mistake not to respond immediately when authoritarian tendencies emerged. Of course, Article 7 of the Treaty on European Union means member states can have their voting rights suspended. And it was already possible to take targeted legal action against a member state that does not comply with EU law with infringement procedures. Nevertheless, there were no 'in-between' measures in place: effective instruments which do not need unanimity, but do involve real consequences for political leaders violating the rule of law. Attempts to violate the rule of law clearly should have been tackled immediately. Seeing how far you can go – and subsequently going a bit further than that – is a typical trait of autocrat politicians. Unfortunately, it turned out that a leader like Viktor Orbán could go as far as destroying Hungarian democracy.

The more politicians in Hungary and Poland developed their authoritarian habits, the more the European Commission let them off the hook. A recent study by academics Daniel Kelemen and Tomasso Pavone has shown how the number of infringement procedures launched by the European Commission has steadily declined since the mid-2000s. There is probably no need to explain the lack of success of the Article 7 procedure: although the European Commission and European Parliament triggered this mechanism for both Poland and Hungary, the member states have for years now refused to make any progress in applying it. In their endless

efforts not to be too harsh to the autocrats amongst them, European leaders do not even dare to put the first part of Article 7, which does not require unanimity, to the vote. And whereas it has been clear for a very long time that we lacked instruments to effectively tackle rule of law violations, it took the EU ages to finally extend the set of tools to address this. By the time new mechanisms finally existed, they were needed to repair what had already gone terribly wrong. The consequences of this lack of response to European heads of government carving up the rule of law are almost incalculable.

Yet without in any way downplaying the excessive anti-democratic policies of Orbán and his cronies, it is important to be aware that rule of law problems can arise in any European member state. Recently, the Netherlands – a member state with a strong, highly valued rule of law and democracy – was shaken by a huge scandal around childcare benefits. Dutch authorities wrongly accused an estimated 26,000 parents of fraudulent benefit claims and obliged them to repay the funds they had received in their entirety. For many families, this had disastrous ramifications including financial distress, debts and even children being taken into care. The Dutch Council of State ruled that parents did not receive the legal protection they were entitled to. Moreover, research demonstrated that institutional racism was part of the Dutch tax authority system. Only one politician took responsibility and stepped down: Lodewijk Asscher, former minister and leader of the Dutch Labour party – although he had already been opposition leader for four years when the scandal surfaced. The conservative-liberal prime minister of the Netherlands and former Christian Democrat minister of finance are back in government, despite neglecting their duties during this tragedy.

The Dutch childcare benefit case is of an entirely different nature and scale from the grave rule of law problems in Poland and Hungary: in the Netherlands, the system responded eventually and parliament started an extensive inquiry into the scandal. However, we should draw lessons from it: in a normally functional democracy, the system can turn against a group of citizens. When that happens, the rule of law should always be the mechanism to protect people and never an excuse to wrongly punish them. What is more, a democracy and a judicial system that really protect the most vulnerable should have safeguards to ensure equal access to any procedure and adequate, fast compensation in the case of mistakes.

The point is that we can never take democracy and rule of law for granted. This is not about 'old' or 'new' democracies, better or worse 'democratic cultures'. In the United Kingdom, Boris Johnson was able to flout the rule of law numerous times before his political party decided to attach consequences to his behaviour. This was, according to fellow Conservative politician and former prime minister John Major, only once they saw the political damage he was causing. In the United States, a former President encouraged his electorate to attack the Capitol building after being defeated in the presidential election. And what about Greece? The current government is diminishing press freedom at record speed, criminalising civil society and dehumanising migrants by leaving them adrift at sea or worse. No democracy should take the risk of starting out on a slippery slope. Once a country is on it, the way downhill is much faster than finding the way back up.

Rule of law problems should be a particular concern for left-wing politicians and policymakers. If we do not take responsibility for the protection of vulnerable minorities, they lose their core ally in the political arena. In addition, we should not forget that international solidarity has always been one of the key social democratic values. The negative impact of democracies in decline extends beyond our EU borders: how can we be credible in our foreign policy, when we can not even manage to sustain our own rule of law? Ensuring a reliable foreign policy in which we support democratic forces and oppressed people beyond the European Union should therefore always remain our priority. We can only be a trustworthy partner externally if we defend the rule of law inside every EU member state as well. The gruesome war in Ukraine shows all the more how essential European democratic support is – the fact that Ukrainians have to see their cities destroyed and lose their loved ones in order to protect their democracy is horrifying. On top of supporting Ukraine by all possible means, we have to do everything within our power to prevent this situation in any other Eastern Partnership or Western Balkan country.

Furthermore, we should not underestimate the influence of authoritarian third countries within the EU. Foreign interference is a serious threat to which autocratic regimes seem to be more receptive. The unwillingness of Hungary to contribute to harsh sanctions against Russia is an example of this and explicitly shows Orbán's dual loyalty. In several member states, Russian actors have tried to influence elections through disinformation campaigns and funding for anti-EU parties. Authoritarian countries such

as Russia and China are champions at finding the gaps in our European democratic system. For them, this is a way of disrupting our unity to their strategic advantage. Countering this is crucial but, to say the least, challenging particularly as a time when we have a Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement pursuing Hungarian priorities. Especially in that position, we need a Commission with clear democratic objectives – and definitely without a hidden agenda.

In short, it is evident that social democrats should be at the forefront of urgently defending the European rule of law. But how? In the past years, we have done important work to extend the EU's toolbox to counter autocratic developments in member states. The battle for a rule of law conditionality mechanism is a clear positive example. Without the European Parliament and the Socialists & Democrats Group, the EU would not have this instrument as it is in place today. The mechanisms are there now, but their implementation is far from effective. So first we need to consistently pressure the Commission and member states to actually use these instruments to their full potential. Second, there should be no more money for autocratic policies and leaders. We cannot compromise on this; there should not be any room for manoeuvre. Third, we need to keep pushing for full implementation of the conditionality mechanism and follow up on Article 7 and infringement procedures. This means that we should also not be afraid to be critical towards governments from our own political family if need be.

Social democrats have always been, and should be, the political family protecting those who need it the most. This is what voters rightfully expect from us. Where we fail to fulfil this responsibility, we lose our electorate. It is our duty to be vigilant and intervene immediately when a government starts to mistreat minorities. Autocracy does not develop overnight. The decline of democracy starts with small acts of discrimination and oppression against the most vulnerable. That is why we can never let our attention waver when it comes to fundamental rights. We believe in a social, green, free and united Europe that will only be within our reach if we sustain a robust rule of law. We cannot permit ourselves to give in to the numerous merchants of fear in Europe. We owe this to our social democratic history, but most of all to our common destiny, our European future.

Preet Kaur Gill MP

8 | Compassion: working together for a better world

In the face of huge global challenges, progressive values rooted in compassion can form the heart of a fresh approach to international aid and development. UK Labour and its European sister parties can all play a part.

