

## Progress in an Age of Fear?

**TONY JUDT:**

### **Ill Fares the Land: A Treatise on Our Present Discontents**

London 2010

Allen Lane, 237 pp.

**W**ith the publication of his last book, »Ill Fares the Land,« shortly before his death in August 2010, the great British historian Tony Judt made an invaluable contribution to the debate on the future of social democracy and progressive politics. The book is required reading for anyone interested in the past, present, and future of social democracy – as is Richard Wilkinson's and Kate Pickett's »The Spirit Level: Why More Equal Societies Almost Always Do Better,« to which Tony Judt makes copious reference.

Naturally, one is not obliged to agree with every word even of required reading. But it does not matter whether one agrees with Judt's arguments or not: in any case, »Ill Fares the Land« compels social democrats to rethink their customary arguments. In the twenty-first century, can and should social democracy continue to conceive of itself as a party of progress? What direction should this progress now take? Or could it be that today »progress« represents rather the problem than the solution? These are the provocative questions that Judt poses.

It is clear that belief in the necessity of progress and its possibility in principle was always a constitutive factor in social democracy. In contrast, conservatives have tended to believe in the existence of a »natural order of things,« which could not be radically changed. Conservatism, properly speaking, was always a fundamentally pessimistic world view. That changed to some degree around 30 years ago with the emergence of the neoconservative and neoliberal hegemony. Judt rightly stresses the historical dimension of this turning of the tide: »It is the Right that has inherited the ambitious modernist urge to destroy and innovate in the name of a universal project.«

This observation is uncontroversial among social democrats. However, the conclusion Judt draws from it with regard to the task of social democracy is likely to give rise to some debate: »If social democracy has a future, it will be as a social democracy of fear. (...) The first task of radical dissenters today is to remind

their audience of the achievements of the twentieth century, along with the likely consequences of our heedless rush to dismantle them. The left, to be quite blunt about it, has something to conserve.«

Tony Judt's truly arresting point, therefore, is that in the twenty-first century it is social democracy which must become the party of a genuine or »conservative conservatism«: »We take for granted the institutions, legislation, services and rights that we have inherited from the great age of 20th century reform. It is time to remind ourselves that all of these were utterly inconceivable as recently as 1929. We are the fortunate beneficiaries of a transformation whose scale and impact was unprecedented. There is much to defend.« That is why »social democrats, characteristically modest in style and ambition, need to speak more assertively of past gains.«

They should indeed. Judt is quite right to emphasize that »[t]o abandon the labors of a century is to betray those who came before us as well as generations yet to come.« However, more questionable is the manner in which Judt seems to play off the task of defending »past gains« against the task of working towards the progressive goal of a better future for as many people as possible. In his New York lecture of October 19, 2009, on which the book is based Judt formulated the presumed alternative in particularly stark terms: »Rather than seeking to restore a language of optimistic progress, we should begin by reacquainting ourselves with the recent past.« But why should we have to choose between them?

This alleged contrast is inexplicable – and counterproductive for the social democratic cause in the twenty-first century. Of course, it is right to fight for a social democracy which defends the civil and social standards achieved in an earlier era: equality, justice, integrity, belief in the possibility and worth of common efforts for the common good. In this specific sense, social democrats must really be »conservative.« But as every footballer knows, teams which, after scoring an early goal, timidly try to defend their one-nil lead for the remainder of the match are likely to be punished. In politics, no less than in football, it pays to take the game to the opposition, dictating the play and believing in one's own ability to score more goals.

In other words, if the goals social democrats represent are important and they have a cause worth fighting for – which is indeed the case – they must take their ideas to the people, instead of merely taking cover and hoping for the best, while secretly expecting the worst. It is true that in the era of radical free-market hegemony, which has now passed, the idea of social democracy went onto the defensive. Even social democrats themselves no longer believed in their cause, because they had lost their specifically social democratic »language of optimistic progress.« And this language continued to ebb away from them, because they no longer believed in their cause. One led to the other – and vice versa.

This vicious circle has to be broken. As things stand, there is indeed every reason to fear. Free-market radicalism may be a thing of the past – at least as

a hegemonic narrative – but the destruction of everything achieved under the aegis of social democracy in the post-war years still threatens. As a result of climate change; endemic financial, economic, debt, and currency crises; population growth; energy scarcity; demographic imbalances; mass migration; scarcity of food; terrorism; weapons of mass destruction; nuclear proliferation; and a public which is either distracted or panic-stricken; the world has indeed become a very dangerous place. During such times, backward-looking »parties of fear,« held together by little more than a yearning somehow to halt the erosion of their earlier achievements will never be able to mobilize anything more than ultimately help-less blocking minorities.

Fear paralyzes people and stifles creativity. Instead of giving in to it, however, we should revive the conviction that the idea of a progressive, future-oriented social democracy, which also includes green and liberal goals, has every hope of winning electoral majorities in the twenty-first century. If social democrats themselves do not believe that they have something valuable to offer, why should anyone put their faith in them? Martin Luther King did not say: »I have a nightmare.« And Barack Obama did not become president of the United States and introduce health insurance for millions of previously uninsured Americans by wringing his hands about neoliberal hegemony. Instead, he prevailed by persuading enough people that positive change, progress, and a better future are still possible.

