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The transformations of social democracy

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Abstract

The political, organizational, and ideological deadlock that European social democracy has gone through in recent decades is obvious and much discussed. This impasse is indirectly expressed by the weakness of social democratic parties in maintaining their electoral clientele and social base of workers, employees, and pensioners. This means that the crisis of social democracy is becoming more permanent. This article attempts to analyze these characteristics

Key words: Social Democracy, Crisis , new middle, new center , third way, welfare state, New Labor, PASOK, State, Etatism, 'modernization, neoliberalism, Legitimacy. intervention state, public goods, *Progress*'

1. The logic of division and the new middle”

The political, organizational and ideological impasse that European social democracy has passed in recent decades is evident and much debated. This impasse is indirectly manifested in the inability of social democratic parties to maintain electoral clients and the social base of workers, employees and pensioners (Pfaller, 2009). Against this backdrop, the crisis of social democracy is becoming more and more permanent. The dramatic trend towards restructuring the economy with innovative technologies has reduced industrial production to 10-20% of total output in most countries, with the result that social democracy has lost the workers as the social environment that supported it (Bremer &Renewald,2022;Rásonyi,2016; Pfaller, 2009). Over the past years, Europe's social democratic parties have faced increasing competition from different parts of the political spectrum. Studies show that the traditional social democratic voter base in many countries is particularly vulnerable to the political offerings of radical socialist left parties, green environmental parties as well as radical right-wing populist parties (Krouwel & Kutiyski, 2019). Moreover, libertarian parties of the right-wing political camp are also contributing to an erosion of the social democratic electorate, for example in France, where the party La République En Marche! (LREM) of President Emmanuel Macron was able to win over many former Parti socialiste voters. Or in the Netherlands, where the social liberal Democraten 66 (D 66) won over many former supporters of the Social Democrats there. The Social Democrats traditionally have a strong voter base in the political centre, which is why many of their former voters tend towards centre-right parties (Krouwel & Kutiyski, 2019).

Two important events seem to have further weakened social democratic parties in the last decades (Downes & Chan,2010). The first event was the 2008-13 economic crisis. During the crisis, a number of incumbent centre-left parties were forced to cut public spending, a policy that apparently reinforced the populist radical right and left-wing parties (Downes & Chan,2010). Social democratic parties may be losing ground on the critical issue of welfare policies. The second event is the ongoing refugee crisis, which has arguably led to the systematic demise of a number of European social democratic parties, because of their pro-immigrant policy which has put water in the mill of right-wing populist parties.

This particular landslide path is presumed to be irreversible without the intervention of possible slowing and corrective parameters, such as measures belonging in the great historical legacy of egalitarianism, “*based on welfare and the redistribution of social contributions*” (Barata & Cabrita, 2019) in a line with the attempt “*to achieve goals of equality and fair distribution of wealth*” (Esson, 2022), and the tradition of political stability of many social democratic parties on the Old Continent. But, in contrast to her traditions social democratic parties have responded to the challenges of the time created electoral strategies to reach out to new constituencies. They established organizations and formed cross-class coalitions that were less connected to voters and working-class constituencies, but shifting to the right in terms of policy. The so-called "Third Way" was electorally successful in the short run, but it had a negative electoral impact in the long term. As illustrated by Brenner & Rennewald, in the context of the Great recession brought about by the financial crisis of 2007, the vote share of social democratic parties tumbled, falling within the next ten years, by nearly 10% (Brenner & Rennewald, 2022).

In this context, the most social democratic parties have been increasingly degraded over the last 30 years from institutionally embedded political organizations of absolute power, to political formations of relative electoral reach and entrenched social breadth (Bremer & Rennewald, 2022; Rieger, 2022). This raises the vital question of why this is happening and why voters have begun to swim to other political pools. In answering this question, international opinion formers and the associated market interests are accustomed to lamenting the supposed 'doctrinal immobility' of the socialist parties, interpreting any electoral participation (defeats or victories) as an argument that they are unable to gain a foothold in the so-called middle ground because they are more or less on the left bank of the political scene (Rzepisky/Schwartz: 2007).

A typical example is Bernie Sanders in the USA, who has in fact put forward classic social democratic themes of a social nature but has sometimes been portrayed by many media as a left-wing extremist. The establishment of the Democratic Party, the leaders of labor unions and NGOs, and the establishment of the media in the form of traditional media and commercial television strongly endorsed Hillary Clinton and considering Sanders legitimate, understandable, and enforceable social demands as dangerous (Völkers, 2016).

Another example is Jeremy Corbyn, former leader of the British Labor Party.

He is portrayed as a left-wing fool in some mainstream media because he opposes austerity and promises to stop it and renationalize railroads once he comes to power (Lendman,2015). His election by 60 per cent of Labour Party members as he points out, has brought with it *“the hope of change and bringing big ideas in is now back at the centre of politics: ending austerity, tackling inequality, working for peace and social justice at home and abroad. That’s why the Labour party was founded more than a century ago.....Everybody aspires to an affordable home, a secure job, better living standards, reliable healthcare and a decent pension. My generation took those things for granted and so should future generation.....Our job is to show that the economy and our society can be made to work for everyone. That means ensuring we stand up against injustice wherever we find it and we fight for a fairer and more democratic future that meets the needs of all..... The values of compassion, social justice, solidarity and internationalism have been at the heart of the democratic eruption in Labour’s hugely expanded ranks. Those values are embedded deeply in the culture of the British people. Our aim is now to take that spirit and hunger for change, that has won the support of the Labour party, to reach out to the whole of Britain”* (Corbyn, 2015).

The animosity expressed against Corbyn by the European establishment and the media has little to do with the classical social-democratic message Corbyn expresses regarding his appeal to society. This, by the way, was directly reflected in the enrollment of more than 400,000 s members in the Labor Party when Corbyn became party leader (Botzen, Graw &Kalnoky, 2015).

Surprisingly, what applies to the case of Corbyn and the Labour Party does not apply to the Greek case of Alexis Tsipras and Syriza, since the initial caution and aggressiveness of European political-economic establishment As Stavros Ligeros (2016) notes, 'the praise of the European Parliament for Tsipras is inextricably linked to his willingness to implement his commitments. Therefore, as long as the government remains on the rails of the Memorandum, the European lenders have no intention of pulling the rug out from under it and destabilizing it. They prefer SYRIZA to ND because they consider it more capable of passing painful measures both in Parliament and in society. They send this message to the domestic economic oligarchy at every opportunity.

In other words, the political and economic establishment nowadays expresses aggressive tendencies when the political behavior and political discourse of a political

formation deviates in a credible and clear manner from and does not conform to the institutions of the dominant neoliberal project and at the same time exerts a charming influence on the social and electoral body. On the contrary, the logic of convergence and adaptation to neoliberal austerity is rewarded institutionally and communicatively. In these sense, most scholars see the alleged crisis of social democratic politics as a result of the convergence of two distinct circumstances. One is the triumph of austerity policies as a solution to the recent economic and financial crises, with the well-known consequences of the demise of public services and the welfare model (Palacios, 2022, 2; Bandau,2022). This policy agenda primarily involved reductions in government spending and/or changes in government programs such as limiting the terms of unemployment benefits, raising the retirement and health-care eligibility age, and reducing programs for the poor. The second is the massive abandonment of its core electorate, which has primarily sought refuge in new populist and challenger parties (both left and right) after either moving to the right, fearful of a scenario of increasing social insecurity, or to the left, dissatisfied with social democracy's real capacity to solve people's problems in difficult times.

Sometimes the strategic argument of the international media mentality ends up defending 'modernization' and the opening up of the centre-left to capture the useful vote of the centre, given that support from the left is a priori considered unlikely. In this context, the concept of the centre refers to the belief that real solutions require realism and pragmatism, rather than idealism, radicalism and emotion (Gotlieb, 1987: 154).

