

# EUROPE AND THE “RE-REGULATION OF WORLD SOCIETY”: A CRITIQUE OF HABERMAS

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The idea that a reformed and progressive European Union could take the lead in the “re-regulation of world society” is raised by Jürgen Habermas in the conclusion to an essay on “The Postnational Constellation”, written in the late 1990s (Habermas, 2001: 111). This vision of the European Union as a progressive alternative to rampant neo-liberalism is shared in various forms by other left-leaning social and political theorists such as Ulrich Beck (2006), Roberto Unger (2005) and Hauke Brunkhorst (2005). It reflects a shift in the locus of power from the nation-state to largely unaccountable global processes, seeing the EU as a vehicle for redressing this democratic deficit. Left eurosceptics would be quick to point out the EU’s own democratic deficit and the technocratic nature of its administration, but few would now argue that withdrawal is a feasible option. In which case, how should the Left respond to the evolution of the European Union in the light of its recent spectacular failings, first in being unable to speak with one voice against the invasion of Iraq, and second, in being forced to abort the projected Constitution following its democratic rejection in France and the Netherlands? In what follows I want to contribute to the debate about the Left in Europe by

critically examining Habermas's normative vision. First, however, it is necessary to review the development of euro-socialist positions in recent years, suggesting a shift from envisaging the EU as a vehicle for strategies no longer feasible at the level of the nation state to an EU with the potential to develop as a 'social' alternative to global neo-liberalism. Habermas's views on the possibility of a progressive European identity are then examined, as they clarify the options available to the Left and pose some of the big questions which need to be answered before we can push on to what Unger has termed "the reinvention of social democracy" (Unger, 2005; 83-97). Finally, and in opposition to Habermas, I will argue that a European public sphere will not develop as an extension or expansion of civic solidarity allegedly found in nation states, but as something new and unique which transcends the destructive limitations of nationalist and statist world views.

### **The Old Alternatives**

From its inception socialism always expressed its ultimate goals in internationalist terms, and, indeed, in most European countries the first great International (1864-1872) preceded the emergence of state-centred political parties everywhere except Germany and Austria (Braunthal, 1967: 116-117). However, the exigencies of operating within the various national arenas led to the development of a predominantly national focus, and participation in constitutional politics entailed a tacit acceptance of the primacy of nationalist sentiment assiduously promoted by the ruling classes in the process of establishing their hegemony. The support given to the national governments by the socialist parties at the outbreak of the First World War in 1914 struck a mortal blow to The Second International. It is worth recalling the lament of the historian of the International, Julius Braunthal:

It had been conceived as a brotherhood, uniting the workers of all countries in a spirit of solidarity for the joint struggle against the ruling classes. Now the Socialist parties of the belligerent countries were

making common cause with their own ruling classes, which bore the sole responsibility for the war, against peoples of other lands who had had war forced upon them. The bond of brotherhood between nations had been broken and the spirit of international solidarity of the working classes superseded by a spirit of national solidarity between the proletariat and the ruling classes (Braunthal, 1967: 355)

The long-term results were also disastrous, for it precipitated the sundering of the socialist movement across the world. On the one hand emerged a communism which disavowed democracy and built its internationalism on the theoretical nonsense of 'socialism in one country,' and on the other a moderate social democracy with very weak international linkages which pursued its various forms of social-democracy in one-country. Examples of the latter could be seen in the Labour Party programme of 1973, the Wage Earner Funds policy of the Swedish Social-Democrats, and the swiftly aborted 1981 attempt to 'break with capitalism' by the French Socialist government. Whatever the internal reasons behind the collapse of these radical endeavours, it became clear that the constraints imposed by the need to maintain competitiveness in an increasingly open world economy rendered conventional 'left-Keynesian' strategies obsolete.