Spend any amount of time on social media, reading our tabloids, or listening to our public discourse, and you could well be excused for thinking compassion was dead. Yet whether we are opening our wallets and front doors for Ukrainians, driving food and medicines to Calais, or helping neighbours survive Covid, the truth is that our everyday lives in Britain are made up of many more small acts of kindness and solidarity than the news would have you believe.

Social democrats and progressives believe fundamentally in people's compassion. The left may not have a monopoly on the principle: plenty of well-meaning Conservative politicians, after all, have placed great importance on compassion too. Yet their compassion too often means merely giving people crumbs from the table, rather than an equal seat at it. Ours is a compassion based not on charity, but on solidarity. We act together to make society fairer and more equal.

I was fortunate to grow up shaped and inspired by these values from an early age. When you grow up with six younger siblings, you quickly learn the importance of solidarity and working together. My father worked hard as a foreman and bus driver. But he somehow made time too to help our community, serving for 18 years as president of the Sikh Gurdwara on Smethwick High Street in Birmingham. He stood as a Labour councillor and was instrumental in the 1980s in setting up Sandwell's race and interfaith networks. He ran food banks to address the impact of recession in Sandwell. It was these values that led me to become a social worker and, eventually, to stand up for and represent my community as a councillor.

For social democrats across Europe, our values matter. They must be at the heart not just of local change, but also of our response to the global crises of climate change, inequality and conflict that can seem at times daunting. Yet ultimately, personal principles count for little unless they result in material improvements to people's situations, reshaping the world in their favour.

I am fortunate, as the UK Labour party's shadow minister for international development, to see day in day out the remarkable difference that international development policies, budgets and programmes can make. Make no mistake: we have the means to change people's lives in the most practical of ways.

In this chapter, I argue it is time for European social democrats to recommit to international sustainable development. In doing so, we must grapple with two key propositions. First, that in a fast-changing world, we must reform, not retreat from, global institutions and international rules; and second, that our approach to development must tackle head-on the challenges of the next quarter of a century, rather than fall back on doctrines of the past 25 years.

The international 'compassion' of Conservatives

Back when I was first elected as a councillor in 2012, it appeared at first that David Cameron's new Conservative government might maintain the cross-party consensus on international development. That consensus would come to include both an independent department as well as the UK's landmark pledge to spend 0.7 per cent of gross national income (GNI) on official development assistance (ODA).

Early optimism proved to be unfounded. In 2015, the government declared in a strategy that aid would now be "squarely in the UK's national interest". It heralded the start of a gradual tilt away from spending taxpayer money on reducing poverty and towards instead protecting the UK's short-term security, trade and business interests. In the political turbulence that followed, long-term strategy and smart decision-making suffered. Between 2016 and 2020, six different international development secretaries – Justine Greening, Priti Patel, Penny Mordaunt, Rory Stewart, Alok Sharma, and Anne-Marie Trevelyan – all left office.

Then, in 2020, things fell apart. Boris Johnson's government shut down the world-leading Department for International Development (DFID), merging it into a new Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). With one ill thought-through flourish of the pen, Britain's development expertise – for which we were once renowned around the world – was gone. In the new FCDO, civil servants' morale reportedly plummeted.

Then, Boris Johnson and Rishi Sunak moved to slash the UK's aid budget by some £4.6bn. The decision defied opposition from across the political spectrum, including Conservative ex-prime ministers and former Conservative development secretary Andrew Mitchell, who warned that 'hundreds of thousands' would die.

The cruel cuts abandoned the Conservatives' own 2019 manifesto pledge to retain the 0.7 per cent funding. But for the millions of people around the world living through the crisis and relying on UK aid, it also spelled immediate disaster. Some 7.1 million children – equivalent to more than half the UK's child population – lost their education. In the middle of a global pandemic, funding for research, health programmes and hygiene was pulled at short notice. 72 million people missed out on expected treatment for neglected tropical diseases. Hundreds of millions of pounds were cut from life-saving assistance in some of the world's most acute crises, such as Yemen and Afghanistan. Just months before Russia was to invade Ukraine, the UK cut £350m from its Conflict Stability and Security Fund programming to prevent conflict.

Rushed through and driven more by political ideology than by need, the cuts also caused more damage to people's lives and Britain's reputation than they needed to. Without a careful exit strategy, the government tore up agreements and abandoned international partners, aid agencies, and the communities they worked with – often with little warning or opportunity to seek alternative funding. In March 2022, the National Audit Office – the UK's public finance watchdog – found that the Conservatives had failed to sufficiently consider the impact of the funding cuts – which had lacked transparency and consultation – on development programmes, creating what they euphemistically called a 'value-for-money risk' to the British taxpayer. In fact, it was DFID – as the most effective department at spending ODA – that had given the British taxpayer best value for money.

In 2022, with the damage done, the Conservatives finally made explicit in their new 'international development strategy' what they had already started to do in practice: Britain's remaining aid budget would now be spent directly to take on so-called 'malign actors' like China and to promote the UK's short-term trade and foreign policy objectives. In a document some 32 pages long, the Conservatives referenced the UN's Sustainable Development Goals – negotiated and championed by David Cameron just a few years earlier – just twice. Also cited just twice was 'poverty reduction' – despite still being required by UK law to be the central focus of any aid spending. After 12 painful years of gradually unpicking Britain's internationalist consensus, for the Conservatives, 'development' was finally dead in all but name.

Bringing Britain back to the international stage

Appalling though this recent record is, some might reasonably ask: is it not simply the normal way of things that Labour governments strengthen Britain's role on international development and that Conservative governments weaken it?

After all, it was a Labour government that first established a separate Ministry of Overseas Development in 1964, before the Conservatives incorporated it back into the Foreign Office in 1970. In 1974, Labour again made the department separate with its own minister. In 1979, Margaret Thatcher again transferred it back into the Foreign Office. In 1997, Labour established a Department for International Development, shut down by Boris Johnson in 2020.

Labour is clear that when the British people put us back into government, we will return to the 0.7 per cent slice of spending and restore Britain's development expertise. Could the pendulum not, therefore, simply swing back again in favour of international development, compassion and solidarity?

There is some truth to this. But the changing times demand we go much further than restoring an independent aid department and budget. We need a government that will truly put its shoulder to the wheel. The global challenges we now face in 2022 are unprecedented. Conflict rages not just in Ukraine, but around the world. One in 95 people have been forced

to flee their homes. Amid a global cost-of-living crisis, inequality surges: while those with extreme wealth get richer, 263 million more people are believed to now live in extreme poverty than before the pandemic.

Global food insecurity means more famines and conflicts that barely even make the news. In East Africa, aid agencies report one person is now dying every 48 seconds. The clock is ticking too towards climate breakdown: from California to the Sahel and the Pacific, the world is already on fire. Governments have no choice but to bring about immediate and transformative climate action, and scale up help for those on the frontline of pollution that they did not cause. Risks, moreover, interconnect and multiply like never before: from conflict to climate and from the economy to ecology, the fragility of our system is extreme.

Global crises demand global solutions. Unilateral compassion is not enough. In the financial crisis of 2008, swift international action by leaders prevented a bad situation from getting worse. In 2005, concerted effort by G8 leaders saw progress on debt cancellation. Now, in the face of a global pandemic, if we are to vaccinate the world and halt economic crisis, we need both effective global institutions and governments with leaders who will respect international rules and step up.