For purely functional reasons, the term "new middle" as the electorate's middle ground' was coined in this case as a conceptual tool that denotes an intermediate space supposedly housing moderate citizens with phobic and conservative reflexes but no hard ideological characteristics. A specific social and political definition of such a space is obviously impossible. It is more of an ideological outgrowth based on a false belief that places too much emphasis on an existing trend in electoral behavior that has no temporal characteristics and does not refer to a specific political, social, or economic context (Mouffe, 1998: 11-23). As a result, it has never been an electoral source of ideological and political hegemony. Since then, the concept of the "new middle" has evolved into a three-stage value norm. These three stages can be explained using the three-phase pattern, which is more broadly applicable to the influence of rules and values. The first stage, according to Lavdas (2010), is the

emergence of a new rule (which actually means the reappearance of a transformed/mutated form of a rule or value); the second stage includes the phase of widespread acceptance of the value rule; and the third stage includes its internalization. The first two stages are separated by a critical 'tipping point,' at which a critical mass of relevant actors adopts a particular strategy. This critical point as a watershed moment for social democracy was undoubtedly the victory of Tony Blair's third way in Britain.

Indeed, the partly innovative analyses of the new middle essentially repeat an age-old trope of "opening up" that has been put forward countless times in the history of socialism and has not come without a political and electoral cost. It is no coincidence that examples of alliance governments between center-right, right-wing, and socialist formations, such as in France and Germany, have not shied away from implementing policies of expansionary austerity and repression, opening up the prospect of a long-term strategic victory for the right. Following in the footsteps of German social democracy, which at the 1959 Bad Godesberg congress followed the path of modernization, abandoning its radical origins and fully embracing the philosophy of the market economy, almost all European countries have followed suit.

Almost all European socialist parties have acquired a moderate and liberal character, even if they frequently use radical political aphorisms in their rhetoric (Meyer, 1999). The realization that socialist parties are no longer victims of the conservative revolution, but instruments of it, was once exemplified by the 'grand coalition' in Germany between the CDU (Christian Democrats) and the SPD (Social Democrats), a possibility that may well be repeated if polling trends in the upcoming German elections are confirmed. Even the French Socialists' election platform emphasized "developing an entrepreneurial spirit," "rationalizing the welfare state," and "combating the ideology that punishes profit." Finally, the adoption of the 'middle ground' as a political compass has contributed to the ideological discoloration of social democracy and, ultimately, the loss of the 'apolitical' voters of the so-called 'middle ground,' who now move from party to party with ease. Especially in times of crisis, when people are looking for immediate political and economic relief.

The Greek case of PASOK is a good example because it has been bleeding both to the right and to the left. Of course, this was a result of the Memorandum. However, if the previously powerful party had not previously been governed by the 'middle ground' logic, it would not have so readily adopted the neoliberal fiscal logic

of austerity. Of course, the same argument applies to SYRIZA's 'political adaptability,' which is inspired by the PASOK model from which it draws its electoral base. In one way or another, social democratic parties throughout Europe have, for the first time, ignored the fact that political sovereignty is the result of ideological hegemony. It is thus not enough to win the vote, i.e. the temporary consensus of the electorate, but also to involve citizens in political life.

The 'middle ground' social democracy, on the other hand, has not attempted to establish a coherent relationship between its values and society, but has instead resorted to in-depth communication gimmicks, the products of a managerial and opportunistic logic, with illusions and illusions of political leadership. In the midst of the economic crisis, it is clear that developments have contradicted the middle-ground strategy, bringing the so-called political extremes of the political spectrum to the fore. The shifting of objectives that provided social democracy with a long period of hegemony via the so-called "third way" and "modernization strategy" is no longer widely resonating with the grassroots. On the contrary, it is eliciting quite strong reactions. Reactions that, in many cases, result in large-scale movements of voters and members or to dissolution.

Indeed, after the financial crisis of 2007, that is, after the Great Recession, when there was a significant shift to the economic left, social democracy recognized the importance of distinguishing itself from the collapsing international neoliberal economic model. after having enthusiastically supported it during the Third Way years(Trastulli,2022). Indeed, while social democracy pursued and built pervasive welfare states based on Keynesian prescriptions prior to the 1990s, during the Third Way period it still emphasized the importance of providing welfare, but in a "positive" and "pro-active" manner. It pursued a "overhaul" and "rescue" of the postwar welfare state by reducing deficit spending and expanding educational and labor-force participation opportunities, which would have resulted in economic expansion (Trastulli,2022). As a result, the Third Way promoted a new vision of welfare in contrast to more traditional social democratic stances. In essence, this flagship stance of Third Way social democracy corresponded to an effective recalibration towards more center-right, neoliberal economic positions (Trastulli,2022).

The shifting of objectives that secured social democracy a long period of hegemony through the so-called 'third way' and 'modernization strategy' is not now widely resonating with the grassroots (Esson, 2022). On the contrary, it is meeting with quite sharp reactions. Reactions which in many cases lead to mass movements of voters and members or to dissolution. After all, *“the Third Way, with its depoliticisation of economics, proclivity for privatisation and marketisation, was a form of liberalism that happened to take hold within social democratic parties. Herein social democracy, as expressed in social democratic parties, had reformed itself to become alien from its prior traditions, both seeking to build a socialist society and to govern capitalism in line with socialist principles”*. (Esson, 2022).

2. The moral and intellectual weakness of the progressive area and PASOK

According to some thinkers (Berman, 2006), social democracy is the most successful ideology of the twentieth century because its principles and policies marked and strengthened the most harmonious and prosperous period in European history, reconciling previously incompatible interests and smoothing over opposing interests that appeared totally irreconcilable. In this regard, social democracy has achieved the smooth operation of capitalism in conjunction with democracy and social stability. Some years earlier, Ralph Dahrendorf (1983: 16-18) observed that a paradigm shift was assumed to be taking place in the larger political scene, and that "the assumptions of yesterday's world are not helpful in dealing with the problems of today." According to Dahrendorf, tomorrow is not a continuation of yesterday, but it is also not the inverse of yesterday or a return to a reconstructed yesterday. Tomorrow will be different, and the change has a name: social democracy. The last century was social and democratic in its best aspects." We were almost all social democrats by the end of it. We have all adopted and made self-evident some of the concepts that define the theme of the social democratic century: development, equality, work, reason, the state, and internationalism. The end of social democracy has arrived after the majority of its programmatic proposals have been implemented, and the social groups that supported it have now formed disparate interests (Grebing, 2005: 552). According to Dahrendorf (1983), the traditional assumptions and positions of social democracy are

no longer valid today, and we are approaching the end of the social democratic century. People have never before had such expanded possibilities, according to the thinker, as at the end of the social democratic era, and the real value of the social democratic era is above all that social democrats have succeeded in establishing and defending what we call a loose democracy. The political form of the social democratic era is the link between the rule of law and the institutions of open society. In Dahrendorf's view, the social democratic paradigm is appealing. It is, however, a thing of the past, not only because unjust developments have removed the foundation for its assumptions, but also, and most importantly, because it has exhausted all of its potential. As a result, social democracy has evolved into a natural governing party rather than the driving force behind developments. This process is linked to the political situation, which has not allowed for the simultaneous satisfaction of the newly rich and newly poor under conditions of expanding neoliberalism (Grebing, 2005: 553). The social-democratic century ended, however, in a "social-democratic consensus" adopted "by all parties. The bourgeois parties were social-democratized (Grebing,2005: 552)... Dahrendorf considers what will happen to the welfare state when capitalism's growth potential is gone, exposing the paradox that social democrats, who once invested in transformation and changing the world, now invest in maintaining the acquis and stabilizing the status quo. The social democrats had no choice but to point out any flaws in the world they had created. According to the author, the very social democrats who have historically invested in the state are now concerned about excessive etatism that may paralyze individuality. Indeed, Dahrendorf's point of view reveals the ideological vacuum that exists in today's social democracy. The absence of a post-industrial narrative based on Enlightenment principles that would give practical expression to the need for more solidarity, more equality and more justice.

According to Hans Magnus Enzensberger (1978: 4), "the strength of left-wing theory in any form is based from Babeuf to Bloch, that is to say for more than a century and a half on the establishment of a positive utopia to which the world had no equal." A positive and credible utopia is currently missing from social democracy, resulting in a profound orientation crisis. With the end of the Cold War, leftist narratives and socialist utopias became fluid, while the establishment of progressive multiparty parties based on the compass of class struggle and the abolition of capitalism became impossible (Rasnoyi, 2016).