The Finance Minister of that French Government was Jacques Delors, and his response was to attempt to reignite the social-democratic endeavour at the level of the European Union (or EEC as it was then). Delors became President of the European Commission in 1985 and initiated the idea of the single European market, which was vital to the interests of European capital. He wanted to match economic integration with political integration and the Maastricht Treaty of 1992 was seen by friend and foe alike as a step towards a federal Europe. Delors gave a vision of a Social Europe sufficiently convincing to convert many left eurosceptics, evidenced by the enthusiastic reception of his speech to the British TUC in 1988. The general idea was that what was no longer available at the level of the medium-size nation state could become a reality at the level of the EU. In order to achieve this in the medium-term Delors had to demonstrate the ability of the EU to intervene

directly in economic recovery, and in so doing to take on the mantle of an interventionist state. This was embodied in the Delors White Paper of 1993, "Growth, Competitiveness, Employment", in which substantial investment in three areas - Transport and Energy, Information Highways, and the Environment - was to be paid for largely by loans and bonds (*The Economist*, December 11-17, 1993: 27-28). The target was 15 million new jobs by 2000, announced at a time when there were alarming predictions that unemployment would exceed 20 per cent in countries like Spain and Ireland by the millennium. But the most important principle was the creation of an EU public borrowing facility hitherto available only to nation states, opening the way for a new level of Keynesian interventionism. In this way there would be an interventionist counter to the de-regulatory logic of the single market.

Delors' regeneration strategy was moderate in both scale and scope, but in principle it opened the way for more radical interventions of the sort that had failed in social-democratic led states. The Left saw the possibility that this process could be extended into a Social Europe presenting an alternative development model for the world economy (Wilde, 1993: 179-186). Essentially it was hoped that the 'left Keynesian' approach, no longer feasible at national level, could be reproduced at the internationally more powerful level of the EU. This retained a fundamental similarity with conventional 'statist' forms of socialism in that it aimed at winning state power - with the EU as a new state form - in order to implement an interventionist grand plan. The complexity of decision-making processes in the EU meant that support for a Social Europe would have to be forthcoming from a majority of state governments and a majority in the European Parliament, but since the departure of Delors in 1995 there has been an absence of political will to push forward with such an agenda. The possibility that the EU could operate a *de facto* Public Sector Borrowing Requirement was effectively ended at the European Council in December 1994, Delors' final meeting as President.<sup>1</sup> Since then there has been no wavering from the original principle of the EU of the Balanced Budget Rule, and there is no immediate prospect of such a change.<sup>2</sup> The imperatives of achieving

monetary union and expanding the EU to include the central and eastern European states has thwarted the federalist and interventionist ambitions of the eurosocialists. In all members states, direct involvement of the state in the running of the economy has diminished and the private sector has infiltrated the realm of the old decommodified public services. Nevertheless, the EU retains a far greater commitment to social welfare than the US, and political economists have identified the material basis for the development of a European 'social' alternative to US-led global neo-liberalism (Pontusson, 2005; Alesina and Glaeser, 2005). Theorists have now begun to re-think the possibility that the EU could become the vehicle for a re-awakening of social democracy, not through direct state intervention in economic development but through insistence on minimum standards of provision in order to eradicate poverty and social exclusion and to ensure environmental sustainability. The next section will focus on the contribution to the debate over the last decade from Jürgen Habermas, perhaps the most prominent advocate of a solidaristic EU capable of leading a re-regulatory governance of the world as a whole.

### **Habermas and Postnational Solidarity**

Habermas recognises that the EU is dominated by a bureaucratic mode of administration. Insofar as functionalist and path-dependency arguments explain the success of the EU as a rational way of managing economic life in the region, they also show how 'elite intergovernmentalism' is perpetuated at the cost of neglecting to develop the active support for the ideal of European unity, or, in Habermas's words, the need for the 'normative integration of citizens' (Habermas, 2006b: 68). The recent debacle over the European Constitution is a good example of this, with virtually no attempt made to popularise the project or mobilise support for it, and, for that matter, scant attention paid to the social guarantees that might have made it attractive to ordinary citizens (O'Neill, 2007). Habermas wants the EU to play the role of a

re-regulatory alternative to neo-liberalism, but he does not think this possible until a European public sphere, with a collective identity, is created. He framed this problem for the first time in a 1990 appendix to *Between Facts and Norms* (Habermas, 1996: 506-7) and developed the discussion in *The Postnational Constellation* (Habermas, 2001: 58-112). More recently he has made further observations in two collections of essays, *Time of Transitions* (2006a) and *The Divided West* (2006b).