Perhaps – even probably – there will not be a better future for all. The dilemma of progress in the twenty-first century is evident. In his latest book, »The Politics of Climate Change,« Anthony Giddens puts his finger on the problem: »Our civilization could self-destruct – no doubt about it – and with awesome consequences. Doomsday is no longer a religious concept, a day of spiritual reckoning, but a possibility imminent in our society and economy. (...) No wonder many take fright. Let's go back! Let's return to a simpler world! They are entirely understandable sentiments and have practical application in some contexts. Yet there can be no overall ›going back‹ – the very expansion of human power that has created such deep problems is the only means of resolving them, with science and technology at the forefront. There will probably be nine billion people in the world by 2050 – after which the world population hopefully will stabilize, especially if the least developed countries make significant economic and social progress. Ways will have to be found of providing those nine billion people with a decent way of life.«

The world of the twenty-first century therefore is in urgent need of progress and of alert social democracies so that at least some of the problems can be solved for which, it must be said, past progress is also responsible. To be sure, we cannot be certain that we will succeed in this. What we can be certain of, however, is that conservatism, whether social democratic or otherwise, will not save us. It may be that we are doomed to failure even if we opt for more and – hopefully – better progress. In any case, we are definitely doomed to failure if we reject the guiding

notion of progress out of hand. As even Tony Judt admits: »The past really is another country: we cannot go back.«

Not that social democrats and other progressives have nothing more to learn from history. Far from it. Our success in coping with this century will depend not least on whether enough people in western countries come to acknowledge how precious, improbable, and fragile the social and liberal-democratic post-war settlement is. Judt is right to warn us not to take anything for granted: »If we are going to build a better future, we must begin with a deeper appreciation of the ease with which even solidly-grounded liberal democracies can founder.«

The fact that Tony Judt relentlessly and assiduously promulgated this message right up until his death merits the highest praise. »Social democracy does not represent an ideal future,« he writes, »it does not even represent the ideal past. But among the options available to us today, it is better than anything else to hand.« Social democracy will therefore remain indispensable in the twenty-first century – not as the defensive ersatz-conservatism which Tony Judt had in mind, however, but as the optimistic, progressive, but also sober political belief that our dangerous times so urgently need.

But will social democracy take on this task and is it even capable of doing so? These are the questions which, inspired by Tony Judt's book, are now being debated all over Europe – for example, in »Berliner Republik,« in »Die Neue Gesellschaft,« and on the website of the Dutch Wiardi Beckman Stichting. In the Netherlands, Judt's book was available in every bookstore – in Dutch translation – not long after the appearance of the original. The fact that Judt's complacent German publisher – of many years' standing – did not find itself able even to announce a German-language edition of »Ill Fares the Land« in the months before his death is as incomprehensible as it is unforgivable.

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## Is Equality Set to Return as a Political Good?

**RICHARD WILKINSON / KATE PICKETT:**

### **The Spirit Level: Why More Equal Societies Almost Always Do Better**

London 2009

Allen Lane, 352 pp.

(Translated from the English by Edgar Peinelt and Klaus Binder as »Gleichheit ist Glück – Warum gerechte Gesellschaften für alle besser sind.« Berlin 2009)

**W**inston Churchill (1874–1965) once summed up his experience with processed data as follows: »The only statistics you can trust are those you falsified yourself.« This can be interpreted in a number of ways: anyone listening to the party secretaries discussing the results on television after national and important regional elections in Germany would generally get the impression that every party had won.

Numbers are patient, it is said. Bad statistics can often be hidden or disguised and results can be »sexed up,« as illustrated recently by Eurozone member states, with dire consequences. Other sets of figures can be startling, however: in June 2010 the German Institute for Economic Research published a new study on income distribution in Germany. Income differentials between poorer and richer households are increasing and the middle class is shrinking. Society is drifting apart into a small and prosperous stratum and a broad and poor one. But the trend of income polarization is by no means merely a German phenomenon. In their book »The Spirit Level: Why More Equal Societies Almost Always Do Better,« British social scientists Kate Pickett and Richard Wilkinson examine the consequences for society as a whole of this development, also taking into consideration the international dimension.

How is it that the societies of rich industrialized countries are more prosperous than ever before but suffer from such profound social problems? The USA, for example, has the highest per capita income but, at the same time, the highest homicide rate of the western industrialized countries. The authors think they have the answer: income and prosperity are not distributed equally. Once a certain level of social product has been reached, the more fairly income and prosperity are distributed, the healthier, happier, and more successful a society is.

But the consequences of unequal distribution are not borne solely by the poorer strata of the population. The well-to-do also feel the effects of a socially unequal society to a greater extent than previously thought. To take one example: in the USA the top 20 percent of the population have seven and a half to eight times as much money at their disposal as the bottom 20 percent – in Norway, by contrast, it is only around four times as much, despite broadly similar living standards. By comparison, Norway comes off much better in every area than the USA. A child born in Norway is healthier, generally does better at school, has

a longer life expectancy, and has less risk of becoming a victim of crime. This applies to all strata of the population.