In an increasingly multi-polar world, norms and values are contested. The liberal consensus that shaped international norms after the second world war is fast being eroded. In much of the world, the notion that wealth trickles down and that our lives are getting better seems increasingly absurd to too many.

Our global institutions – and our mechanisms for resolving difference and tackling shared crises – can feel like they are creaking at the seams, in need of urgent reform. Yet the choice is stark. Down one path lies isolation: the Trumps and Johnsons of our world peddle the lie that we can turn inwards, abandon global cooperation, put walls up against those with whom we disagree, and surrender the international stage. The other path is difficult, but the right one: face outwards, build international partnerships as equals, resolve differences where they exist, reform our global order so it works for people over profit, and step up to tackle global crises.

Labour's sister parties in Europe now hold power in Germany, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, and Luxembourg – all of which in 2020 kept their

UN pledge to spend at least 0.7 per cent of GNI on ODA. Together, we could inspire others to step up: France is already legislating to return to 0.7 per cent by 2025 and Spain by 2030. With progressive governments in power in countries as diverse as Australia, Portugal, Chile, Finland, New Zealand, Canada and the United States, the truth is that new opportunities are emerging to address together the world's biggest crises. Under Keir Starmer's leadership, Britain would once again assert itself on the world stage as a global leader in international development, supporting the multilateral system and bringing Britain back to the international stage as a trusted partner.

International development of the future

The world is fundamentally different today and that means not only the focus of international development, but also the means by which we must achieve it must be different too. An independent department solely focused on poverty needs to look to the future challenges we face as a world.

Notions of poorer, less developed countries in need of charity are outdated and wrong. It is true that humanitarian assistance and conflict prevention remain an important part of what the British government can do: poverty, human need and climate damage are greatest in just 20 to 30 key crisis- and conflict-affected countries. Help people here, and we will also make genuine global progress on many of the key indicators for the UN's 2030 sustainable development goals.

We must also prepare for the reality that in the coming quarter of a century, climate breakdown will be directly responsible for a growing amount of human suffering around the world. A central mission of Britain's international development focus must be to support people to survive and adapt to the changing climate.

Important though humanitarian assistance will remain, it is justice rather than charity that is needed most around the world. The sustainable development goals negotiated by UN member states were underpinned by the principle of 'universality' – the simple recognition that we are all the same. What people need, want and have a right to is the same in Uganda as in the UK.

In middle-income countries, where vast numbers of the world's poorest people still live, inequality has too often surged. Just as in the UK we demand and deserve investment in our NHS and our schools, the future of many of the world's poorest people depends increasingly not on food parcels handed out by foreigners, but on universal, quality public services and the power of civil society to win change.

That is why Britain's next international development strategy must unequivocally back citizens, activists, social movements, trade unions and faith groups fighting for change where they are. How we do development must change.

Yet the Conservatives cut funding to civil society in Britain and the Global South. Where the Conservatives promise only aid and charity to women and girls, Labour will get resources, support and protection to the women's rights activists fighting for gender equality and transforming their own societies.

We must back the British people's demands for global justice, especially on issues like climate change and vaccine equity. As with the movement for tax, trade and debt justice in the early 2000s, Britain's positive impact on the world is at its greatest when government works in tune with the British public.

For social democrats across Europe, bringing to life a different way of doing development, fit for the challenges of the coming 25 years, may sound daunting. But we can learn from and work with each other. In Germany, the Social Democratic party's new government brought together climate and development into one single, powerful department. Together, centre-left governments will soon face the challenge at the UN of negotiating what succeeds the 2030 sustainable development goals.

As we look ahead, the power of cooperation is unmistakable. We can choose to turn to each other when confronted with global crises, rather than inwards. We can choose to renew and update the world's approach to international development, learning from each other. We can and must address the world's biggest challenges. In the UK, under Keir Starmer, Labour is again ready to play its part.

Panny Antoniou

9 | Intergenerational: bridging the gap between young and old

Many key issues in British politics are divided along generational lines. Labour should learn from its sister parties in Europe and strengthen its policy offer around housing, regeneration and Brexit to unite both young and old.

Political analysts often speak about a divide between generations, with millennials and Generation Z seen as more progressive than their Generation X and baby boomer forebears. The causes of these differences are subject to interpretation, but certainly younger generations have faced difficulties which older generations have never had to deal with.

House price rises are far outstripping wage growth and the dream of home ownership is ever more out of reach for most young people.[23] In addition, most people under 30 have lived through an unprecedented pandemic during their most important years for education and mentoring – and are about to endure their second 'once in a generation' recession since 2008.

Beyond the bleak economic picture, for many young people across Europe, their adult life has felt like one crisis after another, from populism domestically to the climate crisis globally. A number of European countries have seen an increase in populism, from Marine Le Pen's run for the French presidency, to Brexit, to the entrenched rule of Viktor Orbán in Hungary. Western liberal democracies have not seen this level of threat since the interwar period when fascism was on the rise. So, with all these unique challenges in mind, how do we bridge the gap between generations and build a socialist country which works for people of all ages?

The UK has one of the lowest levels of political engagement amongst young people in Europe.[24] This lack of engagement has resulted in lower

voting rates. However, in many countries across Europe studies have found young people's engagement with civil society has increased. This is the case in Portugal where decreases in voter turnout amongst the young have been accompanied by increases in civic engagement.[25] Working out how to reach these voters is an issue for progressive parties across Europe and without the young it becomes increasingly difficult for the left to win.

The first and best way to build solidarity and unity between generations is by looking at what unites us – in which areas is there is broad agreement between generations? This may sound tough, particularly given the disparity in views among different age groups on issues ranging from Brexit to justice policy and LGBT+ rights. However, there are many issues where the interests of young and old are already aligned or can be brought together to foster unity and a sense of joint purpose.

Housing is one key policy area which is important for all ages. However, there is significant disagreement between generations on the best way to solve the housing crisis.

The option of building new housing often causes concern in local communities, with developers – both social and private – facing a large amount of opposition from existing homeowners, who are usually older. If we could bridge this generational divide, we would be able help people of all ages to live in high-quality housing with the dignity they deserve.

The first solution must be to improve the standard of new developments and build in architectural styles which match an area's existing character. This would likely result in less opposition from existing homeowners. This increase in housebuilding must also be coupled with improved local services for residents to alleviate the increased pressure which an influx of new residents would bring.

Demanding more social and affordable housing from private developers should also be a key plank of future housing policy. One European country with a strong model of affordable and social housing which countries should look to emulate is Austria, where approximately 80 per cent of new residential development benefits from some form of public funding or subsidy and 24 per cent of homes are social housing.[26]

Additionally, policymakers should prioritise freeing up existing capacity for homes within big cities whilst also providing retired people dignity and enjoyment in their later years. One example of this approach is the City Hall scheme which has seen more than 1,000 older Londoners in social housing who are looking to downsize give up their existing council accommodation in favour of housing on the coast.[27]

Policies which encourage home swaps and high-standard housing will help many young people find suitable housing while also allowing older people more agency in where they live and what their communities look like.