Habermas describes four positions on Europe – the Eurosceptic, the Market European, the Federalist and the Cosmopolitan. The Eurosceptic approach seeks to regain national autonomy against the grain of economic globalisation, while the Market Europeans want the benefits of the single market without a central political body to regulate it. The Federalists want a stronger European state with far greater harmonisation of policy, and the cosmopolitans want to use that example of postnational state-building to prefigure similar cooperative institution-building at a global level (Habermas, 2001: 89). Excited by the prospect of cosmopolitanism, Habermas recognises that it will be a stalled project until such time as the goal of a federation is realised. He sets two preconditions for the emergence of a federal Europe capable of contributing to the creation of a more democratic and egalitarian world order. First, that the EU would be able to compensate for the lost competencies of the nation state, and second, that within it there could develop a collective identity strong enough to legitimate a postnational democracy (Habermas, 2001: 90).

On the question of competencies Habermas appears confident that the EU could overcome the institutional barriers to a viable federation, although he emphasises that a second chamber of a Euro federation representing the governments of nation states would have to be stronger than the directly elected parliament (Habermas, 2001: 99). The strength of the state tradition in Europe is such that they would have to 'retain a substantially stronger status than would normally be enjoyed by the constituent parts of a federal state' (Habermas, 2006a: 109). However, he recognises that, despite the developing powers of the European Court of Justice and the European Central

Bank, for the most parts states have retained their competences (Habermas, 2006a: 97). In Weberian terms, The EU does not have a monopoly on the legitimate use of force, but it does assert the primacy of EU law over the law of its member states (Habermas, 2006b: 137). At various points in his recent writings Habermas talks in favourable terms of the prospects of the EU being able to levy taxes (2006a: 101), of harmonising tax policy and social policy (2006b: 55), of being represented by a foreign minister, (Habermas, 2006b: 51), and even by a Finance Minister (2006a: 96). For the present, Habermas considers the EU to be a 'lamentable condition', propelled by bureaucratic decision-making processes and suffering from a serious democratic deficit (Habermas, 2006a: 76-78 and 2006b: 82). In terms of the four 'positions' on Europe outlined above, he characterises the situation as a tacit coalition between Market Europeans and erstwhile Eurosceptics, the latter being prepared to accept the *fait accompli* of the single market and the euro rather than embrace federalism (Habermas, 2006a: 85). This applies equally to Left Eurosceptics.

The failure of the constitutional project reflects a failure to develop popular support for the European project, and this brings us to the second precondition for a cosmopolitan Europe, a European identity. Habermas considers that such a project requires popular support and a sense of solidarity, so that forms of civic solidarity previously limited to the nation-state would have to be expanded to the European level (Habermas, 2001: 99). He accepts that we cannot, at present, speak of the existence of a European identity, but the real question ought to be whether we can realistically conceive of the conditions whereby citizens are able to extend their civic solidarity beyond national borders 'with the goal of achieving mutual inclusion' (2006b: 76). At this point we should note Habermas's use of the words 'expansion' and extension' (Habermas, 2001: 99; 2006b: 77 and 78), because he clearly wants to delineate a trajectory from a solidarity-building civic consciousness at the national level to some sort of equivalent at the European level. In order to do this he makes a conceptual distinction between national consciousness and civic solidarity.

National consciousness develops when the idea of the nation becomes the principal source of collective identity, but civic solidarity develops only in a democracy in which people recognise themselves as free and equal citizens. The former involves a fixation on the state and its superiority over others, while the latter emphasises the liberal order within the state that enables a structure of 'solidarity among strangers' and thereby opens the way to a transnational extension of solidarity. Civic solidarity's focus on our liberties and democratic processes displays a universalistic content beyond national boundaries, and this gradual 'uncoupling' of the constitution from the state is what Habermas terms 'constitutional patriotism' (Habermas, 2006b: 78-79). Like all liberal nationalists, Habermas needs to make a clear distinction between good and bad nationalism. He acknowledges the 'Janus face' of nationalism, but insists that it reflects not simply blind fealty to the state but also awareness of the value of political rights and civil liberties (Habermas, 2001: 101-102). I find this argument problematic and will return to it below, but for now let us look at the distinction he makes between civic solidarity and global solidarity (Habermas, 2001: 110; 2006b: 80)