In the course of research over several years the authors accumulated extensive statistical materials and compared income distribution mainly in the western industrialized countries. Germany is still in the upper third of generally more socially equal countries. The authors then linked this country index with data on social issues: trust, mental illness, addiction (which the authors link to mental illness), life expectancy and infant mortality, obesity, how well children do in school, teenage pregnancy, suicide, size of prison population, and social mobility. The data used in these researches come from the official surveys conducted by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the UN, and the World Health Organization (WHO), generating a comparable and robust database. The book's Appendix is also very useful, added to the English paperback second edition (which also has a new subtitle: »Why Equality Is Better for Everyone«): it contains an explanation of where the data come from and the statistical approach taken. This makes the graphs easier to read and more comprehensible – one of the main criticisms leveled by conservative critics especially, who have attacked the imputed statistical evidence and claimed correlations in particular.

The authors are particularly adept in the detailed analysis of social malfunctioning and the chapter on mental illness, life expectancy, and obesity is convincing. It seems perfectly logical that higher pressure of competition and »fear of falling« in more unequal societies should lead to more mental illness.

Other derivations remain vague and ambiguous, however: in the chapter on suicide, for example, the authors assert – in contrast to their previous findings – that the suicide rate in less equal societies is lower than in societies in which income is more evenly distributed. Their explanation for this is that depressed people in egalitarian societies tend to direct their violence towards themselves. In more unequal societies, in contrast, depression tends to find external expression in the form of more violent crime and higher murder rates. This postulated connection between suicide rate and violent crime is not persuasive. Similarly, the connection between equality and global warming and resource scarcity also seems rather forced. It is wiser to stick more closely to the empirical findings.

In the Anglo-Saxon countries the book has met with a strong response, depending on political standpoint. What, for example, Polly Toynbee of the left-liberal Guardian newspaper praises as pioneering research (Toynbee 2009) is regarded by those on the right as fraught with contradictions.

Christopher Snowden entitled his critique »The Spirit Level Delusion. Fact-Checking the Left's New Theory of Everything« (Snowden 2010) and found fault with the fact that some countries had not been included in the data comparison and that much of the book refers solely to the northern European model countries. Snowden considers himself an independent journalist, but has ties to the Democracy Institute (with headquarters in London and Washington), a think

tank which can be identified, through its leadership, funding, and advisory committee, as an appendage of the Cato Institute – the traditional neoliberal »talent foundry« in the USA. Otherwise, his main claim to fame is his ideological-critical reappraisal of the anti-smoking movement.

Peter Saunders is from Policy Exchange, one of the most respected British think tanks, with close links to the Conservative Party. It is plain from the very cover of his study – »Beware False Prophets« – what he thinks of the line of argument he is criticizing: it depicts a shell game, the implication being that skillful manipulation makes it possible to achieve a desired (false) result (Saunders 2010). In almost as much detail as the original Saunders puts most of Wilkinson and Pickett's tables and figures under the microscope and re-interprets them within the framework of his own paradigm: what counts is not fairness and distribution, but primarily social product per capita – in other words, growth, not equality.

British sociologist Daniel Dorling, in his book »Injustice. Why Social Inequality Persists,« tries to uncover the deep-lying structures and thought patterns in our capitalist societies and political cultures which ensure that inequality is constantly reproduced and predominantly approved in public discourse as justified and beneficial for all (Dorling 2010). Under the aegis of a difference – and so also inequality – which is part of the nature of things an elite constantly seeks to legitimize itself as inevitable and convinces itself and mainstream public opinion that it has to take the reins of the economy and politics in its hands for the good of all, regretfully accepting that the exclusion of some segments of society is unavoidable. In parallel with the critique of neoliberal global financial capitalism in the wake of the bank crises of the past two years, appeal to the idea underlying the book »The Spirit Level« could now bring the long-spurned »good« of equality back into the political debate.

In their passionate closing chapter Kate Pickett and Richard Wilkinson venture out of the world of statistics into the political realm to offer a number of proposals concerning what changes need to be made: their prescriptions range from redistributive taxation, through restrictions on excessive wages at the top, to the closing of tax loopholes. The authors have also set up a foundation, the Equality Trust,<sup>1</sup> whose goal is the public dissemination of the results of their work and their political implementation.

To return to Churchill for a moment: at some points, in pursuit of the statistical evidence and the correlation between inequality and living standards they are looking for the authors get somewhat carried away, as a result of which the book here and there fails to convince. Inequality cannot be the reason for all ills and problems. But the book does show that it is with more equality and not with reference to the level of average income – »a rising tide lifts all boats« – that the

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1. [www.equalitytrust.org.uk](http://www.equalitytrust.org.uk) – a response in particular to the critique by *Policy Exchange* may also be found on the website.

life circumstances of all parts of the population improve. This calls for a veritable paradigm change.

Statistical juggling or not, in pursuit of the right policies to open up people's life chances social democracy has also long overestimated the importance of markets, within the framework of which the issue of distribution is downgraded and the close connection between equality of opportunity and equality of outcomes ignored. Under the aegis of economization and consolidation programs in the wake of the financial and economic crisis (social democratic) governments have limited room to maneuver. Equality of opportunity under the aegis of fairer distribution, however, requires in particular intact welfare states and a decent level of public services, and both these things are in jeopardy.