Simultaneously, the social democrats failed to replace the traditional foundations on which it was founded with new ideas and charming projects, resulting in a further deterioration of its social base (Rasnoyi, 2016). With the rise of Margaret Thatcher, Ronald Reagan, and Helmut Kohl in the 1980s, the social democratic era came to an end (Perger, 2015). Indeed, the ideological collapse of social democracy can be traced back to the early years of neoliberal hegemony, when the 'conservative revolution' brought Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan to power (Kotroyannos,2016; Rieger,2022). Beginning in the mid-1980s, many social democrats believed that the neoliberal critique of the welfare state contained some elements of truth and that the center-left would do well to endorse this critique by readjusting its political stance in the Globalization era (De Waele, 2016).

The 'third way' completed the transformation of social democracy in the 1990s, well before the 2008 financial crisis. European leaders such as Gerhard Schröder and, above all, Tony Blair came to power with the lofty goal of establishing a social democratic alternative to neoliberalism. However, the New Labor later adopted and encapsulated the majority of neoliberalism's ideological assumptions (Kotroyannos, 2016).

Despite the fact, that social democratic parties benefits and takes advantage when welfare state issues are dominant in electoral campaigns, , analyses of party manifestos show that social democrats are gradually moving towards the ideological center by abandoning many traditional leftist positions (Polacko,2021).. These parties' embrace of the market, increased financialisation, privatisation, and deregulation, as well as tax and welfare state cuts, have been key elements in this transition. As a result, during a period of rising inequality, social democratic parties have become much less egalitarian (Polacko,2021). In the late 1990s and early 2000s, this 'Third Way' party strategy appeared to bring significant electoral benefits. However, social democratic parties have seen a significant decline in vote share across Europe as many traditional parties have withdrawn.

The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, and the subsequent collapse of all regimes of so-called real existing socialism, also contributed to social democracy's ideological shift. Until then, Communist parties had been constantly pushing social democrats to the left, even if their political weight varied by country, while state socialist regimes had been completely discredited even before their fall.

When the so-called Soviet bloc fell apart, the social democratic parties no

longer faced competition from the left and believed that progressive voters were now theirs for the taking and that they could therefore pivot to the center in order to attract moderate middle-class voters without losing their traditional support base. As a result, between 1945 and 1989, one important effect of communist parties in Europe was to push social democrats to the left and keep them from sliding towards the conservative center (De Waelle, 2016). Finally, the European project played a significant role in the transformation of social democracy. Not all social democratic parties supported Europe at first, but there were heated debates within the French Socialist Party, as well as among Swedish social democrats and others (De Waelle, 2016). The Christian Democrats and the right-wing business elite were largely responsible for the formation of the European Union. Jean Monnet and Alcide De Gasperi were neither social democrats.

As a result, there was genuine reluctance among the major currents within the social democratic parties toward this nascent Union, in which social democrats did not recognize themselves. Suddenly, however, the socialists almost unanimously embraced the concept of "Europe." Since then, the social democrats have not stopped compromising in the name of the priority they placed on the development of the European Union. However, power dynamics at the supranational level are far more complex than at the national level (De Waelle, 2016). Also, as soon as the social democrat representatives realized they couldn't share power with the right while maintaining their own convictions, they gradually began to abandon them.

The social democrats based their conversion mainly on the idea that the creation of a large European market was a necessary condition for a social Europe, in their own eyes, to justify their conversion. However, this assumption turned out to be an unfounded bargain, or at least a miscalculation, because while the broader market was steadily liberalizing, European social policies remained stagnant or non-existent (De Waelle, 2016).

In the midst of the international economic crisis, social democracy's orientation deficits became even greater, since it was unable to react to the confrontation with anti-democracy populists from the right and left of the political spectrum by winning the trust of society (Perger, 2015). As Neil Lawson (2014) notes, where the crisis hit hardest, the Social Democrats fell the deepest and fastest. PASOK in Greece is almost non-existent. The PSOE in Spain is on its knees... and about to be overtaken by PODEMOS, which has only existed for some years. In

Scotland, the Labor Party is about to be replaced by the Nationalists. Socialists everywhere are facing a wave of populism and political apathy sweeping across Europe... But the Social Democrats accept all this as if nothing had happened and retreat to their orthodox views. They wage a tug-of-war over budgetary and regulatory obstacles without really touching the limits of neoliberalism, while pretending that the old class divisions persist and taking the preservation of their core constituency for granted. Today, social democracy is in danger of losing its leading position on the progressive political spectrum, because it has long since lost the tradition of radical reformism, which historically had serious advantages.

Consequently, the social democratic parties cannot benefit from the widespread social anger being generated at the increasing impoverishment of the population in the face of the crisis. In the greatest crisis of capitalism since 1929, the Social Democrats are losing on all fronts. Affected societies are turning to right-wing and left-wing populist parties, which have the greatest influx of newcomers and voters of all time. From the perspective of the extreme right, it now seems fruitful to adopt the harsh anti-capitalist critique that the left once boasted of (Crouch, 2011). European social democracy and the broader reformist left, on the other hand, remain deeply divided and have never been more uncertain about their critique of capitalism and their long-term goals. The moral and intellectual weakness of the progressive world also explains the long-lasting dominance of neoliberalism as the modern political religion, despite all the economic disasters it has brought with it (Eppler, 2015). It is significant that wherever the Socialists and Social Democrats held the reins of government during the crisis in Europe, they played the thankless role of mere administrators, acting under the tight control of the European Council, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

Whether in government or in opposition, the major crisis has left Europe's centre-left party in great confusion, without a plan and without a vision. In the face of the panicked rush of financial market players, the growing anger of voters and the growing fear of the future, improvisation and maneuvering have prevailed one way or another. In the next step, the centre-left stumbled from defeat to defeat. In a distant era, social democracy in Europe stimulated the fear reflexes of the rich and socially powerful not so much from a readiness to use violence or armed action as from a coherent ideological readiness. The socialists' intellectual arsenal challenged and seriously threatened the very foundations of the capitalist world order.

If in past times the oppressors used to be emperors, kings and feudal lords, today they are politicians, multinational bosses and multi-million dollar shareholders. At the same time, conditions for enslaved workers are much more favorable than in the past, in the sense that they are protected by collective agreements, labor laws and the relevant courts. Through their own interventions and struggles, social democrats across Europe secured workers' basic social and labor rights, particularly after World War II.

It should be noted that the rise of fascism in many European countries had been preceded by the abolition of all labor profits made by the Social Democrats after World War I until the rise of Hitler. The National Socialists immediately converted the eight-hour day into a sixteen-hour day, unmarried people were obliged to pay a special tax and forced labor was reintroduced. At the same time, members of left-wing parties who fought alongside the workers were imprisoned, tortured and executed. With the fall of fascism, trade unions were re-established and social democracy entered its strongest historical period, dubbed the golden age of social democracy. From the 1970s to the mid-1980s there was a steady increase in wages, a steady expansion of workers' rights and a marked rise in social standards of living. The combination of expansive social welfare with a drastic economic boom was the recipe for success.

As Asvall states(1999: xiii)“for nearly a half century, the WHO European Region enjoyed the steady growth of employment in an environment where workers were secure in their jobs and where the employee–employer relationship was assumed to be a lasting one, often spanning the employee’s working life. When unemployment occurred, there was usually an ample government safety net that provided essential support to workers and their families. Recently, however, development in Europe has clearly emphasized more efficient competition in the global market-place. This has inevitably led to massive downsizing of the workforce in many traditionally labour-intensive industries and service enterprises, which has affected employees at all levels, including middle and upper management. Reductions in force are being facilitated by advances in information technology, new work options (such as home and part-time work) and access to low-cost global labour resources. The result is an apparently sharp – xi – xii rise in chronic anxiety among people who never before experienced unemployment and a consequent threat to their sense of security, wellbeing and social status. Chronic anxiety can be devastating to

the health of the worker, as well as the wellbeing of the worker's family”.