When considering the possibility of cosmopolitan solidarity, Habermas concludes that that the idea 'has to support itself on the moral universalism of human rights alone', rather than being rooted in particular collective identities (Habermas, 2001: 108). Moral outrage over violations of human rights provides a sufficient basis for solidarity among activists engaged in global politics, but this is a 'weakly integrated' cosmopolitan society. What is lacking at the global level, according to Habermas, is a 'common ethical-political dimension' to sustain a collective identity. Within nation-states, he argues, there is a common political culture in which the various actors engaged in negotiations operate within 'common value orientations and shared conceptions of justice' which enable agreements to be made beyond the limits of instrumental rationality. In other words citizens can agree to make some sacrifice of their narrowly-defined self-interest in order to strengthen society, as, for example, when assenting to economic redistribution through



progressive taxation. However, at the international level this 'thick communicative embeddedness' is missing (Habermas, 2001: 108-109).

The question then is raised as to whether the European Union can offer some sort of mediation between the state level and global level by developing a transnational extension of civic solidarity (Habermas, 2006b: 67). Solidarity within the EU would require something more than the strong negative duties displayed by global activists. It would require a widespread sense of belonging if Europe were to speak with one voice in foreign affairs and execute an active domestic policy (Habermas, 2006b: 80). However, whereas this sense of belonging at national level drew on notions of a shared national history and therefore appeared to be somehow 'natural', at the European level such an allegiance would have to rely on an *explicitly* constructed collective identity. Habermas considers the shared experiences that may be mobilised to foster such an identity. His outline of these building blocks for European identity appears in an essay entitled "February 15 or: What Binds Europeans", which refers to the massive demonstrations against the impending invasion of Iraq in numerous European cities in 2003. He invokes seven experiences (Habermas, 2006b: 46-48):

1. The secularisation of the state, or the privatisation of faith.
2. Following long periods of class conflict, the emergence of a confidence in the state to compensate for market failures.
3. Growing awareness of the paradoxes of progress, so that we are able to assess with care what might be lost in the process of modernisation and what might be gained.
4. Against the background of both the traditions of the labour movement and Christian social thought, a 'solidary' ethos of struggle for greater social justice.
5. As a result of the destructive history of the twentieth century, sensitivity has emerged for violations of personal and bodily integrity, reflected in the fact that the death penalty is outlawed in Europe.
6. In view of the history of wars between European states, a commitment to reciprocal restriction of the scope of sovereignty.

7. In view of the loss of empire, the experience of decline can lead to Europeans achieving 'a reflexive distance towards themselves,' learning to see themselves from the perspective of the defeated.

If this is to be something more than a wish list from a strong supporter of a federal social Europe, some consideration of the extent to which these collective experiences are really 'in development' is required.

Let us first consider these experiences in as positive a light as possible. The achievement of the secularisation of the public sphere is something that is shared and valued highly by citizens of states in which religion had previously played an intrusive role, such as Ireland, Italy and Spain. It also implies rejecting calls to invoke the specifically Christian heritage of Europe, for only by reminding ourselves of the catastrophic damage of past religious wars and pogroms can we hope to achieve cultural reconciliation and embrace the future membership of Turkey. It requires a decisive 'no' to the pleas of Giscard D'Estaing, Chair of the Constitutional Review, to exclude Turkey on 'cultural' grounds (Evans-Pritchard, 2002), or to Pope Benedict XVI's call to give primacy to Christianity in the consolidation of European identity (Traynor, 2007b). However, this is not the same as lending support to the sort of militant anti-religious sentiments expressed by Dawkins in *The God Delusion* (Dawkins, 2006), since that would also cut the ground from attempts to develop social solidarity. Habermas rightly comments, in a dialogue with Cardinal Ratzinger (now Pope Benedict XVI), that those committed to a secular polity should nevertheless respect the verities raised in religious thought, and recognise the religious roots of much of our normative language (Habermas and Ratzinger, 2006: 51 and 44-45).