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## FRANZ WALTER:

### **Vorwärts oder Abwärts? Zur Transformation der Sozialdemokratie**

Berlin 2010

Suhrkamp, 142 pp.

Individual accounts of the problems of European social democracy and the various parties and organizations which make it up are available in abundance. High time, therefore, for a synopsis, an analytical overview, a positioning of current processes within the framework of longer-term political and ideological contexts and lines of development. With »Vorwärts oder Abwärts?,« Franz

Walter provides precisely this. While there is a certain emphasis on the SPD and the changes it has undergone in recent years and decades the book's perspective is at the same time much broader, taking in developments outside Germany, in particular in France, the Netherlands, Scandinavia, and the UK.

This broad-based approach makes it possible to avoid the danger of excessive personification of the current problems of European social democracy. Although Walter goes into a fair amount of personal detail especially concerning leading German social democrats, he puts this in the context of broader developments. The decline of social democracy, according to Walter, basically began in the early 1970s when post-war Keynesianism reached its limits. This assessment is not new as such. But where other authors have been content with arguing on the basis of »sheer force of circumstances« – in other words, bowing to necessity and adapting to the prevailing conditions – Walter depicts the political and ideological developments of this period and the triumph of »new liberal« (»neoliberal«) thought as a battle of ideas, an interest-driven »ideological struggle« which the traditional left simply lost. It was at the end of this course of development that social democrats adapted themselves to the »Zeitgeist« and the prolonged dominance of liberal thought, in its neoliberal, but also eco-liberal forms. The subsequent flirtation with the Third Way, which turned out to be a blind alley, ultimately did massive and lasting damage to social democracy's basis of trust among its traditional constituencies – and finally led to the debacle of the Bundestag elections of 2009. An extensive chapter on the situation in Europe shows that the German experience in this regard was not unique.

In his analyses of the crisis of social democracy Franz Walter has always strongly emphasized the inclusion of developments in terms of social background and organizational sociology. A chapter is also dedicated to this in »Vorwärts oder Abwärts?«, in which the author describes the dissolution of the traditional social democratic milieu, the disconnection of parties and organizations from the social context of the classic working classes and the capture of the party apparatus and positions by a generation of careerists who have little empathy with those losing out as a result of modernization. Anyone wishing to understand developments in Germany, but also in the UK in recent years must not underestimate this factor, as many authors have done. As a consequence of this slippage of the sociological anchor, social democratic parties can be characterized less and less as workers' parties. Instead, according to Walter, these parties are increasingly becoming parties of the public sector, whose foothold in Europe's problem and crisis locales is now fairly tenuous.

In the description of the »defective party,« the SPD, what stands out is how much Franz Walter focuses his analysis on the socio-economic and sociological aspects. Presumably – although the reviewer does not feel competent to judge – this is perfectly proper for an understanding of the problems of the SPD. In this respect, however, Walter differs from some other authors who, in recent years,

have tried to explain the current problems facing European social democracy. Hanspeter Kriesi and his co-authors; René Cuperus, who is repeatedly cited by Walter; and also Patrick Diamond and Roger Liddle stress much more emphatically than Walter the significance of socio-cultural factors – adaptation to a »cosmopolitan« elite ideology, the effects of immigration processes and the fetishization of multiculturalism and universalism – for the problems of European social democracy and its separation from parts of its erstwhile proletarian electorate. It would have been fascinating to see how the shrewd and extremely knowledgeable Walter assesses these aspects.

In the final chapter, Walter addresses the prospects for social democracy in Europe. His conclusion is not optimistic. Given the structural shortcomings of European social democracy, the enormous loss of trust over recent years, and the deep-lying alienation of strategic constituencies it is far from certain that social democracy will ever be able to re-establish its hegemony. Instead, the specter of an upsurge in right-wing populism looms – the »negative mobilization« of those disaffected with democracy.

To sum up, »Vorwärts oder Abwärts?« is a book which has no equivalent in either Germany or the rest of Europe: no other author has so far managed to summarize the variety of crisis symptoms from which European social democracy is suffering in similar depth. The variety of sources from different European countries is impressive. Precisely because it denies the reader a happy end the book is simply required reading for all those interested in the future of social democracy.

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## **Left-wing Ways: Reconnoitering Political Topography**

**FRANZISKA DROHSEL (ed.):**

**Was ist heute Links? Thesen für eine Politik der Zukunft**

Frankfurt 2009

Campus, 250 pp.

**SIGMAR GABRIEL:**

**Links neu denken. Politik für die Mehrheit**

Munich 2008

Piper, 379 pp.

**T**he SPD's election defeat on September 27, 2009 can be described with some justification as a watershed in the history of Germany's oldest political party.

At the 2009 SPD party conference in Dresden a process of renewal was heralded, which will have far-reaching consequences. Where the journey will take the SPD is far from certain. Traditionally a broad church, the SPD encompasses very different views on the economy, the state and politics, which are usually in dialogue with one another but sometimes come into conflict.