Consequently, things began to change politically from the 1980s onwards, with the rise of the environmentally conscious Greens, the New Right and the populist far right, who managed to win over a large section of blue-collar workers through harsh rhetoric . In particular, the fanatical immigration rhetoric put forward by the new right and the extreme right appealed to the lower and middle classes. The New Right and the extreme right have ingeniously cultivated among workers a fear of labor market exclusion, a new nationalism combined with a targeted racism that selects target groups according to circumstances. At the same time, the environmentalists-Greens, with a new agenda centered on factual ecological sensitivities, succeeded in wresting part of the intelligentsia and middle classes from social democracy. All of these developments have resulted in social democracy being downgraded to a middle power, while the once strong support of workers and employees has been forgotten.

As a result, social democracy is now at a real dead end, as are the collective institutions that represent the world of work. For example, workers are becoming fewer and fewer in unions because of the perception that institutions of collective action cannot effectively demand more rights and change the status quo. Everyone is now trying, as a lone fighter, to oppose powerful economic interests and to negotiate individual advantages. However, this mentality and perception overlooks the fact that non-union members also benefit from collective union services. The weakening of unions and social democracy is leading their collective and partisan counterparts to fear-based action.

Social-democratic concessions to neoliberalism (Bandau,2022) through the so-called third way of Tony Blair and Gerhard Schröder or the modernization of Kostas Simitis were ostensible attempts at accommodation, which were in fact motivated by phobic reflexes of disappearance or retreat. The same goes for sticking to right-wing and sometimes far-right positions on immigration in the face of fear of losing votes to racist and nationalist parties. Fear-motivated adherence to both neoliberalism and the concept of the closed society weakens rather than strengthens social democracy.

On the contrary, the insistence on social achievements such as the recent increase in basic wages, the increase in funds and appointments in education, health and social services, the increase in places in crèches and kindergartens, the expansion of all-day school education, the modernization of universities a strategic choice of social democracy that strengthens and strengthens it, as can be seen partly in the

Scandinavian examples. In many northern European countries, social democrats have succeeded in securing important social rights such as children's rights being enshrined in the constitution and in achieving a significant reduction in unemployment and absolute poverty without falling into the trap of growing public deficits.

The international media hardly mention the current social successes of social democracy and shift the focus entirely to the economy. The belief that everything will work itself out is leading to a mass movement of voters to abstain on the one hand and to the right or extremes of the political spectrum on the other. But the factually justified fear of unemployment and poverty, which is also expressed in xenophobic terms, must not tempt social democratic parties to give up their purely social identity in favor of returning lost voters. However, timeless social democratic values must not be allowed to drown in the fire of fear. Finally, it is not unreasonable to conclude that exchanging strong traditional principles and values for hazy mainstream visionary principles undermines the unity, utopias and ultimately even the ambitions of social democracy, leading to a deep ideological, political and organizational crisis. The constant transformation of social democracy was accompanied by a process of historical power dynamics that only partially produced large and far-reaching shocks (Polanyi, 2011).

The historical course of PASOK is indicative of the above view. The formerly powerful centre-left party has gone through various phases of change, from the liberation-political, radical movement of September 3rd in the 1970s to the pragmatic ruling party of the 1980s to the modernization and establishment ruling party of the Simiti period in the 1970s 90s. Then under the direction of Georgios. Papandreou, after 2007, the party took on two successive and seemingly opposite physiognomies, from the frontal type of the Democratic Party in the US (Liakopoulos:2014), at least at the level of general declarations and ideological references, to a party that sought a return to its roots without losing touch with today's reality. In the end, this path led to a party of established governmentalism, which introduced the Memorandum of Understanding in Greece and thereby faced serious existential dilemmas.

3. The Question of Legitimacy

Through the process of change, socialist parties typically attempt to reconnect with the electoral and societal body, a strategy that has historically worked because it expresses to the people a particular form of response to expectations, whether it be

some sort of acknowledgment of mistakes and errors of an otherwise under-appreciated past of government, or a positive proposition of power. But what about post-austerity Europe? Will social democracy in Europe as a whole be able to overcome the logic of neoliberalism through some kind of transformation? To answer this question, we must turn to a major issue in political science, namely that of legitimacy. The mutations of political parties are also linked to the question of legitimacy, as one of the founding fathers of political science, Gaetano Mosca, very aptly pointed out. According to Mosca, the parties in power are constantly looking for a political norm, a political formula, i.e. a social ideology which, while expressing the interests of the ruling class, is at the same time in tune with the feelings and perceptions of the dominated. (Martinelli, 2009: 7-9).

Since violence alone is no longer a sufficient means of domination in modern societies, moral parameters in the form of political norms are used to achieve the broadest possible consensus. Throughout the ages, myths about the divine origin of the sovereign, racial superiority, historical necessity, etc. have been used. From the point of view of modern social democratic parties, formulas and concepts that express the common or collective good are often used. Terms such as transparency, good governance, good governance, consolidation, competitiveness, solidarity, a just society, public goods serve to place the centre-left party at the center of the political spectrum because, on the one hand, they attract a broad underprivileged audience, but they repel on the other hand, center-right voters are not dismissed. To a certain extent, categories of a citizen-friendly, collectively oriented ethics are developing, which are related to the increasing institutional deregulation and increasing individualization of today's societies. The result of these developments is a growing but fluid mass demand for more community and collectivity, which the new social democracy seeks to express.

The problem here is not so much the strategic use of the concepts as the great fluidity and ambiguity that characterizes them, making them susceptible to purely instrumental use. However, this means that your programmatic application can be equipped with any content depending on the specific contextual needs. They can be provided with ecclesiastical, socialist, liberal, nationalist, republican content without losing their fluidity and relevance as concepts. Ultimately, however, the value overload or ambiguity of terms serves no other purpose than political domination of extremely populist instrumentalization. No reference to the just society or the

common good is credible unless it addresses the fundamental contradictions of the capitalist system, particularly that between capital and labour. A just society will ultimately be achieved through targeted and harsh redistribution measures, which means that at least some of the privileged will be affected. If social democracy takes a clear position on this core issue, it is unlikely to regain its legitimacy. The examples of Sanders and Corbyn mentioned above show exactly that, a social democracy that takes the side of workers and the underprivileged and expresses great values such as equality, justice and democracy regains its legitimacy.

A new survey about the Question .whether citizens support the normative ideas that underpin social democracy, and how satisfied they are with the actual implementation of these norms in their respective countries." (Palacios,2022: 2) comes to the , the finding that Europe's social model of democracy is not facing a major legitimacy crisis, at least not one that cannot be mitigated by further advancing welfare state institutions (Palacios,2022:17). According to this assertion, the widespread public dissatisfaction with social service delivery that many European countries, particularly those in Southern Europe, experienced at the start of the financial crisis was caused by (poorly universalistic) welfare state institutions rather than rising public aspirations, that is, excessive public demands that the system cannot meet. (Palacios,2022:17). As a result, the alleged legitimacy crisis of social democracy afflicting many European countries may be overcome by more universal welfare policies. However, if the inequality gap in European societies widens, this positive conclusion should be called into question. Then it is possible that welfare institutions are no longer capable of changing citizens' negative perceptions of social democracy(Palacios,2022:17). Second, it has been observed that welfare state institutions do not equally affect all social groups, and that some of them remain quite critical even under conditions of high universalism. This is especially true for women and left-wing voters, who have long been vocal supporters of the social-democratic model. If social democratic institutions fail to meet the needs of these social groups, the future of social democracy in Europe may be jeopardized.

4. The need for a new narrative

It is clear that the financial crisis has exposed social democracy's inability to offer viable alternatives. The theoretical explanations for the impasse of social democracy are varied, some apologetic, others radically critical. Some authors (Engels&Maas, 2010; Birnbaum, 2010) argue that the basic principles of social democracy are not disputed by anyone since most of these principles have already been implemented, at least adopted and included in the programmatic platforms of other political parties. Assuming that this is the case, it is obvious that the electorate is no longer able to recognize the authentic characteristics of social democracy.

Another group of thinkers (Eppler 2015; Kapeller & Huber: 2009; Kotroyannos; 2016; Crouch: 2013; Frenzel, 2002: 120; Habermas, 2013) argues that a crucial factor that propelled social democracy into crisis was the strong influence from the neoliberal wave of the 1990s, which even influenced and partly integrated part of the left and social democratic parties (Third Way), resulting in a relative to absolute deviation from the basic values of social democracy.