The second point appeals to a priority of state over markets, and although this has been particularly strong in the Scandinavian states it is weaker elsewhere. However, even in those states where marketisation has been most advanced (e.g. Britain and Ireland), there persists a strong feeling that the social cost of the pursuit of high growth is intolerable, and, unlike American communitarians (Etzioni, 1998), that the state must play a lead role in ensuring social cohesion. The third point concerning the paradoxes of

progress may appear to be primarily a concern for intellectual elites, but in fact it does reflect a more widespread healthy scepticism to elite pronouncements on issues on which there is alleged to be 'no alternative', such as genetically modified foods, nuclear power, or raised pension ages. 'What are we living for?' is a well-established question in European philosophy. The fourth point, relating to the struggle for social justice, reflects a common European historical experience, often expressed through the language of solidarity with an ethical commitment drawing on both secular and religious traditions (Stjernø, 2004, part two; Baldwin, 1990). Of course the formulation of this as a common experience conveniently overlooks the bitterness of the class struggles that have always been present in capitalist Europe, but it could be argued that the establishment of the principle of the welfare state as a 'peace formula' between warring parties (Offe, 1984: 147ff) is still robust. The fifth experience, a developed sensitivity to brutality, is more difficult to assess, and the horrors that accompanied the disintegration of Yugoslavia give pause for thought. Nevertheless, the contrast with the American experience is clear, not just in terms of capital punishment but also in much lower levels of violent crime and imprisonment in Europe.

The remaining two points appear more pertinent to continental Europe rather than Britain, and indeed Habermas not only concedes 'English' reticence towards the European project but considers that this uneasy relationship should not be 'brushed under the carpet' (2006b: 53). Certainly the disastrous experience of three major wars between France and Germany was the major background factor in the renunciation of the old enmity and the establishment of a new form of institutionalised reciprocity which effectively transcended the Westphalian system of sovereign states which aver to no superior authority. The remarks on Britain reflect Habermas's anger at the British government's support for the invasion of Iraq, for this decision (with the support of the Spanish conservative government) completely undermined the possibility of the EU speaking with an authoritative, restraining voice. Nevertheless, the bloody failure of the misadventure surely means that it will take its place alongside Suez as a

milestone in the self-understanding of the limitations of British state power. Further, it will encourage a critical look at the perils of a servile relationship with the United States and should, by extension, encourage a closer affiliation to Europe.

The final point is about learning the lessons of national decline and the development of a new form of self-understanding which allows for reconciliation. The nations of Europe have had to deal with such issues as the collaboration of swathes of their people with dictatorial regimes or occupying powers. Habermas has dwelt on the German experience of coming to grips with its Nazi past (Habermas, 2006a: 38-50), but in recent years there has been an accumulation of critical histories and documentaries bringing to light shameful episodes from the histories of numerous European states. These experiences should contribute to a popular understanding of history which rejects the puerile adulation of nation and instead promotes a strong human rights culture. The recent call by German Justice Minister Brigitte Zypnes for Holocaust Denial and the display of Nazi symbols to be criminalised throughout Europe is an example of how this new European self-understanding might develop (Traynor, 2007a).

What social forces might impel us towards a politics of re-regulation? Habermas is clear that the impetus for the idea of the re-regulation of world society has been supplied by citizens and citizens' movements rather than governments or political parties (Habermas, 2001: 111). This reflects the dramatic retreat of the Left in Europe in recent years, with a loss of belief in the capability of political parties to challenge the dictates of the market. As Unger puts it, there has been a wholesale surrender to the 'the dictatorship of no alternatives' (Unger, 2007: 1-11). Habermas recognises that at some stage political parties will need to take decisive action to move beyond the mere management of the *status quo*, but this can happen only when global issues become part of the domestic political agendas (Habermas, 2006b: 81-82). In this respect the British case is interesting, for not only were global issues marginal in the political debates of 2005 General Election campaign, but Europe itself was not a major issue because the rival parties saw no

advantage in making it into one. Immediately following the election, however, the news was dominated by global politics issues – the Make Poverty History Campaign and the Gleneagles Agreement, the terrorist attacks on London, and the alarm bells over global warming. It is difficult to imagine another General Election campaign that will not demand a debate on these global issues, but although Habermas is right to see this as a necessary condition for the revival of ideological commitment in party politics, it is not the only condition. In the British case, the absence of proportional representation ensures the petrification of a party system in which the parties stand for nothing other than their own aggrandisement. Only new political formations can break this pattern, and only proportional representation can enable those formations to emerge – this is a central issue in the renewal of political democracy and the renewal of the Left.