Sigmar Gabriel and Franziska Drohsel, whose views on their party differ considerably, have laid out theoretico-political analyses and outlines for the future which, in a contemporary perspective, can be read as blueprints for a »post Agenda 2010 SPD.« Having said that, it is striking that both books were written in 2008, well before the election debacle. Neither, therefore, was solely intended to be a contribution to the party's renewal debate, but instead they represent fundamental pronouncements on the basic values and programmatic foundations of social democratic politics. The two books also share an interest in the normative-ideological grounds of political action, in contrast to the apolitical »there-is-no-alternative« discourse of the 2000s. The authors frame their reflections in terms of classic political topography: they raise the question of what »left-wing« means and what a contemporary »left-wing« politics ought to look like.

The book edited by *Franziska Drohsel* – »Was ist heute Links?« – constitutes a debate-oriented contribution to the issues. The volume consists of 63 theses agreed on by the Young Socialists (»Jusos«) – of which Drohsel was national chair until mid-2010 – in autumn 2008. Also included are articles by leading figures in the SPD, »Juso« veterans, academics, and representatives of civil society, all of whom take up the question of a modern left and the 63 theses.

The Young Socialists' theses are in the tradition of neo-Marxist theory and take their point of departure from an analysis of the basic categories of the capitalist economic and social order. They then turn their attention to the actors and also strategies involved in current political conflicts, as well as examining the current forms of capitalism in detail. Finally, they take a closer look at individual policy areas, such as feminism, anti-fascism, internationalism, and environmentalism.

Capitalism is the key concept, which the Young Socialists describe in the tradition of Critical Theory as a »totality« – »the dominant structural principle of society« (Drohsel 2009: 28), whose logic pervades every area of life. Despite its changing forms, capitalism is always inherently crisis-ridden, is driven by a compulsive logic of exploitation, and must therefore be surmounted in order to make possible a »free and equal life for all« (p. 20). The market principle automatically leads to inequality. Capitalism produces winners and losers »not for want of proper organization but as a consequence of its inherent laws« (p. 58). As the dominant trends of the historical forms capitalism has assumed the theses cite globalization and the disconnection of the financial markets from the real economy, as well as precarious employment and social divisions (cf. pp. 46–65). The Young Socialists regard the state as, on the one hand, a useful tool for progressive politics, by means of which changes can be secured (cf. p. 57), but on the other

hand as structural guarantor of the conditions of capitalist exploitation. What they are calling for, then, is not merely that the »good« state restrain the »bad« market, but rather changes of emphasis brought about by political means within a capitalist state and economic system.

The Young Socialists' theses judge SPD governments harshly. Not only because of their the political (co-)responsibility for the developments mentioned above, but also because of the depletion of democratic culture in the party as a result of a certain authoritarianism and segregation. Nevertheless, the Young Socialists are clear that progressive politics is simply not possible without the SPD and therefore that what is needed is to struggle »in and for the SPD« (p. 36). In Drohsel's book the success of SPD policies is measured not in terms of the party's approval ratings, but rather its ability to translate left-wing policies – whether alone or in partnership – and thereby to move closer towards the above-mentioned free and just society. The SPD is conceived of as an instrument for changing society, not as an end in itself.

The Young Socialists' theses oscillate between a rigorous anti-capitalism in principle and a reformist line in detail, even though the reform program remains fragmentary. The contradictions between radical rejection and incremental reform are as frankly admitted in Drohsel's book, as they are harshly criticized in the part presenting the debate. »Being left-wing« also has an individual component for Drohsel and the Young Socialists, however, namely putting up with life's contradictions while struggling for progress in the here and now (cf. pp. 90–92). The book devotes a fair amount of room to this aspect of self-assertion.

In contrast, *Sigmar Gabriel* spells out his »being left-wing« not as a position of marginalization but, on the contrary, as *a politics for the majority*. Gabriel's book which, in contrast to Drohsel's volume is a monograph, has its origins well before his election as party leader and is very much a controversial work, not an attempt to reconcile every position in the party. In his 370-page book »Links neu denken« the former German Minister of the Environment develops a policy outline for a »social democratic creative left« (Gabriel 2008: 12) to distinguish himself and his party from his political rivals.

Gabriel understands left-wing politics to mean »guaranteeing social inclusion and incentives to economic progress for the great majority« (p. 22). He derives his concept of the »left« from the principle of emancipation. In the opening passages of his book he uses this idea against a politically eviscerated fetish of the »center« in political communication, which he considers inherently conservative. Gabriel explains convincingly how talk of practical constraints and the lack of any alternative is a repudiation of democratic politics and an abrogation of responsibility. From this he derives his demand for a renewal of democracy in which the primacy of politics is restored. But he also discusses internal party reforms, such as opening up the SPD to people who have already distinguished themselves in other spheres, in order to make democratic participation attractive again.

The greatest contemporary challenges to the putative capacities of democratic politics, according to Gabriel, are financial capitalism, environmental disruption and climate change, post-democratic tendencies, and social cleavages, as well as the dissolution of political boundaries and the disturbance of societal equilibria. The detailed explanations satisfy the author's claim to »say how things are« (p. 66), but they neglect to say why. Gabriel largely leaves out of account the SPD's contribution to many of the developments he describes and deplors. The book contains virtually none of the analyses of the party's mistakes or the self-criticism of Gabriel's later public statements.