Moschonas(2002:161) for example notes that *“social democracy’s move towards a moderate neoliberal discourse, embellished with a more traditionally social-democratic social discourse as well as a post-materialist sensibility, 14 creates a somewhat ‘social-liberal’ programmatic profile. With ever-increasing difficulty, neoliberal-inspired modernization is concealed beneath a rhetoric that merely condemns the ‘excesses’ of economic liberalism: ‘unbridled liberalism’ or ‘ultra-liberalism’. And the struggle against poverty is increasingly reduced - even at a discursive level - to the struggle against ‘social exclusion’”*

In this context, it is noted that Third Way social democracy was based on loose regulation of the free market, with the result that it grew stronger and eventually developed into a rampant and uncontrollable monster (Bos: 2010: 81). In the same way, it is argued (Crouch, 2013, Streeck, 2013 ; Judt, 2010; Cuperus&Becker, 2010) that the very compromises that social democracy made in contradiction to its basic values led it to an existential one crisis has been led. The centre-left party loses voter confidence, abandons its core values and the idea of building a prosperous society characterized by equality, prosperity, solidarity and mutual trust (Cuperus: 2011).

According to Abraham (2009, 24-25), four critical aspects of the crisis of social democracy can be identified: identity crisis, cooperation and solidarity crisis,

communication crisis and leadership crisis. Without a new grand narrative of the good life and a better future beyond capitalism as it currently operates, it is impossible to break the long hegemony of the neoliberal narrative. Summarising the causes that led to the demise of social democracy, Berman & Snegovaya (2019) , notes that *“the decline of West European manufacturing during the late twentieth century weakened the working class and unions, shrinking the left’s traditional voting base and reducing the heft of the organizations that had been its most important affiliates. During the same period, postmaterialist values such as self-expression, environmentalism, cosmopolitanism, sexual freedom, and gender equality took on a new prominence in Western societies. Voters holding such values considered themselves to be on the left, but they differed from longtime leftist voters who remained wedded to national identities, prioritized law and order, and favored growth over environmental protection. The divisions between “new” and “old” left voters rendered socialist and social-democratic parties conflicted and confused”*.

However, Tony Judt (2010), the great Anglo-Saxon historian who died in 2010, had called on European social democracy to lead a movement to reform capitalism. In his view, the future of social democracy belongs to fear. Tony Judt's legacy is a narrative for a European welfare state at the heart of the social democratic project. In this case, of course, the historic compromise that would have made possible the creation and development of such a welfare state in Western Europe no longer exists. Also, the elements that once constituted the so-called organized capitalism, or Rhenish capitalism, which had long been the hidden ideal of European social democracy, were reduced. In today's liberalized, disorganized and deregulated capitalism, the power elites ignore all compromises. The fear of the lower classes of total social collapse and a worse future allows the elites to shoulder the cost of the economic catastrophe that led to the fourth Great Depression in the history of capitalism. Today, European social democracy has to face this fear and the fear of the next social-democratic compromises leading to socialist austerity experiments, as in Greece, Spain and Portugal during the crisis and earlier in Germany under Schröder or in England under Blair. The answers to be given must of course contradict the neoliberal dictum There Is No Alternative.

A radical vision of modern social democracy, as developed by Tony Judt, who does not believe in one-size-fits-all recipes and synchronized planetary solutions to all problems on a global scale, can be countered to this dictum. Judt praises the welfare

state – thinking of Great Britain and continental Europe. For him, the old Europe of social democracy, not the USA, is the model for the future. In the US there is no known tradition of social democracy, while in Britain it has been successfully dismantled by Blair and company. Judt calls on European social democracy to reflect on its strengths. These strengths lie in the transformation of capitalism in which social democracy in Europe has played a leading role. A transformation that has been associated with the consolidation of the welfare state, the intervention state, the expanded public goods and services sector, the domestication and regulation of capitalism. All of this challenges the neoliberal zeitgeist and can be a stepping stone to a new understanding. This new conception will build on the tradition of the democratic left, which sharply criticized the Leninist road to socialism. This does not mean, however, that European social democracy should give up its rich subversive heritage, including the tradition of radical reformism (or revolutionary realpolitik), without hesitation. In other words, social democracy must not abandon the critical reflection on capitalism expressed by Marx, Kautsky, Bernstein, Keynes and others. During the crisis, social democracy was left without language, without ideas, without a conceptual arsenal and without symbols to resist the dominant neoliberal discourse and envisage a future beyond capitalism. Surely, the most significant reason for the decline of Social Democracy was the late-twentieth-century left's shift to the center on economic issues. The short-term benefits of this shift were negatively offset by , possibly fatal, long-term consequences because it diluted the left's distinct historical profile; made socialist and social-democratic parties unable to capitalize on widespread dissatisfaction with the aftermath of neoliberal reforms and the 2008 financial crisis; created incentives for parties to emphasize cultural and social rather than economic or class appeals; and undermined democracy's representative nature (Berman & Snegovaya, 2019).

In this context it is useful to refer to a new study of Matt Polacko who argues that, in an era of rising inequality, shifting to the left on the economy that is, the return to traditional principles and values, will benefit social democrats. In his recent study, Polacko (2021) finds out that income inequality is a key moderator of social democratic policy offerings and their support. Based on data from 22 countries between 1965 and 2019, his analysis shows that when social democratic parties shift to the right on the economy, they have a lower vote share when income inequality is high or when this shift is combined with rightward socio-cultural positions. These

findings offer an important explanation for the social democratic party's precipitous electoral decline. Moreover, the Author finds out that rising inequality should benefit social democrats electorally, only if they offer clear leftist economic positions, as party supply must meet citizen demand. According to Polacko (2021), when social democrats shift to the right on redistribution, they alienate both their traditional base and much of the middle class, and their support suffers as a result. Precarity and unemployment in the labor market have spread to the higher skilled middle class, and flexibility as a result of the deregulation of non-standard employment has created downward wage pressure among low- and middle-income insiders while benefiting top earners. The brand dilution suffered by social democratic parties as a result of politics that contradict the party family's traditional image as welfare state agents does not appear to have been offset by gains from progressive movement on the socio-cultural dimension (Polacko,2021). The cultivation of an profile of fiscal and economic responsibility by shifting to the right have also failed to compensate for the loss of traditional supporters (Polacko (2021),. As confirmed by recent polls left-wing economic policies are popular in Western European countries. Meanwhile, rising income inequality shows no signs of abating and has become even more pronounced during the pandemic. Yet the growing inequality in the midst of the pandemic could be an opportunity for social democracy to benefit by offering enhanced redistributive policies. The Recent cases of Norway and Germany, in which social democrats moved to the left on the economy, leads to a return of social democrats to power.

5. Some hidden truths

In the face of the failed utopia of pure, unregulated capitalism, a radical market economy, it is worthwhile for social democracy to recall some truths that are often successfully hidden. In any case, the principle of economic value applies to social policy, the welfare state, with which capitalism and civil society function much better than without it. Of course, the welfare state as we know it wasn't necessarily a great mechanism for eliminating social inequalities and promoting the common good. Those who defend the welfare state and the public sector must work effectively for their horizontal and vertical reform. Anyone who wants this reform needs broad alliances, the support of the traditional working class, the wage earners of the precarious social classes, the peasants and the bourgeoisie. The body that will attempt

such a breakthrough cannot therefore be content to play the role of advocate for the welfare state, social transfers and those dependent on public services. A serious and broader program of state transformation is needed, with sufficient depth and without slogans. A program that puts an end to the intolerable frivolity of the politics of real needs. The policy of privatization, the product of a superstitious belief in the infallibility of markets, has done nothing but damage and disaster, not just for Britain's railways, as Tony Judt has described it. However, the answer to the destructive policy of privatization cannot be nationalization, but progressive, democratic or at least sustainable democratic forms of public finance that involve the state but not its administration. Without an adequate and flexible provision of public goods and services that can be used by all regardless of their purchasing power or market position, there can be no equality and freedom for citizens in capitalist economies. If the public sphere, as the foundation of democracy and the logical counterpart of privacy, is not given a material basis, it inevitably degenerates into a rhetorical scheme. This means creating a public democratic economy that produces, distributes and uses public and common goods, by and for all citizens of society. The private sector will of course be seriously involved in this area.