Another issue which could unite generations is regeneration. A key concern for many older residents in post-industrial areas is the decline of their towns and villages. At the same time, we are seeing young people moving out of these areas to larger cities such as London, Birmingham, Manchester, and Glasgow where there are more jobs and opportunities. This leaves the older left-behind generation isolated and more likely to engage with populist forces as seen in the so-called 'Red Wall' at the 2019 general election.[28]

Whilst some level of movement and internal migration is inevitable, it is of vital importance that post-industrial centres are given the opportunity to thrive, retain their best talent, and stem urban decline. To do this we need to create skilled jobs and opportunities.

We could help achieved this with a commitment to fast broadband connections. This would allow jobs to be done remotely and could provide more people with the opportunity to work where they were born and brought up.

Furthermore, there must be significant investment in local high streets to make post-industrial towns not just a place where people can work but a place where people can thrive. The decline in many non-metropolitan areas is most obviously seen in the closing down of high street banks and ATMs which provide essential banking services to local residents and make regular trips to the local high street far more likely.

The UK government is the largest single shareholder in the NatWest Group following the 2008 financial crash.[29] This means that a future Labour

government could use this shareholding to open up more local branches in deprived high streets. These could act as hubs by providing services to residents and stimulating growth in local communities.

Labour could provide further impetus for regeneration by creating new 'business improvement districts' in cooperation with local businesses and councils. This further cooperation between councils and local businesses would help improve public realm, provide additional security for local businesses, and help shape an environment which works for local and cooperatively owned businesses. These would benefit both old and young and would ensure that more young people have the opportunity to live and work where they grew up without harming their future prospects whilst providing a more vibrant living environment and local high street for older residents.

Brexit is yet another issue which has been split along generational lines – but for which there is now a need to build strong solidarity between generations. Those born in the 1990s or later are less likely to be Eurosceptic, with the post-war baby boomer generation being the most Eurosceptic of all.[30]

Many of the young people who voted to remain feel a profound sense of loss from the removal of our European identity. Finding unity on such a polarising issue is difficult but it is something which Labour must be able to confront head-on in order to have credibility with both the old and the young.

One belief which all generations have in common is that Brexit is going badly with 45 per cent of those who are 65 or older unhappy with the results as well 54 per cent of those aged 18 to 24.[31] This is a good starting point for uniting people on what has proven to be one of the most divisive issues the country has seen in modern times. What else could we do?

First, the obvious issues caused by the government's hard Brexit must be mitigated through agreements with the EU to ensure the proper functioning of both the Northern Ireland protocol and the entry ports into the UK. This would require a broad alignment on standards and inspections, with the UK not undercutting the EU.

Second, the rights of European citizens in the UK must be safeguarded with an end to the expensive, ill thought-out, and ineffective 'leave to remain' policy. Residency-based rights for EU citizens must be guaranteed, including the right for legal residents to vote in all elections, including at a national level. This would help build lost trust and ensure that other negotiations go more smoothly.

And although the benefits of Brexit are few and far between, we should grasp what we can to help ordinary people, both young and old. This could include introducing popular measures such as VAT exemptions for sanitary and feminine hygiene products as well as re-entry into the Erasmus programme so young people do not miss out on opportunities which those older than them were able to enjoy.

These efforts to make Brexit bearable might help reconcile generations, although a future rejoin campaign will continue to be a distinct possibility as the demographics continue to swing in favour of the EU and the long-term consequences of the leaving the EU become apparent.

Whilst Brexit is a uniquely British phenomenon, it would be foolish to not look at other parts of Europe where the far right are in the ascendancy and ask what the UK can learn to prevent anything similar becoming a possibility.

Whilst young people are broadly supportive of the UK's EU membership, an inability to turn out younger voters and complacency from the political establishment led to the scenario which the UK now faces. In France, the Parti Socialiste has united with other parties of the left to ensure that there is a strong left vote in the French Assembly and that the far right Rassemblement National were not the largest opposition group. And in Poland, the mobilisation of civil society to oppose restrictions to abortions should also provide a model of engagement for left-wing parties across Europe when opposing the right and building extra parliamentary movements which help produce change.

This underlines the value of the UK Labour party cooperating with other progressive parties where our interests are aligned. We saw an example of this at the recent Wakefield and Tiverton and Honiton by-elections where the Liberal Democrats and Labour party were able to assign assets where they would have the most impact on the result. It also

shows the importance of working with progressive civil society and trade union movements – involving them in policymaking and supporting their struggles.

Social democratic parties must bridge the divide between generations as a top priority. It is impossible for progressive parties to win without the support of millennials and Generation Z. Far too many young people do not see a difference between different parties, indeed, in Germany one third of those surveyed said that the perception that all parties are the same was key to their political apathy.[32]

Social democratic parties must provide answers to the crisis of capitalism – a crisis which is behind the harsh reality that under-30s face every day. Otherwise they will fade into irrelevance and lose support to regressive right-wing forces – especially those on the far right, who play into the grievances people have while scapegoating immigrants. It is urgent we act now to create engaged youth movements with links across Europe so we can learn from each other's experiences and build a better tomorrow today.

Jon Bloomfield

10 | Sustainable: meeting the climate challenge

The next few years will test whether the European left is capable of responding to the climate emergency. To succeed, parties across Europe will need to work together to offer a response that is fit for the future.

The publication in April of the 6th IPCC report on how to mitigate climate change[33] was inevitably overshadowed by the brutal war in Ukraine. However, its message was stark. At the launch of the report, UN secretary-general António Guterres could not have been clearer. He said it was a "file of shame, cataloguing the empty pledges that put us firmly on track towards an unliveable world". The report's most important message was that a failure to peak and reduce carbon emissions **this decade** will put the Paris goals to limit the global rise in temperatures increasingly 'out of reach'. For European social democrats there is no greater challenge.

The changing context

It has been a tough few decades for social democracy. In the 20th century, the belief in regulated markets, state-funded welfare and organised workers secured vastly improved living standards, health and education for hundreds of millions of Europeans. Yet since the Thatcher/Reagan era, the overall social democratic project has been threatened both by fierce political opposition from an emboldened right and a loss of belief in its own principles from within the mainstream left.[34] At the same time, the shift to a post-Fordist economy has undermined the traditional bases of electoral support for the left. The icons of the industrial era – the pits, shipyards, steelworks and factories – are vastly diminished. Most people still earn their living by selling their labour but it is a different kind of working class: less concentrated, no longer overwhelmingly male; more ethnically diverse; and more technically qualified. It is less culturally homogenous

and, being more dispersed, it is less easy to organise. Society now has a salariat and a precariat, working alongside a much smaller proletariat.