Based on his analysis of the situation Gabriel wishes »to continue with the left-wing project« (p. 139). Against a conservative environmentalism which is skeptical about technology he opposes the idea of sustainable progress, which marries Bloch's principle of hope with Jonas's principle of responsibility (cf. p. 143). From the idea of progress understood in this way he develops a political blueprint, the majority-oriented »politics of balance« (p. 109). An environmental industrial policy which promotes growth and employment has a key role in this, as does the promotion of innovation and the frequently invoked enabling welfare state. The education policy side of former teacher Gabriel is evident from his focus on a culture of learning and early childhood education, but the explosive debate on the school system is largely neglected. By and large, these passages illustrate Gabriel's political strengths, containing a polished presentation of a logical and ethically well-grounded reform program, marred from time to time by a ministerial predilection for detail.

In strategic terms, Gabriel puts his faith in social democracy finding its place as a »creative left« which pursues balanced policies for the majority of the population. He sets himself apart from the »bisected liberalism« of the FDP, the fickle Christian Democrats, and narrow-minded environmentalists among the Greens (pp. 336 f) and takes a strong stance against the »protest left« (pp. 354 f) and old-left »to-ing and fro-ing« (pp. 124 f). In the process, he construes his political opponents, in particular to the left of the party spectrum, rather simplistically, as typical dogmatists in thrall to their respective ideologies. This reduces the political competition to cardboard-cutouts who can easily be knocked over. Any search for common ground is rarely to be found.

»Left« does not always have to mean the same thing: this insight is confirmed by reading these two books. On a number of fundamental questions the authors are worlds apart. This is particularly evident in respect of the crucial question for the left: where do you stand on capitalism? Sigmar Gabriel evinces a generally optimistic conception of capitalism which rests on observations of the variety of capitalist phenomena. Gabriel conceives of capitalism as malleable and economically productive, and basically trusts it to be able to deliver balanced development within the right political framework. Furthermore, Gabriel considers markets to be fundamentally adequate instruments of allocation which, through the appro-

appropriate regulation and internalization of external effects, curb power and enable efficient resource distribution. Although he wishes to roll back the market in some areas, in others – for example, climate change – he wishes to expand market mechanisms. For the Young Socialists, in contrast, the capitalist system per se is crisis-prone and its fundamental workings are not readily susceptible to reform. They consider the market principle to be the actualization of capitalism's competitive logic, which systematically produces social inequality and exclusion. The question of whether a left-wing politics can succeed with or against the market may therefore be answered in a number of different ways.

Beyond the differences, the two books share a number of ideas about what it means to be »left-wing.« The analysis of the current situation is similar in the two books, as are some of the proposed instruments and detailed reforms. The differences in respect of the assessment of the SPD are significant, however. While Gabriel barely mentions any of the SPD's mistakes, and tends to attribute unfavorable developments to market fluctuations, the Young Socialists touch on a sore point by pointing out the fact that the intensification of precarity and social polarization coincided with social democratic participation in government. In terms of strategic issues »left-wing« means different things to different people. While the Young Socialists understand themselves to be part of a societal left, who work within the framework of a left-wing project both individually and in groups, for Sigmar Gabriel »left-wing« is exclusively reserved for social democracy. But a politics of the majority will also need partners.

Anyone hoping to distill a magic potion or elixir of life to fill up the water bottles of those engaged in everyday political conflict will be disappointed – the prescriptions are too much at variance. Anyone seeking stimulus for a debate and incentives to think more deeply will have much to gain from these books. Because they confirm at least one thing: the left's distinctive culture of reflection and debate. The open and rational discussion of what it means to be »left-wing« is part and parcel of »being left-wing.«

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**A. FISCHER-LESCANO / F. ROEDL / C. U. SCHMID (eds.):**

**Europäische Gesellschaftsverfassung. Zur Konstitutionalisierung sozialer Demokratie in Europa**

Baden-Baden 2009

Nomos, 408 p.

**F**or years Europe's »social imbalance« has been subject to criticism, which the current Constitutional process has done nothing to rectify. European social democracy has developed an ambivalent attitude to this reproach: on the one hand, it calls for the creation of a »Social Europe«; on the other hand, it frankly presents the existing order of the EU as, in principle, open to social composition and locates the »social imbalance« rather in the dominance of neoliberal parties and in the neoliberal orientation of the European Court of Justice.

Against this background, the book produced by the Zentrum für Europäische Rechtspolitik (ZERP) in Bremen, »Europäische Gesellschaftsverfassung« (A European Societal Constitution), could represent an important contribution to further analysis and theoretical discussion. The guiding theme of the 20 contributions collected in the book is clearly discernible from the subtitle: no less than the possibility of a »constitutionalization of social democracy in Europe« is to be examined. In the foreword the editors refer to another important point: modern constitutions tend to be »societal constitutions,« their inherent goal being to permeate the entire social sphere.