6 . The available political repertoire

Undoubtedly, the neoliberal hegemony of the past few decades has led to a rapid increase in social inequality by prioritizing market freedom over equality, solidarity and social justice). Amid notions of short-term profit and loose rules, social democratic notions of the necessary balance between economic freedom and social cohesion have been marginalized (Mavrozacharakis, 2014). Despite Keynes' warning that the time for austerity is in the boom and not in the recession, and that austerity is generally discouraged because it mortgages investment and is, in that sense, anti-economic, the ruling elite of The Capitalist System avoids strict expansionary government financial intervention to destroy jobs and incomes, and remains committed to the formula of government borrowing to bail out large financial and other corporations, followed by austerity policies that target the cost of the bailout and save money by doing so cutting jobs and government services (Wolff, 2012).

The result of these policies is that consumer spending in the eurozone has stagnated as wages have not risen. Firms are not investing because sales have been canceled due to falling demand. At the same time, public investment is declining and

government spending is being cut, leading to a contracting economy and falling tax revenues. The consequences are stagnation and deflation. One's expenses are the other's income. However, one of the strong arguments made by pro-austerity advocates is that only a policy of restraint allows today's younger generation to engage in meaningful redistribution dialogue on an ad hoc basis. As long as there is unlimited and cheap borrowing, the deadlocks on redistribution will be passed on to future generations. The counter-arguments are that genuine investment in society as a whole will benefit future generations, both in terms of infrastructure and opportunities. Finally, the main problem with austerity is that it involves unpopular and unpopular measures such as cutting public spending, raising the retirement age, and cutting wages and pensions. Apart from that, after the diagnosis by the rating agencies Fitch, advocates of austerity have interpreted the crisis in the countries of the south and especially in Greece to mean that these countries are showing high budget deficits. In Greece, the budget deficit was in the order of 15% of GDP, which excluded the country from access to capital markets. It was therefore clear to the IMF and the EU economic institutions that the country needed tough austerity measures. On the contrary, many economists warned from the start that too many cuts could be deadly and were very skeptical concerning the "medication" administered to Greece and the southern European nations while aware that the recession already in place was getting worse. Professional groups in their entirety are departing Portugal, Spain, and Greece. Therefore, there is no purpose in continuing to administer the same treatments if these countries are deprived of their productive core and the patient's life is in danger (Rhodes& Stelter, 2010; Tomkiewicz,2019) Gavin-Marschal, 2011). Peter Bofinger, a German economist and member of the German government's Council of Economic Experts (Committee of Wise Men), was critical of the "treatment" chosen for Greece and the South of Europe from the start, comparing it to the disastrous policy implemented during the Weimar Republic. "The policy pursued in Spain, Portugal, and Greece is reminiscent of Chancellor Brüning's fatal emergency policy," said the prominent German economist, referring to the strategy of welfare state cuts that resulted in soaring unemployment and inflation in the early 1930s. Bofinger, in particular, condemns recently agreed-upon measures such as the reduction of the minimum wage, pension cuts, and the dismissal of 15,000 civil servants, which exacerbate the lack of demand in Greece (Freiberger& Zydra, 2012). An even more egregious example of criticism is the IMF's official admission in the aftermath of the

latest reports by the Fund's two leading economists, Olivier Blanchard and Daniel Lee, in which they assert that the choice of extreme austerity was 'obviously' a mistake, because the entire world panics during a crisis. Because people do not behave predictably, the effects of austerity are two to three times greater than predicted (Blanchard/Leigh: 2013; Blanchard: 2015). Those who made forecasts vastly underestimated the fiscal multipliers, such as the short-term effects of drastic cuts in government spending or tax increases on economic activity, according to the report. Finally, Blanchard and Lee admit that forcing countries in financial distress to drastically reduce their deficits is counterproductive. "For example, in Portugal, we have relaxed our budget deficit targets," they say. This is evident in the unemployment figures, the closed stores, the soup kitchens, and the people sorting through the garbage.

Who can talk about democracy when unemployment in Spain and Greece is expected to reach 30% in the near future, and a young generation has no economic prospects? In southern Europe, half of all young people are unemployed. Politics is literally tearing a generation apart. Unemployment is accompanied by precarious employment, future fears, psychological illnesses such as depression, and, finally, an increase in the suicide rate. Austerity worsens the situation not only socially but also economically, inevitably leading to societies of 'lawlessness,' without solidarity or rules. On the other hand, as long as austerity continues, so will the banking crisis, because with each unemployed person, savings are wiped out and bad loans increase, inevitably leading to a banking deadlock. These, in turn, lead to tighter lending restrictions and, as a result, a contraction in GDP, which leads to increased debt. Overall, this policy is meaningless and will not solve the crisis, but will only exacerbate it. Austerity is stifling growth, while a drop in public consumption is causing job losses. Despite the prescription's failure, the cynicism of those who welcome austerity as a useful and necessary prescription has grown and matured over time.

According to Krugman (2012), those who serve up 'common beliefs' about austerity in Greece and Spain 'have forgotten that it is the people who are involved,' and that people 'in these two countries are saying, quite simply, that they have reached their limits: with unemployment at Great Depression levels and former middle-class workers scavenging for food in the garbage, austerity policy has already lost its measure. This demonstrates that what was agreed upon may no longer be applicable.

The European periphery, particularly Greece, is experiencing cyclical and structural economic problems. Their economies are inefficient and thus uncompetitive in the eurozone.

Everyone understands that these countries will require significant assistance from the eurozone to get their economies back on track. Finally, we would like to emphasize that the vicious circle of low competitiveness and skilled worker emigration is just getting started. Of course, social democrats support a society with equal opportunities for all, as well as the freedom for all to shape their own future. This means that the concept of equality is central to the social democratic narrative. However, in the midst of an economic crisis, this idea has not only been challenged, but has been given a negative connotation, primarily because it is an impediment to unbridled competition. However, social democracy must promote a healthy balance of equality and freedom. In this case, equality must be based on the need for equal opportunities for all citizens, particularly when it comes to meeting basic existential needs, the fulfillment of which has a liberating effect on social hardship. Equality is a critical factor for political, social, and economic stability, as well as an indicator of a society's level of social justice and fairness. Inequality, on the other hand, contributes to political and economic insecurity as well as social injustice. Comparative research has also revealed that countries with a high degree of egalitarianism, such as Scandinavia and Japan, have greater social cohesion and fewer economic problems than the United States and the United Kingdom (Wilkinson / Piquet 2009).

Equal treatment is a core value of social democracy that is inextricably linked to freedom and equality. Equal treatment, according to social democrats, is the provision of equal rights to all citizens, regardless of gender, age, ethnicity, religion, or belief.

7. A new concept of progress

In the midst of a crisis, the left and center-left in general are attempting to position themselves internationally as a viable alternative to neoliberalism's mainstream. Helping people acclimatize to capitalism, rather than engaging in a futile and ultimately destructive effort to slow it down, has been the social democratic left's historic achievement, and it remains its major purpose. currently in nations where the social democratic style of thought is most thoroughly embedded. Many analysts have remarked, for example, on Denmark's and Sweden's excellent achievement in

managing globalization—promoting economic growth has enhanced competitiveness while the state has provided high employment and social security. The Scandinavian examples demonstrate unequivocally that social welfare and economic dynamism are natural friends rather than competitors. (Berman ,2011:48). The legitimate objection raised in this attempt is that the proposed centre-left and left-wing policies are stagnant and partly identical with the defense of the status quo. That is, they are in sync with a logic that opposes social change. This conservative portrayal contrasts with the left's philosophical origins, which place it within the intellectual current of the first half of the twentieth century, which largely addressed the issue of social change in light of evolution. That is, the belief in society's gradual development. As a result, the transition from pre-modern to modern forms is generally regarded favorably. This belief in society's unbroken positive direction stems from the philosophy of Enlightenment history, particularly Hegel and Marx, as well as the influence of Darwin's evolutionary theory and Spencer's sociology. However, if the working hypothesis of the left's stagnation is correct, then the left as an ideological current no longer has a positive outlook on the progress of societies. As a result, it has no reason to exist. As a result, the time has come to advocate for a "new left" with a contemporary narrative. The history of the European left demonstrates that its political philosophy is inextricably linked to the concept of progress.