Habermas's theoretical focus on communicative action leads him to search for the processes of consensus formation required for a European political civic identity. He recognises that this cannot be controlled from above or produced by administrative decisions (Habermas, 2006b: 82), but he maintains a faith that a European identity will develop as a 'learning process' (Habermas, 2006a: 105). The problem with this pursuit of an ever-elusive consensus is that it deflects attention from the real antagonisms within Europe that exacerbate social divisions. The struggle for re-regulation is a struggle against powerful interests, and popular acceptance of the EU as a progressive political entity will occur only when concrete goals of social justice are fulfilled. Nevertheless, Habermas is right to emphasise that discourse and communication are powerful forces for the development of a new form of collective identity. Although common value orientations are lacking at the international level, the processes of global negotiations produce what he identifies as 'normative framing' (Habermas, 2001: 109-110). The process of normative framing flows from the reality of a global discourse on a range of issues. So, for example, international non-governmental organisations can help to shape the agendas of United Nations summits by bringing key issues to the attention of citizens across the world, and by using institutionally

established forms of lobbying. This in turn helps to produce agreements on concrete targets and action plans to achieve them. In this way apparently weak forms of legitimation 'appear in another light' as this ability of citizens to shape agendas is taken into account. He suggests that the 'opening up' of national agendas might develop into a 'self-propelling process' of shared will-formation on European issues (Habermas, 2006b: 81).

## **Critique**

Habermas raises the possibility that Europe could evolve into a political entity that bridges the gap between the idea of civic solidarity embedded in national communities and the purely moral appeal to cosmopolitan solidarity operating at the global level, but he offers no clear indication of how this might emerge. The chief problem is the persistence of nationalism, as Habermas himself admits when commenting that 'the divisive force of divergent national histories and historical experiences that traverse European territory like geological fault lines remains potent' (Habermas, 2006b: 81). For a European identity to emerge, these allegiances must become 'historical' in the sense that they can no longer be called upon to place an emotional veto on the emergence of a wider solidarity. It seems to me that Habermas is setting an impossible task in seeking to 'expand' civic solidarity to the European sphere, because that form of solidarity is bound up with national consciousness too closely to permit the conceptual distinction that is so important to him.

By his own admission, 'civic solidarity' at the national level is 'relatively thin' (Habermas, 2006b: 55). It is paid for 'in small change', in the sense that citizens pay their taxes but are no longer prepared to die for their country, and he rightly observes that neither the US nor Britain could sustain the war in Iraq if they had to rely on conscription (Habermas, 2006b: 77). But if civic solidarity is so 'thin', then how can Habermas impute a 'thick communicative embeddedness' to the 'common political culture' that is supposed to exist at the level of the nation state? (Habermas, 2001: 109). And if a strong civic

solidarity means willingness to die for one's country, are we not better off without it and ill-advised to want to 'extend' it to the European polity? Habermas's conceptual distinction between national consciousness and civic solidarity simply does not work. Insofar as we can talk of solidarity in civil society it is normally not orientated to the state at all. The 'good citizen' may be socially active through involvement in trades unions, charitable work, community action, or in any number of causes, but this does not involve a conscious rallying around the constitutional achievements of the liberal democratic state. Indeed it is often the most politically astute citizens who are most critical of the democratic deficits of those liberal democratic states, such as unfair voting systems, unelected second chambers, patronage, etc. Respect for democratic processes is necessary for the development of a public sphere, but it is not sufficient to constitute solidarity. There have been, of course, examples of national solidarity, as expressed in wartime, but this is generated by national consciousness, a consciousness which, is, more often than not, supremacist and irrational, and, as Michael Billig has argued, is constantly reiterated in the everyday discourse of 'banal nationalism' (Billig, 1995). A recent example of the hopelessness of allegedly progressive politicians trying to harness national sentiment was provided by Ségolène Royal, the Socialist candidate for the 2007 French Presidential election, when she called on all citizens to display the tricolour on national holidays. Doubtless she would claim to be encouraging civic solidarity, but the fascist Le Pen was surely right to conclude that 'by stealing my ideas, my rivals are in fact validating them' (*The Guardian*, March 27, 2007).