Around half of the contributions collected in the book are devoted to the areas of private, labor, and economic law. In this connection, the editors expressly invoke the social democratic debate on constitutional theory during the Weimar Republic and the early Federal Republic, a theoretical line to which several of the authors refer in another section under the heading »Prospects of a Social Democratization of Europe.« A concluding section is dedicated – setting out from the thesis that a »return to the nation-state« is impossible – to the possibilities of a »conceptualization of a transnational societal constitution.«

The EU's imbalance with regard to a labor and social constitution has often been discussed. The contributions brought together in this volume attempt to understand this in individual thematic areas, but above all seek the reasons for this development. As far as general private law is concerned, it is a body of law which hitherto has rarely been the focus of critical consideration. The authors consciously distance themselves from »jurisprudence's illusion of neutrality,« as Brigitta Lurger writes in her contribution.

Considerable space is also given over to discussion of the European welfare state and the labor constitution. For example, Florian Rödl, in a very readable contribution, comes to the sobering conclusion that the discussion of a »Social Europe« has finally proved to be an »interminable blind-alley,« while the model of a European Social Union has been talked into being in defiance of the facts.

Christoph U. Schmid, in his contribution, addresses the »judicial expansionism« of the European Court of Justice (ECJ) in recent years. Schmidt examines in detail the ECJ's argumentation which, according to his analysis, can by no means be characterized simply as the dogmatic prioritization of the basic freedoms over European basic rights. The calm dissection of juristic argumentation and its testing against its practical effects here is also an attraction of other contributions in the book.

Under the rubric of »social democracy« a number of contributions explicitly take up the social democratic constitutional theory of the Weimar Republic – associated above all with Hermann Heller and Wolfgang Abendroth – and of the early Federal Republic. In these terms, according to Hans-Jürgen Bieling's interpretation, forms of democratic intercourse remain fragile in two respects in a society characterized by antagonistic interests: on the one hand, sharp lines of conflict and division could impair political stability, and on the other hand, the processes of democratic representation are in many ways not utilized adequately and thereby come to nothing. Therefore, the formal rule of law should be supplemented by institutions of labor law, economic democracy, and the welfare state.

»Social democracy« is therefore not to be understood in a party-political sense here, but the discussion is nevertheless fascinating. The »social imbalance« of European unification has often been addressed. Criticisms have mainly been formulated as political demands and do not tend to find their way into social science or jurisprudential theory. On the contrary, European jurisprudential debate has been characterized for many years by an almost total lack of consideration of the social conditions and consequences of juristic norms and decisions.

Taking up the social conditions pertaining to juristic decisions could also prove to be a possible path for a self-conscious social democratic (in the party-political sense) European legal policy: in that case, legal policy would have to be understood as policy aimed at shaping society as a whole and ultimately as enabling and extending democracy – as does, for example, Oliver Eberl with his plea to regard democracy and the welfare state as inseparable for the development of social democracy.

With its attempts at a »conceptualization of a transnational social constitution« the volume is expanded to take in another fundamental jurisprudential perspective. In their contribution, Andreas Fischer-Lescano and Kolja Möller start from the assumption that difference and not unity is the key characteristic of modern societies. Within the framework of a »constitutional pluralism« it comes to a decision between »technocratic« and »societal collision management.« Legal collisions, in the sense of »societal collision management,« should be left to societal negotiation processes and not be decided »technocratically« by judicial process through the construction of hierarchies of norms.

In particular, the connection established with the line of debate after Abendroth and Heller is fascinating. It should be linked to the debates on

constitutional pluralism. The establishment of societal unity was a complex problem for Heller and Abendroth. As the contributions collected in the volume show, the level of complexity has increased with Europeanization and internationalization. The approaches put forward in the book offer intelligent food for thought concerning why the simple – hasty – conclusion »back to the nation-state« cannot be drawn, but also how the reality of a society legally integrated at various levels can be captured theoretically and above all how it can be opened up for measures which shape it in a social direction. All in all, therefore, this collective volume represents critical scholarship at its best.

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**J. CALLAGHAN / N. FISHMAN / B. JACKSON / M. MCIVOR (eds.):  
In Search of Social Democracy. Responses to Crisis and Modernisation**

Manchester and New York 2009  
Manchester University Press, 304 pp.

**P. DIAMOND / R. LIDDLE (eds.):  
Beyond New Labour. The Future of Social Democracy in Britain**

London 2009  
Politico's, 288 pp.

**M**uch has been written recently about the dire state of social democracy, its intellectual emptiness, and the need for programmatic and organizational renewal. After all, in 2010, only five out of 27 member states of the European Union are ruled by social democrats. Britain, France, Germany, and many other states are governed by center-right and liberal parties, with the social democrats trying hard to re-build their credentials in opposition. It seems to be the perfect moment to re-define social democracy and adapt it to a fast-changing global context.

Two edited volumes, both published in 2009, approach the topic from different, yet often complementary angles. »In Search of Social Democracy,« edited by John Callaghan, Nina Fishman, Ben Jackson, and Martin McIvor, is a collection of academic essays. It presents a critical, yet optimistic and forward-looking alternative to the apocalyptic writings of the moment. The strength of this book lies in its comparative and multidisciplinary approach to social democracy. Divided into three parts, the book strikes the (difficult) balance between the past, present, and future of social democracy and manages to successfully link classic socialist and republican thought with the challenges of modern policy-making in various countries across Europe and abroad.