Alongside these social changes, the rising prominence of the environmental agenda and the dangers of global warming have posed a different challenge. Socialists have traditionally seen their role as either to take control of the means of production (the revolutionary strand) or to regulate them (the reformist wing). Rarely has either strand questioned the purpose or nature of production itself. When environmental politics began to emerge in 1970s, it caused some ripples within the labour movement,[35] but these voices remained on the margins. However, within a generation, environmental politics has gone mainstream with new Green parties sharing governmental office in seven EU countries. The growing recognition of the depth of the climate emergency requires a new economic paradigm and mind-set for the labour movement and the left. That is why the development of the Green Deal programmes both in Europe and the US has been so important.

Most parts of the left now display an increasing recognition of the centrality of the climate change agenda and make serious efforts to incorporate it prominently within election manifestos. Joe Biden did this within his US presidential campaign bringing the main planks of the Green New Deal into his programme and giving prominent roles to its leading advocates. Olaf Scholz was one of the crucial proponents of the European Green Deal and ensured that the SPD had a strong climate change offer in the September 2021 German election. In Keir Starmer's Labour party, the commitment to the Green New Deal is one of the few areas where Corbynite radicalism has not been extinguished, while it features prominently in the 'Union Populaire' alliance of the French left for June's parliamentary elections.

Across Europe, trade unions have increasingly recognised the centrality of the climate issue, while arguing for green job creation as well as protection for those workers in fossil fuel industries threatened by a loss of jobs. Their demand for a just transition has been incorporated into the policy mechanisms set out in the European Green Deal. Thus, almost all the diverse segments of the left are taking the climate issue on board. A range of Liberal parties are doing the same. On the progressive side of the political spectrum in Europe, no one force will be able to claim the monopoly of leadership on the environmental agenda. The Greens have 'first mover' advantage but for the foreseeable future there are likely to

be a multiplicity of parties making the environmental case to the public. To succeed, they will have to show that they can work together.

A pivotal moment

Europe is at a pivotal moment. After four decades, neo-liberalism has run out of steam. The centre of gravity in the economic debate is moving leftwards. The growing recognition of the climate emergency has accelerated the shift in outlook.[36] The IMF, along with the OECD,[37] has reversed four decades of Washington consensus and given its seal of approval to public investment strategies. The pandemic has reinforced that trend, demonstrating the vital role of government and public institutions in protecting citizens. The EU announced a trail-blazing €750bn green recovery plan in summer 2020 involving the creation of common European debt for the first time.[38] Keynesianism and active government are back. Within the EU the politics of climate transition has been developed on a broad, cross-party basis initially promoted under the German and French leadership of Merkel and Macron. This offers social democracy a chance to reapply its core principles and make alliances anew.

A new growth and innovation paradigm

To exploit this favourable terrain, social democracy needs to offer a growth and innovation paradigm fit to the challenge and adopt a pluralist approach suited to the diverse character of 21st century Europe. Is it ready for the cultural challenge the following five steps require?

First, it has to recognise that the old model of high-carbon, fossil fuel intensive economies has run its course. The core task is no longer for 'man to conquer nature' but for humanity to work in harmony with it. Social democracy can no longer be the party of traditional industrialisation and producer interests. To safeguard our common future a new, low carbon model of sustainable development has to become the 'common sense' of the age. That is what the policy specialists and architects of the European Green Deal have formulated. This represents a profound challenge for the mainstream left. Labour, like many of its European counterparts, underestimates the scale of transformation required to shift the world's

economies onto a net zero axis. It still retains the baggage of the industrial era with a supply-side fixation on long-heralded, but economically unproven technologies such as carbon capture and storage, or expensive risky ones such as nuclear power.

Second, this necessitates a change of language and mindset. The Green Industrial Revolution should no longer be the metaphor of choice nor 'shovel-ready' the favourite term for public investment. They speak to a departing industrial age which conjures images from the past, while constricting the imagination of the present and future. Instead, social democrats need to adopt a language of 21st Century modernity. The potential of a mix of social innovation and digital revolution to transform 'soft' infrastructure needs to be at the heart of environmental policy and practice. Currently they play second fiddle to 'hard' infrastructure investment.

New tech opens new vistas. Cities from Manchester to Milan have responded to the Covid-19 pandemic by reconfiguring their urban systems. Digital platforms and applications offer simplified ticketing, real-time travel information, integrated transport options and cycle and vehicle sharing. There are vacancies for 21st century European city mayors to create versions of 'platform socialism' that would be the modern equivalent of Joseph Chamberlain's 19th century 'municipal socialism' in Birmingham.[39]

Third, green deal politics offers a significant role for working people and local communities in the sustainability transition. This can sometimes manifest itself as a return to an old fashioned type of class politics. The choice is neither a simplistic model of business-led green transformation nor a reassertion of an exclusive labour movement. Successful sustainability transitions rely on a wide alliance of social actors with a shared vision. Pluralism has to be at the heart of any successful green deal movement. The key challenge is to show positive opportunities for new broad coalitions, which combine environmental and employment benefits, as with the buildings transition.[40] At the same time, the enormity of the climate emergency and the diversity of progressive forces across Europe, also means social democratic parties need to establish political coalitions and electoral alliances widely. This is an especially acute problem in the UK with its 'first past the post' parliamentary system, but more generally all parts of the left have to recognise that the era of mass

parties representing the overwhelming bulk of the working class is also a relic of the departing industrial era.

Fourth, the Green New Deal rightly stresses the centrality of jobs and material sufficiency for all as the necessary co-benefits of environmental actions. Yet on the left this too readily slips into an implicitly economistic view of people's aspirations. The potential widespread attractiveness of changes in lifestyle through sustainability transitions – both for individuals and institutions – does not get a look in. The fear of being accused of preachiness leaves an unsustainable consumption landscape uncontested. Yet the latest IPCC report contains a chapter on these demand-side measures and behavioural change, for the first time illustrating that lifestyle changes are an essential part of a sustainability transition. In the medium term, the mobility transition offers convenience, the food transition offers health and improved diet, the buildings transition offers comfort and lower fuel bills. The absence of positive lifestyle policies is a serious political shortcoming which a transformative social democracy needs to address.

Fifth, there are no nationalist boltholes in the interconnected 21st century world. Some parts of the left such as Melenchon's 'La France Insoumise' have still to accept that economies have slipped the leash of the small and medium-sized nation states that comprise Europe. The European Green Deal shattered the financial orthodoxies that ordo-liberals previously insisted were sacrosanct. Social democrats need to campaign with others for this EU green fiscal capacity to become permanent. Already, discussions have begun about the need for a follow-up investment fund. The chief of the Federation of German Industries (BDI) Joachim Lang has indicated that the BDI is open to the idea of EU borrowing to help fund the massive public and private investment necessary to meet both German and European climate goals. "To meet its climate targets, Germany needs additional investment of €860bn until 2030," Lang says and to secure this the German government should discuss "borrowing and financing at the EU level."[41] Such a move would confirm that the adoption of the European Green Deal was no one-off transaction but rather a first step towards Europe adopting green, macro-economic Keynesianism with the capacity to be a world leader on climate change.