In both the brightest and darkest periods, the concept of social change is absolutely constitutive of the various stages and diverse manifestations of left-wing theory and practice. The uncertainty and crisis in which the so-called social left finds itself today are most visible in this context. We appear to be living in an upside-down world, because the various left environments, particularly and persistently, project and mobilize a deep distrust of social change. As Bauman states *'Progress'*, *once the most extreme manifestation of radical optimism and a promise of universally shared and lasting happiness, has moved all the way to the opposite, dystopian and fatalistic pole of anticipation: it now stands for the threat of a relentless and inescapable change that instead of auguring peace and respite portends nothing but continuous crisis and strain and forbids a moment of rest. Progress has turned into a sort of endless and uninterrupted game of musical chairs in which a moment of inattention results in irreversible defeat and irrevocable exclusion. Instead of great expectations and sweet dreams, 'progress' evokes an insomnia full of nightmares of 'being left behind' – of missing the train, or falling out of the window of a fast accelerating vehicle (Bauman,*

2007: 11)..... *The movement called 'progress' was more an effort to run away from failed utopias than an effort to catch up with utopias not yet experienced; a run away from the 'not as good as expected', rather than a run from the 'good' to the 'better'; an effort spurred by past frustrations rather than by future bliss.* (Bauman, 2007,96).

Furthermore, the left's ideological and organizational fragmentation resembles a shattered mirror. Concepts like "reform" or "modernization" do not have a consistent interpretation in the leftist conceptual arsenal, and can even have a negative connotation when interpreted as an ominous societal dynamic that requires active resistance. Today's left-wing politics frequently entails defending past gains. Since we cannot turn the wheel of history back to a bygone era, we must at the very least maintain the status quo. As a result, the question arises: does the left represent the new conservatism?

The left's paradigm shift may be incorrect, but it is for obvious and well-founded reasons. The twentieth-century disasters dealt a severe blow to the optimistic project of progress advocated by the left as a whole. Add to this the negative reform experiences of the third way, the new center, and modernization, from which the European democratic left has yet to recover. At the declaration level, these reform experiences contained a large number of positive steps for economic and social policy. In practice, however, it was a hollow rhetoric of modernization that was met with righteous resistance and misunderstanding. A clear and comprehensible objective was frequently lacking in the context of general surrealism. There was no political 'philosophy' or accompanying 'narrative.'

The tragedy of those years is that social democracy and the left failed to find a common thread leading to a modern social "philosophy" of justice, progress, and solidarity. In the long run, it was inevitable that the democratic left in Europe would lose its allure, because people are only moved and moved politically if the goals are clear and understandable. Pragmatism is a virtue only if it is measurable on concrete principles of justice and policy goals. Our society requires a new concept of progress, because positive change in many areas is difficult.

A left that does not articulate this concept of progress is deviating from its main task and, as a result, losing the hearts and minds of its social base. It is a dialogue that must take place in the context of a productive debate and in opposition to the dominant conservatism. The end result should be a dynamic process that alleviates citizens' justified fears and concerns while instilling new hope for positive

change. A nostalgic return to the concept of unbroken, linear progress would be a normative and strategic error doomed to failure.

The concept of social progress must be at the heart of a left-progressive policy. This is the main reason why social democrats want to change things: to improve people's living and working conditions. It is simple, yet complex, because we are already in the midst of a debate about social justice perspectives and concepts. Real progress toward equal opportunity for all is linked to the concept of institutional progress.

Social democracy is not trapped in the 'for or against the free market' dilemma. It supports every healthy and promising private initiative and the development of entrepreneurship, but it has nothing in common with neoliberalism. It believes that the free market, in itself, creates income inequalities and inequalities of opportunity. That is why it intervenes to reduce these inequalities at all levels by controlling the market. But social democracy also differs from that old-style Left, which thinks that everything can be solved by increasing the size of the state. Etatism, is a model that has been applied and failed, internationally. Too big a state is bureaucratic, unwieldy and unproductive. It also deprives resources from the real economy through large tax increases (Williams,2021).

Another critical dimension under discussion for a new left-wing progressive politics is technological progress. The concept of increasing productivity through technological advancement is central to Karl Marx, and it is linked to the hope for social emancipation through technological advancements. However, a harsh critique of technological progress has prevailed on the left, claiming that if blindly followed, it produces brute force. Nevertheless. It would be a grave error for the progressive left to abandon the concept of technological progress.

First, technological progress contributes to our prosperity and social participation opportunities. The spectrum includes everything from energy to industrial production and mobility technologies. Second, we cannot solve the world's severe environmental problems without requiring technological advancement. However, technological advancement must be accompanied by a demand for social advancement, in the form of genuine opportunities for participation across the entire spectrum of society. The goal must be to place all socioeconomic groups at the center of our society. Finally, progress must be linked to democratic expansion.

Current societal demands are always evolving. Ulrich Beck (1992) predicts

that the societies of the twenty-first century will be Risk Societies. There is technological change in a modern civilization. And, as technology advances, new types of dangers emerge, and we must constantly respond to and adjust to these developments. Beck contends that the risk society encompasses a wide range of interconnected changes in contemporary social life, including shifting employment patterns, increased job insecurity, the declining influence of tradition and custom, the erosion of traditional family patterns, and the democratization of personal relationships. The Covid-19 is an excellent example of these new Risks and dangers. It has demonstrated how fragile and unpredictable life is in this society. As a result, states must prioritize programs that address their populations' uncertainties and anxieties.

The 'new modernity' in that we exist now, is connected with a process of Individualization in the Western world. The individuals are progressively liberated from structural limitations and, as a result, are better equipped to build not only themselves, but also the society in which they live. People, for example, operate on their own, rather than being determined by their class conditions. People have been compelled to be more reflexive when left to their own devices (Beck,1992) . From this point of view, the collective subject to which social democracy was once directed has been lost and a fragmented field of policy-making based on individual choice is increasingly emerging.

According to Sigmund Bauman (2000), society are transitioning from 'stable' to 'fluid' modernity today. Bauman compared today's society to a fluid one in which each human person behaves like a particle of fluid, implying that the relationships between individuals are not as strong as those of a solid and that society cannot hold its own by exerting various types of force. He believes that the process of societal liquefaction began with the transformation of society and state in the name of modernity. In such cultures, several variables such as insecurity, uncertainty, and individualism, according to Bauman, play a significant influence. We are now living in the age of the fourth industrial revolution, which has seen unprecedented technological advancement while also causing major changes in the fundamental structure of civilizations. The most noticeable and frequent feature of these changes, however, is that the depth of connection between people in society is creating varied distances, and the thick and strong threads of social relationships are steadily narrowing and diminishing (Bauman, 2007).

In this digital age, we can only send large volumes of information, money, or goods from one location to another via the Internet, with no direct human-to-human interaction (Bauman,2012) . Humans are also being replaced by artificial intelligence, which is expected to take over several vocations in the near future. In this age of modern technology, the Industrial Society has given way to a new social system known as the Information Society. We now have advanced computers, smartphones, and access to the Internet. In this new information-based society, we find that the gap between people has shrunk as a result of unprecedented advancements in communication technology. We can now talk to someone far away via video call on Messenger or WhatsApp. (Bauman,2012) For meetings or other uses, we use a webcam. We can receive news from anywhere in the world. Globalization is accelerating as a result of the rapid growth of technology, and its benefits are reaching all people. But what kinds of changes are occurring in the fundamental structure of society as a result of this pervasive technological development?