»Beyond New Labour. The Future of Social Democracy in Britain,« as the title promises, takes stock of New Labour's legacy and outlines future challenges, but also looks beyond the rim of the teacup. It is more policy-oriented, which is hardly surprising, considering that both editors, Patrick Diamond and Roger Liddle were advisers to the Labour government and currently work for the center-left think tank Policy Network in London. »Beyond New Labour« is critical of New Labour's achievements in office, and calls for »new thinking.« However, Diamond and Liddle state that »the problems« social democracy needs to address have changed in nature – perhaps profoundly, but there is no need to question either fundamental goals or the basic means. The renewal of New Labour is yet to take place and, according to the editors, there are four major intellectual challenges that a period of renewal needs to address and develop: a sufficiently sophisticated critique of the market; a more coherent response to the rise of individualism in our societies; greater clarity with regard to Labour's approach to equality; and a redefinition of the role of the state.

Both books remind the reader that questions of equality, redistribution, freedom, and democracy are at the very heart of the social democratic project. Both stress the need for a re-definition of equality – or social justice, as Patrick Diamond labels it. Looking for an alternative to New Labour's Third Way approach, Kevin Hickson (»In Search of Social Democracy,« Chapter 11) recommends the work of British socialist politician and theorist Anthony Crosland (»The Future of Socialism,« 1956). In particular, Crosland's concept of equality, which entails more than just equality of opportunity, but also equality of outcome (income and wealth) is still central to the social democratic project in Britain, Hickson argues convincingly. Patrick Diamond, in the volume edited by himself and Roger Liddle (Chapter 8), agrees that New Labour needs to radically re-define the notion of equality. However, he argues that Crosland's approach to equality »is based on an ideological world-view and a set of assumptions that are likely to be inadequate for the future,« without referring to the original text. Diamond then outlines a basis for a »new political and policy strategy,« focusing on the importance of education for citizens of all age groups, extended asset ownership, a fairer tax and benefits system which would assist individuals in dealing with new social risks, and changing structures of work and welfare in order to »attack inequalities in access to cultural capital in the family and beyond.«

»Beyond New Labour« gives a critical account of social reality in Britain and rightly challenges common phrases such as »Broken Britain.« In particular, Mary Daly's critique of New Labour's family policy is thought-provoking (Chapter 7). Daly argues that, despite considerable achievements, the Labour government's family policy appears rather narrow. It was driven mainly by socio-economic motives, while questions such as gender equality and the protection of the family as a valued social institution were neglected. Moreover, she demonstrates that New Labour's reform process had strong moral and normative undertones, focusing

on the »problem family« rather than all families. Here, a comparison with other European countries could be insightful, for example Germany, where child poverty is prevalent.

Some of the most horizon-broadening essays from »In Search of Social Democracy« are arguably the ones taking a comparative perspective. For example, Ashley Lavelle (Chapter 1) and Norman Flynn (Chapter 2) compare social democratic policies in different western European member states and Australia since the 1970s. However, the authors' conclusions are quite different. Lavelle argues that, without a return to the economic growth levels of the 1950s and 1960s, social democratic parties will not be able to implement redistributive policies again and that, consequently, the »neo-liberalisation of social democracy is here to stay.« Norman Flynn presents a more optimistic picture. Comparing fiscal policies, social spending, and economic performance in France, Germany, and the UK since 1970, Flynn discovers more similarities than differences between the three countries. He comes to the conclusion that, despite high unemployment and fiscal deficits, the welfare state will not experience crisis as long as the economies remain competitive and the EU provides protection for European businesses against completely free competition from low-wage economies.

Against the background of deepening European integration it is indispensable to look at social democracy from a European angle. This is what Gerassimos Moschonas (»In Search of Social Democracy,« Chapter 9) does when he asks why social democratic parties do not follow a more radical, left-wing »Social Europe«-agenda at EU level. Moschonas takes an institutionalist approach and states that the »multiplicity of power centers of European governance« makes it difficult for national political parties to make an impact. He argues that the EU poses a »role« problem for social democratic parties in particular. The reason is that the control of the market and capitalism entails a »strong central authority« and a strong political force capable of pursuing policies that are different from the market's. In such a polycentric system, the argument goes, ideological and programmatic renewal is not encouraged. Moreover, and in my opinion more importantly, social democratic parties across the EU are quite heterogeneous in their programs and do not coordinate their activities sufficiently. While Moschonas raises very important issues which clearly deserve academic attention, the picture he paints is gloomy to the point of fatalism. Couldn't it be that their status as opposition parties allows social democratic parties across the EU27 a more constructive, open dialogue, more room to maneuver?

Both are well-written and thought-provoking books for social democrats in need of renewal. The two edited volumes complement each other quite well. One provides a more theoretically-informed historical perspective, while the other offers practical guidance for future policy-makers in Britain, and also abroad. Both books are forward-looking. In her afterward to »In Search of Social Democracy,« Nina Fishman critiques the narrow horizons of western European social

democratic politicians. However, she leaves the reader with a positive outlook on social democracy's future, stating that, as long as they remain »self-confident and vital,« social democratic parties will be able to influence non-market solutions, as has happened in the past.

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