This is the political and cultural challenge the left needs to surmount if social democracy is to revive and take the climate change agenda fully

on board. Broadly-based alliances to combat climate change are in the making. The new German government marks a genuine breakthrough. It shows how the climate crisis can bring the worlds of science, civil society and business together and reshape party politics and government, forging new coalitions in the process. The historic achievement of the 20th century socialist movements has been not to replace capitalism but to civilise it. The rise of climate change-inspired environmentalism could enable us to decarbonise and transform it. A popular front of the climate willing is underway. The next few years will test whether the European left is capable of playing a key role in ensuring the success of this drive for green modernisation.

Tomáš Petříček

11 | Outward-looking: building new global progressive alliances

Social democracy was from its earliest days an internationalist movement. If we are to tackle the challenges our world faces, we all need to put international solidarity back at the centre of our vision.

The labour and social democratic movement has its origin in 19th century Europe, where it was a necessary reaction to the industrial revolution that had brought an unprecedented transformation of European societies. It was also a reaction to the large-scale exploitation of emerging industrial capitalist economies. From the very beginning, therefore, it was driven by the need for emancipation and protection of marginalised social groups whose rights were, to a large extent, not even articulated at the time. Discrimination, a lack of justice and unbearable working conditions resulted in deep social and economic grievances that seemed impossible to heal. Workers had little control and little say in the increasingly industrialised and urbanised societies of Europe and North America. It was only after workers and their families, and also others who sympathised with their cause, started to organise – in unions, cooperatives, associations and last but not least in political parties – when the majority of people started to get a voice in the public, economic and political life of emerging national states.

From the very beginning the key figures of the movement, however, realised that it was not possible to organise only at the local or national level to achieve their goals of empowering workers and other marginalised groups. Building international alliances and internationalism became part of the social democratic DNA from the early days of the movement. These international efforts have brought progress to millions in the world and have been successful in introducing numerous social and economic standards that became part of international law and justice.

But we also have to accept that there have been dramatic failures in international cooperation and in the alliances of progressive forces over the past century and a half. One of the most visible was the disunity and fragmentation of the movement after the outbreak of the first world war where nationalism overcame internationalism and efforts to prevent the consequent carnage.

More recently, the response from the social democratic and labour movement to the negative consequences of economic globalisation has not met the expectations of millions of marginalised and exploited people across the world. We have not provided a proper framework through which we could harness the positive power of global economic cooperation and use it to improve people's lives by giving them fairer living conditions, a better income, quality public services, protection against any kind of discrimination, a healthy environment or equal access to justice.

In the aftermath of Russia's attack on Ukraine, many people, especially in Europe, have been talking about yet another failure of global cooperation in two respects. First there are legitimate questions over whether the international community, especially its progressive elements, could do more to prevent aggression without undermining the broader security architecture in Europe and without giving in to the pressure of authoritative and revisionist regimes. It is a complex issue which is beyond the scope of this chapter.

It is the second element in the failure of global cooperation that is of interest to me here: namely the relatively ambivalent reaction of a number of key global actors to the outbreak of war. For some, it has been a surprise to see the rather lukewarm response from so many countries in Asia, Africa or Latin America to the conflict, including from a number of emerging global powers such as India, Brazil, South Africa. Why are these countries equivocal about a war that has sparked high levels of anxiety among citizens in Europe, North America and Australia? Why are they reluctant to take a side in this conflict even though the global consequences of the war will affect hundreds of millions? Why has the West failed to isolate Russia as was one of the declared diplomatic and political goals of countries supporting Ukraine in the conflict? Can we see it as a result of decades of accumulated frustration over a global governance system that many see as unfair and unequal? Can we still speak as progressives about protecting and promoting a global rules-based order in this context?

In this chapter I would like to focus on two interlinked issues related to a key value of the social democratic movement – solidarity. The first concerns the spatial dimension of solidarity, where there is a delicate balance between local and global solidarity. The second relates to the possible conflict between solidarity and re-emerging geopolitics from the European perspective. In both of these aspects, we need to find a new strategy to return solidarity to the centre of our efforts to rebuild progressive global alliances that can influence our global security architecture, our global political and economic governance models as well as our ability to face future crises and emergencies.

Solidarity at the centre: local versus global?

While progressives have been advocating on a regular basis for more robust international solidarity with marginalised, discriminated or exploited social groups in different parts of the world, it has been largely national politics, or rather the national frame of reference, that has, at the end of the day, determined the course of action of most of social democratic, socialists and Labour politicians. This is despite increasing awareness about the international nature of challenges that the international community is facing – from poverty, migration, food and energy security, vulnerability of supply chains, arms proliferation to climate change mitigation and adaptation. Even though we know that these challenges are growing, our movement is still largely relying on the historically dominant role of national states for solutions. What are the main reasons for this discrepancy between the international nature of the problems we face and the way we look to solve them?

I would argue that it is the combination of temporal and spatial factors that have an impact on the ability of any society to provide international solidarity over a longer period of time. While it is possible to mobilise support for people affected by short-term emergencies or disasters – be they natural or man-made – it is much harder to sustain solidarity over a longer period of time with groups of people who are not perceived as part of one's own community. It is relatively easy for civil society to mobilise people´s solidarity with victims of natural disasters in different parts of the world and to bring in relatively substantial amounts of money through emergency appeals. It is much harder to mobilise support for new long-term schemes to tackle structural problems and their implications,

for example pursuing system change that would allow for fairer international redistribution of wealth or changing global supply chains in a way that would have an impact on our consumer behaviour. At the same time, however, societies are capable of these kinds of long-term solidarity mechanisms if they are to help 'us'.

This illustrates that solidarity derives from some kind of idea of belonging. So what does it mean to be 'us'? I would argue that the idea of belonging is still largely defined by territorial identity – my local community, my neighbourhood, my city or my country/my nation. This is of course a simplification. Nonetheless it helps us to understand why those moments when societies realise that "we are all in this together" are more common and longer lasting in a defined geographical area, rather than being rooted in more universal notions such as humanity or working class.

This is not to say that 'local' solidarity is harmful or bad. On the contrary, it is part of the glue that bonds our societies together. It is also essential for the idea of the welfare state. Progressives should not try to replace 'local' solidarity with global solidarity. Instead the goal should be to find the right balance between local and global and to build the foundations for similar "stick together" moments at the regional and also global levels. We should return to the original ambition of social democracy and trade unions – to internationalise the workers' movement – and adjust it to the current societal, technological and environmental context in order to make new global social alliances. Alliances where the constitutional blocks will not be national states, but flexible and long-term interconnections of different parts of the global civil society. In this we should reinvent and reinvigorate the global workers' movement and also the global social and environmental movement. At the same time, however, we need to avoid any suspicion that this movement's aim is to uproot local solidarity and communities, their identity and their ownership.

Geopolitics and solidarity

In recent years, it is said that we have witnessed the return of geopolitics. In Europe, we see more often than we did 15 years ago geopolitical calculations being part of policymakers' reflections about global affairs and global governance. This is to a large extent a logical response to the

rise of Chinese power; to the actions of openly revisionist powers such as Russia; to the aspirations of emerging powers around the world; to energy security concerns and the growing vulnerability of global supply chains and last but not least to the serious impact of climate change. It has resulted in a growing focus on strategic autonomy or strategic sovereignty of the European Union. In fact it might seems that against the backdrop of re-emerging geopolitical conflicts in the world, the European Union is shifting away from its former "transformative power toward defensive self-protection" as Richard Youngs from Carnegie Europe has observed. In this context, the Union has approached partnerships and alliances more often than in the past from a utilitarian angle and seen them purely as an instrument of strengthening Europe's role in the world, its own security and its ability to protect its own interests.