Habermas's claim that we can gradually uncouple the constitution from the state to achieve 'constitutional patriotism' is misguided, and we should not be looking for something positive to be made from patriotism of any sort. If civic solidarity in distinction from national consciousness is an illusion, as I suggest, then support for a European project has to be grounded in something new, not 'extended' or 'expanded' from in any way, shape, or form. In this sense Ulrich Beck has made a valuable contribution to the debate on the potential of the European Union in *Cosmopolitan Vision* (Beck,

2006: 163-177). Here he provides an outline of what he terms a 'cosmopolitan Europe' that celebrates the achievement of the EU in promoting reconciliation between nations and for enabling states to understand that their power is increased by renouncing national sovereignty. He offers four theses in support of this vision. The first of these is that the European Union does not replicate the national illusion of cherishing common descent and culture by marginalising or excluding outsiders (Beck, 2006, 164-166). He extols the value of a 'radical openness' which involves people of all traditions in making the cosmopolitan European project work, and in terms of the boundaries of Europe this means making every endeavour to include Turkey. His second thesis is that cosmopolitan Europe is leaving behind not just the nationalism associated with modernity but also the relativism associated with postmodernism. The old Europe may have been associated with colonialism, jingoism and genocide, but it also generated the evaluative standards with which to judge them and move forward (Beck, 2006: 170). In a real sense the idea of European unity grew out of the resistance to the horrors of the world wars and the nationalism which propelled them (Beck, 2006: 168).

The third thesis decries thinking about Europe in national terms which obstruct the development of a 'Europe of diversity' (Beck, 2006: 171-172). The standard models for the European Union – a federal superstate or an intergovernmental confederation – both preserve the national mentality, requiring either a new European nation or defending the priority of existing nation-states. In practice the evolution of Europe has already surpassed this either/or and replaced it with a both/and in which, claims Beck, 'national legal and political cultures continue to exist and are simultaneously merged into a European legal culture' (Beck, 2006: 172). The key conclusion here is that Europe will never be possible as a project of national homogeneity. Self-determination is still a goal, but a self-determination liberated from 'national solipsism', expressing the liberties of diverse groups and orientations and opening out to the world. His final thesis is that cosmopolitan realism is not a utopia but a reality in which the cooperative fusion of the nation-states has not disempowered them but instead generated a 'political surplus value' which



can serve as an inspiration for the development of cosmopolitanism on a wider scale. The European cosmopolitan project cannot be likened to the United States multicultural model in which a new nation was created to overcome national differences amongst its immigrant population. Rather the new Europe has to embrace deep-rooted identities and ancient enmities in a process of reconciliation in which the principles of national, cultural and religious toleration are institutionally 'anchored, preserved and guaranteed' (Beck, 2006: 176). The pragmatic nature of Beck's intervention emphasises the unfolding nature of a new socio-political identity which grows with the Europeanisation and cosmopolitanisation of everyday life and needs no flags or anthems. Beck concedes that the current state of the European Union merits criticism, but he rightly sees no progress in grounding that criticism in a nationalist standpoint. However, he is not a *political* theorist as such and pays no specific attention to the real problems surrounding the democratic deficit, the constitutional impasse, and the stuttering of the 'social Europe' project. The question remains as to how socialist principles of equality and self-realisation can be advanced in the framework of the EU.

### **Implications for the Left**

The Left in Europe is disparate, and it has always been easier to say what it stands against rather than what it stands for. What it stands against are those forces that have impelled us along the path of economic globalisation since the 1980s, encapsulated in the name of its ideology, neo-liberalism. Globalisation as such cannot be 'sent back', and it would be futile for the Left to envisage a return to national roads to socialism. The task is to create within the EU a mode of governance which insists on a range of social guarantees to its own citizens (and denizens), delivered in a variety of ways, in accordance with the principles of democracy and subsidiarity. This social model can then act on the global stage as an alternative to the depredations of neo-liberalism, moving in the direction of Habermas's vision of the re-

regulation of world society. Neo-liberalism is still the ideology of choice of the world economic and administrative elites, and its message is made into reality throughout the world via the decisions of the triumvirate of the World Trade Organisation, International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank. All barriers to trade are swept away, except for the massive subsidies operated in the richest states, including the EU. The privatisation of basic services is forced upon the Less Developed Countries, exacerbating poverty, disease, and helplessness. The extent to which the EU has been complicit in this triumph of marketisation should not obscure its potential to challenge neo-liberalism. It is already a powerful player on the global stage, but the weakness of Europe as a polity has prevented the emergence of the major questions of global economic governance from reaching the political agenda. Instead, it has taken direct citizen action through the NGOs and the Social Forum movement to address the injustices reproduced by the world market. For the EU to become an alternative voice in global politics there needs to be a reconnection between activists and parties of the Left, focused on priority issues such as poverty and social justice.