Of course the EU should have its own agenda when it comes to working with other regional or global actors, with bigger or smaller partners. It is right that it has clear priorities such as climate change mitigation, green transition, protection of the rule of law and human rights as well as trade and technological cooperation. Nonetheless, the European Union has been perceived increasingly as a self-interested actor with a rather limited capacity to reflect the views and interests of its counterparts. This can be illustrated by the relatively insensitive approach to the green transition debate, its geopolitical dimension and impacts on the Union´s neighbourhood and other partners. One can only ask what is the message Europe is sending. It wants to become increasingly self-sufficient in order to become the first green economy. Existing interdependencies with its neighbourhood will be disrupted with potentially huge consequences for geopolitical situations in eastern Europe, the Middle East, North Africa and beyond. And it is not yet providing a clear perspective on how to rebuild these interdependencies on better and fairer foundations.

This chapter does not aim to expose these trends to detailed criticism. On the contrary, I believe that strategic autonomy is a logical goal for Europe – as long as it avoids the mistake of confusing it with self-sufficiency or even autarky. Strategic autonomy should be complemented with the concept of strategic solidarity that can much better reflect the interests of all those partners that are important for strengthening the geopolitical position of the European Union. Such an approach would also help to overcome the potential conflict between geopolitical approaches and transformative approaches to global affairs, empowering partners,

making them more resilient and strengthening local ownership in tackling shared challenges. The role of the social democratic movement and progressives in general is to promote solidarity as part of the EU's global and international strategy. We should be holding fast to the key values of social democracy, by advocating for strategic autonomy of the Union to be built on strategic solidarity not on a slide towards autarky. Last but not least, our movement should argue that the concept of strategic solidarity should not just apply in our relations with states. Instead it should focus on global civil society, on local communities and marginalised groups in different parts of the world.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have not provided an exhaustive account of the possibilities for progressives to build new alliances in a changing world. Instead I have focused on the need to put solidarity back at the centre of our global approach. There are three main arguments for doing so.

First, it is indispensable if we are to address global challenges such as poverty, food security, energy transition, fair and equitable trade for all and climate change.

Second, solidarity has the capacity to unlock equal partnerships and comprehensive alliances with individual countries, regional bodies as well as with global institutions.

Third, it is the central principle on which we can build a global social movement, making small drops of glue that will connect diverse parts of the emerging global civil society.

There are two aspects that will require particular attention. The first is the role of progressives in overcoming the conflict between local and global solidarity. And the second is the need to make solidarity the centrepiece of the EU's position, especially through the concept of strategic solidarity which progressives should further define and develop.

Marius S. Ostrowski

12 | Forward-looking: building a better world one step at a time

Social democracy needs to have an eye on the future, fighting for every progressive achievement and ensuring hard-won victories are not reversed. With a patient approach, it can ensure it delivers the better future we all so desperately need.

Like every progressive ideology, social democracy enjoys its own unique and intimate relationship with the future. Typically, its progressive neighbours – liberals and greens, communists and anarchists – might view this relationship through the prism of what they think will inevitably happen in the medium to long term, or what is set to happen if we stay on our current path. They may also treat such predictions with anything from brash confidence (a better future is just around the corner!) to frenetic consternation (we are on the road to disaster!).

Yet social democracy's relationship with the future is characterised by a very particular sense of immediate expectation. Social democracy lives permanently on the cusp of realising achievement. It crosses a never-ending series of thresholds from one phase, one stage, one moment, to the next, to the one after, to the one beyond that. Or, if you like: social democracy means *eternal reform*, and *permanent evolution*.

Social democracy is a restless ideology, never satisfied with the present. It is always on the lookout for the path onward, for where to place its next step. It is the politics of 'almost there', of 'just about to', of 'shall we then?', caught in perpetual motion. Perhaps it has less of a sense of where it is ultimately heading than other progressive ideologies. Communists might aim for a workers' state and a centrally planned economy, possibly under the leadership of a single party. Or, with anarchists, they might favour a decentralised network of workers' councils and cooperatives. Greens, meanwhile, aspire to a sustainable 'gaiarchy' of human and non-human

equals. And the classic image of the liberal ideal for society is that of a constitutional republic of rights-bearing citizens, coupled with a market economy full of propertied entrepreneurs.

'What social democracy wants' is not quite as easy to define. This is not down to any dearth of vision. Rather, social democracy recognises – in the sense that it positively affirms rather than negatively accepts – that such a vision must be the conditional, circumstantial, cumulative outcome of myriad such 'almosts' and 'about tos'. Its vision is that of an *eventuality*, and it trusts this eventuality to the process of perpetual motion and continual reorientation. To put it bluntly, there *will* be a better future – but we are not yet in a position to say what exactly it will look like.

Yet just because its approach to the future is gradual and incremental, this does not mean that the path social democracy carves out is a random one. When it chooses its next step, it is doing far more than simply responding reactively, or passively, to what happens to be the case there and then. Instead, in the choices it makes at each stage it always has an eye on those it has made before, and those it hopes to make later. Their intended aims and their actual (or likely) outcomes. The continual sequence of new parameters of possibility. Social democracy is an intensely and intensively *directive* ideology. With each of its choices it seeks to bind the future, to lock in 'its' preferred path as 'the' one society pursues. It puts in place an insuperable millefeuille of microscopic changes that amount to an inescapable material logic: a dynamic framework that favours a specific 'chain reaction' of successive choices, which only the most brutally incisive interventions by its ideological rivals can stymie, overturn, or undo.

Social democracy recognises that to direct, and above all to direct efficaciously, means getting granular. Quite simply, good macro means good micro. Every single step matters on the way to the social democratic future. Put one foot wrong, plant it too uncertainly, set it down too far askew, and the whole trajectory might be thrown off course in an instant. Getting it right every time – or at least not too wrong – places social democracy under vast pressure. Such pressure cannot be resolved merely by haphazard improvisation or guesswork. For a social vision to avoid becoming detached from reality, and collapsing in on itself under the weight of its own contradictions, it needs foundations in sound theory and solid empirics. For it to be a truly *social democratic* vision, moreover, it needs to be firmly rooted in what has been shown to

work – and what we have learned. A firm base of evidence and logical justification must lie at the heart of every step social democracy takes.

Social democracy looks forward, as it were, through a varifocal lens. It views reality and where it is headed in terms of both broad brush-strokes and individual pixels: far and near, whole canvas and individual details. Yet its laser-like focus on optimising each successive step does not have to signify the sterile micromanagement of unrestrained technocracy or bureaucracy. Certainly, it is not hard to see why those appeal to social democracy, since (at least on the face of it) they are specially designed to ensure that high-grade social theory and empirics feed through into the principle and practice of social democratic policy formation. But they are only one relatively narrow way of interpreting the broader recognition that social democratic ideology has to 'sweat the small stuff' in order to make sure it gets the world it wants. Social democracy, in other words, recognises that making the 'best' choice (as far as possible) is the result of deliberate vigilance and unremitting sensitivity towards the world within which it puts down each successive step.

As a result, social democracy is an ideology that deals in only the grandest of grand strategies – the most skeletal of outlines for where it wants to go, with ample room for subtle nuance and manoeuvre. Its preferred area of operations is tactical. It is the ideology of street fights over battlefronts, of statistical databases over philosophical tracts, of resource depots over national product measures. Social democracy's conception of progress is contingent: it depends entirely on the assessments it can make *in light of* the situations in which it finds itself at any given time. It is a specific prediction or anticipation of the imminent future trajectory of our social world, insofar as we can grasp or overview this *from within* the constrained horizons of our present viewpoint. Progress successfully achieved thus consists in accumulating an (ideally unbroken) chain of victories won in each moment, judged as victories from the perspective *of* that moment. In each case, what counts as a victory for progress amounts to implementing policies and asserting ideas to build a society that is both qualitatively different ('better') and plausibly derivable from ('builds on') what we have in the present.

This view of progress also reveals the very specific way that social democracy sees the relationship between our social agency and the social structures in which we operate. First and foremost, it *rejects inevitability*:

every progressive achievement needs to be fought for, and any hard-won victory is always at risk of being subsequently reversed. Certainly, there are deep structural forces at work in society, but we cannot rely on their transformative capacities alone. Rather, they provide a kind of conditioning baseline that makes some futures more feasible or more probable than others. After all, the point of seeing the future in terms of 'parameters of possibility' is that the precise outcome can still vary between them. Quite what that outcome is needs to be determined in a fine-grained way by our social activism.

Consequently, if social democracy wants to claim the mantle of leadership within the progressive movement, it has to be at the forefront of defining what progress means in each circumstance. This entails (1) *diagnosis*, identifying the exact situation in which we find ourselves as social democrats; (2) *critique*, identifying what is missing in this situation from a social democratic perspective; and hence (3) *prescription*, identifying what it is about our social world that is to be added or changed to make it more social democratic.

This fundamental dependence on the perspectival horizon of the 'here and now' lets us characterise more fully what it means to be an idealist in a social democratic vein – that is, to answer the question, when as social democrats we imagine a 'better' world that 'builds on' what is there now, of how it is that we should be doing so. Social democracy pursues a vision that sits at the intersection of *aspirational realism* and *concessive utopianism*. On the one hand, it tries to push the transformative possibilities of our current circumstances and capacities to the outer limit of how far they will go. On the other, it posits an alternative or future world that holds a relatable, comprehensible, and above all essentially achievable mirror up to our contemporary state of affairs.

By the same token, social democracy's preoccupation with context makes it strenuously averse to excessive abstraction. Being vigilant and sensitive towards the world around us means that whatever we say ideologically, social democratically, has to be expressed in a way that is inescapably specific. When we diagnose, critique, and prescribe, we cannot do so in a generic, boilerplate fashion. Even if we end up saying things we may have said before, at other times and in other places, we are still crucially obliged to adapt them to our immediate present circumstances. In this regard, the role of social democratic values – like those discussed throughout this

book – is not to offer a rigid and immutable characterisation of 'the' social democratic society. Instead, their role is more that of a set of limiting conditions for what can *ever* count as 'progress' in social democracy's eyes: a set of red lines, careful criteria that allow us to judge what is 'good' and 'bad', or rather 'better' and 'worse'.

Ultimately, these come back to two integral criteria, the defining components of social democracy as an ideology: the interpenetrating elements of 'sociality' and 'democracy'. Certainly, social democracy is hardly the only ideology within or even beyond the progressive fold that has a specific conception of what a 'democracy that is social' looks like. Depending on your ideology of choice, that can include positive rights and welfarism, federalism and subsidiarity, corporatism, nationality-based or proletarian rule, or a model of democracy that spills over into the institutions of the law, economy, religion, culture, and caregiving. The same is true of a 'society that is democratic'. Different ideologies may associate that with plebiscitary and direct rule, constitutionality and popular sovereignty, checks and balances, the rule of law, presidents and parliaments, councils and soviets, elections, representation, or republics of all kinds.

In this light, the purpose of social democracy's other values is to make its versions of 'social' and 'democratic' more recognisable and precise. Social democrats play up the *social and democratic* connotations, implications, and associations that social democracy wants future society to make room for, and dial down those they want future society to rule out. Of course, even this longer list of values still allows room for a degree of contextual variation in how they are interpreted and implemented by different social democratic groups in different places and at different times. There is, after all, not just one social democracy; rather, there are many social democracies possible in the world to come.

So what, then, does it mean to be forward-looking in such a 'social and democratic' way? It means constantly searching for new ways to make society's institutions reflect our interdependence, rooted in mutually appreciative exchange and inclusion. To represent the many interlocking groups we are part of, and celebrate our attachments from the local to the global level. To build a shared identity we can feel, based on reciprocity, togetherness, and unconditional support when we need it. To reduce the hoarding of private and sectional advantages, from knowledge to property, from titles to income. To ensure wide, pluralistic participation

in the creation of policies, across all demographic groups and social identities. To break open hierarchies of authority and control, and unleash the creativity of those without power or privilege. To raise the influence of the majority of the population, and tie how society works closer to the preferences of public opinion. To craft institutions that combine discussion and decision, which know when to turn from formulating ideas to putting them effectively into practice. And ultimately, to place all of this on a sustainable footing that can weather the vagaries of social and ecological upheaval.

With every new step social democracy takes, it seeks to shift society further along one or more of these axes of evaluation. It will not hit the mark on all of them every time. Yet even if it only gets what it was hoping for on one of them, that is still a victory which, if it is quickly and effectively consolidated, can substantially transform the material logic that frames the later course of society. Social democracy is the consummate fighting creed, and it can survive as leader of the progressive movement only as long as it keeps alive its fighting spirit. To let up, even for a moment, is to court the loss of all we have achieved. But to persevere – patiently, astutely, implacably – is to build, layer upon layer, the foundations of the social and democratic future we aspire to and which the world urgently needs.

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Enduring values

How progressives across Europe can win

It is not so long ago that commentators were proclaiming the demise of social democracy across Europe. Disappointing election results and the rise of populism had changed the landscape forever – or so the story went. Recent trends, however, have been more encouraging, with successes seen in elections, for example in Germany and Portugal. But the challenges for social democracy in both the UK and the EU in the 21st century remain considerable. What are the keys to social democratic renewal and victory?

This collection aims to identify some of the foundations for success: the values which will rebuild trust with voters. Each chapter is themed around one of the social democratic principles which chime with the public. From competence to compassion and from unity to solidarity, the authors discuss the social democratic values which form a common thread across Europe. Together, their words can serve as the inspiration for conversations about building a more progressive future both in the UK and the EU.

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