Within the framework of the EU we can adopt a dual perspective on these crucial issues of poverty and social justice. From Europe, looking outward, we see the possibility of moving much further than the Gleneagles Agreement of the G8 in 2005, which is already in danger of unravelling, according to former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan (Elliott and Connolly, 2007). What is possible here is to guarantee states the right to maintain social control of services vital to bringing people out of poverty, such as free water, healthcare, and education. The other perspective is when we look inside Europe and see that the same forces of economic globalisation that have beggared the poorest countries in the world have created the problems of increased poverty, criminalisation and urban degeneration within some of the richest countries in the world. These issues can be linked. For example, agricultural subsidies in the EU provide an immense obstacle to the economic development of the poorest countries in the world, for they effectively close off the European market to their food exports. Rapid phasing out of those

subsidies could lead to a reconfiguration of the EU budget to boost structural and cohesion funds to combat the 'new poverty'.

The 'Make Poverty History' campaign was brilliantly successful at mobilising support to address the stain of poverty in the less-developed world, but as a slogan it can also be applied to the states of the EU. In his budget speech in March 2007 Gordon Brown proudly announced tax measures that would lift 200,000 children out of poverty, helping to meet the Labour Government's aim of reducing child poverty by half by 2010 (*The Guardian*, March 22, 2007). Behind that boast is the dreadful admission that after ten years in power of the one of the richest countries in the world a Labour Government is unable to provide for the most basic needs of hundreds of thousands of children. The recent United Nations study for child well-being placed the United Kingdom bottom of a league of 21 countries, with 16.2 per cent of children living below the poverty line (*The Guardian*, February 14, 2007). The United States was ranked second to bottom. The richest and most neo-liberal states treat their children with contempt, and in Britain a government apparently of the Left has been in power for a decade. At the top of the league were four EU states, the Netherlands, Sweden, Denmark and Finland. This is the sort of comparison which the Left must be making within the European Union, highlighting best practice and demanding concrete targets for the elimination of poverty, the provision of high levels of education and healthcare for all, and the promotion of sustainable environmental goals.

If the Left is to use the EU to promote a politics of social justice, it follows that Europe needs to be more than a loose confederation of states tied together for no other reason than to share the economic-growth benefits of a single market. Equally, a 'Social Europe' will not be pulled out of a hat through Habermas's fictions of civic solidarity or constitutional patriotism, which are based on the illusion that there is something in its postnational achievement around which all classes and interests can rally. The welfare gains produced in Europe came as a result of protracted class struggle, and a Social Europe will emerge only when a coalition of movements succeeds in forcing the EU to apply targets of social welfare as rigorously as it applied

economic criteria for entry into the single market. This will meet with stern resistance from the powerful beneficiaries of neo-liberalism within the EU, but Habermas is right to suggest that there is much in Europe's historical experience that progressive forces can draw from. When the question of the European Constitution resurfaces, the Left must not permit the lead to be taken by patricians of the European Right, but should argue energetically for a serious (i.e. accountable) commitment to social justice to be embodied in the new agreement. The most appropriate institutional processes to promote a politics of re-regulation need not be specified in advance, but the important principle to be insisted upon is the democratic involvement of affected citizens at the appropriate level of decision-making and policy-implementation. The renewal of democracy within the states of the EU as well as the democratisation of decision-making in the EU are fundamental prerequisites for the emergence of a Social Europe dedicated to the abolition of poverty within and without its borders.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The official document of the Council thanks Delors' profusely but Annex 3 makes it quite clear that the financing of transnational projects will remain within existing financial regulations.

<sup>2</sup> I am indebted to Rob Ackrill from the Division of Economics in the Business School of Nottingham Trent University for his advice on this point.

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