According to Bauman's idea of liquid society, as information technology has advanced, human virtual interactions have increased in many ways, but the bonds of daily relationships with those around them have become narrower and weaker. People are continuously drifting away from those close to them, relationships are fraying, and everyone is suffering from acute loneliness. According to Baumann, humans are transitioning from the 'hard' hardware-based modernity of industrial society to the 'liquid' software-based modernity of information-based society today. It is establishing a "liquid society." This liquid society is distinguished by its association with the unregulated and remote processes of the global system, as well as the unstructured and loosely tied social interactions that have forced individuals into an unpredictable and insecure living.

We now have advanced computers, smartphones, and access to the Internet. In this new information-based society, we find that the gap between people has shrunk as a result of unprecedented advancements in communication technology. We can now talk to someone far away via video call on Messenger or WhatsApp. For meetings or other uses, we use a webcam. People from distant countries are making friends in the virtual world of social media sites like Facebook, which would not have been conceivable in the actual world. We can acquire news from anywhere by using search engines like Google.

Bauman emphasizes that it is up to the individual as an isolated actor to

discover customized answers to social problems... He draws attention to a variety of social situations, from our efforts to adapt to neoliberal flexibilisation at work to our efforts to find romance, and he concludes by reminding us that any search for liberation today necessitates more, not less, public sphere, and that any critical theory today must begin with a critique of life-politics - a critique of the scarcity of individualised solutions to systemic contradictions.

Under these conditions, a fresh perspective is required to assess the new reality. Under certain settings, current social democracy can supply this worldview. Social democracy does not have an easy task because it is in the imagined middle of the political spectrum. Market and minimal state doctrines, obsessive Marxists, and the so-called populist right provide a discourse that does not take into account the complexities of situations, a discourse that does not require much explanation, and is - in the end – simplistic (Bandneu,2022).

As a Manichean speech, this one is incredibly appealing. Social democracy, on the other hand, is obligated to conduct ongoing research in order to adapt and combine its social vision to hard realities, particularly economic realities. "The great problem of contemporary social democracy is, first, how to intervene in a world where multinational corporations act dominantly without abolishing basic market components, among which are private property and the pursuit of profit; and second, how to politicize the process of globalization without abolishing democratic freedoms, renouncing the defense of human rights, and, at the same time, erasing the differences between market and society. In the difficult attempt to achieve a successful balance of complementarities, the goal for modern social democracy is to overcome the failings of both the market and etatism through regulatory and social policies that foster long-term growth while ensuring social justice and fair opportunity for all citizens. Because ideological conflicts, including illiberal attacks on democracy, are expected to intensify in the post-neoliberal interregnum, neither the collapse nor the revival of social democracy cannot be ruled out.. From this vantage point, the growing appreciation for a strong and functional state as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic may present a golden opportunity for social democracy (Bandau, 2022: 500).

Today, the social democratic political formations represents typically an alliance between the progressive middle classes from the cities (e.g.competing with the Greens and Liberals) and the more conservative working class from the suburban

areas and small towns (e.g. compete with the populists) (Misik, 2022). The most economically disadvantaged members of the popular classes feel misunderstood and even rejected by politics in general and, in particular, by social democrats as their "natural" representatives. Right-wing politicians took this opportunity claiming to express the voice of the lower and middle classes

In a way, social-democratic politics is stuck in a never-ending strategic puzzle. Social Democrats must take care at the same time to win back the confidence of the fragmented working class, new and old, environments from which it has isolated itself and not to lose the enlightened urban middle class and the younger generation of left-wing activists (Misik, 2022).. Simultaneously, the social Question is becoming more prominent. With inflation nearing 8%, the middle class is feeling the pressure of losing prosperity and the fear of falling behind. In light of the numerous crises—the epidemic, the conflict, and the climate disaster—there is a clear need for security. Under these circumstances of danger and fear, the "modernization" rhetoric that helped the third way Social Democrats to win majorities falls flat. Social democrats can win if they successfully meet this need for security. When an epidemic disrupts vital exchanges or a geopolitical conflict threatens energy supply, "free the markets" is not a reliable guide (Misik, 2022).. Both the coronavirus and the recent shockwaves of war show how markets frequently fail to function properly or are vulnerable to herd instincts and panic attacks, which cause price increases. Citizens expect the state to protect them in times of crisis, so social-democratic programs are almost always popular. Those who consider themselves to be "normal," "ordinary" people want their problems to be highlighted. Many people are afraid because they can't make ends meet. Today, almost no one in their right mind would argue that politics should take precedence over allowing markets to function as they should.

As Misik (2022) notes under the current circumstances *“voters should favor politicians who are regarded as competent leaders. Showmen, populist scramblers, and dazzlers are no longer appropriate at this time. When there are already fires on every corner, who wants to wager on firebrands? That is essentially the current reality, and it at least provides sensible liberal-left parties a fighting chance. If you combine all of these factors, the decade could be described as "social-democratic.”*

8. Instead of an epilogue : For a new social democracy of "democratic polarisation"

If one were to attempt to follow the course of the centre-left from the period of the economic crisis onwards, he would certainly wonder why the social democracy did not try to confront and thoroughly stigmatize the blossoming of far-right and far-left populism in Europe and the agenda it expresses, and why it did not give the emphasis it should have given to the need for a new social architecture as a counter to neoliberalism, but instead preferred to delve into the secret world of introversion. Under the present conditions, therefore, an alliance between , social democracy, the democratic left, democratic forces, environmentalists and inspired liberals is necessary on a pan-European scale in order to avoid an authoritarian turn in Europe as a whole and in the individual nation states. Instead of the entrapment of the progressive forces in defensive monologues and populist political schemes, it would be more promising to move towards a process of democratic polarization (Habermas, 2016) in the sense of a confrontation with neoliberalism, the extreme right and conservatism in arguments and political terms, not in terms of hostility - in the manner of Karl Schmidt.

As Habermas (2016) states, *“since Clinton, Blair and Schröder, social democrats have swung over to the prevailing neoliberal line in economic policies because that was, or seemed to be promising politically; in the ‘battle for the centre ground’, these political parties thought that the only way to win majorities was by adopting a neoliberal course. This meant tolerating long-standing and growing social inequalities. This price – the economic and socio-cultural abandonment of ever-greater parts of the populace – has since become so high that the reaction to it vents itself on the right. And where else? If there is no credible and pro-active perspective, then protest must retreat into expressive, irrational forms”*.

Under the current circumstances, modern social democracy can counterbalance both populism and neoliberalism when he has the *“willingness to open up a completely different front in domestic politics, by making the aforementioned problem the key issue: how do we regain the political initiative vis-à-vis the destructive forces of unbridled capitalist globalisation? Instead, the political scene is predominantly grey on grey; for example, it is no longer possible to distinguish the leftwing, pro-globalisation agenda of giving political form to a global*

society growing together economically and digitally, from the neoliberal agenda of political abdication in the face of blackmail by the banks and unregulated markets. Political contrasts therefore need to be made recognisable again, including the contrast between the 'liberal' open-mindedness of the Left – in a political and cultural sense – and the nativist drivel of rightwing critiques of unfettered economic globalization. In a word: political polarisation again needs to crystallise between the established parties on substantive issues. Parties that give rightwing populists attention rather than contempt should not expect civil society to disdain rightwing slogans and violence” (Habermas , 2016).

The aim of the confrontation is not the extermination of the other, nor even the political vanishing of him, but the logical search for and presentation of alternatives that are fruitful for democracy. The refutation of phenomena, arguments, practices and logics that are contrary to democracy and the presentation of arguments that constitute the institutional re-establishment of democracy in modern terms. It is not enough to differentiate from the dictates of austerity in the midst of a crisis. A social democracy with this orientation is not presented as a feasible alternative to the mainstream of neoliberalism but simply as a management valve of radicalism and protest. What needs to be made clear is that the successive crises from the economic landslide that followed after 2007 , the subsequent refugee crisis , the coronavirus pandemic, to the current energy crisis combined with the risk of wider war due to the Russian expansion, has affected in all European countries elementary dimensions of human dignity and the inviolability and indivisibility of fundamental human rights as the basis of any democratic policy. Where human rights are not respected and entrenched, there can be no social peace and justice and no lasting economic growth.

The demand for a "new social democracy" with a modern narrative is certainly timely. This demand stems from the very uncertainty and crisis in which the so-called social left in general finds itself today. It is obvious that there is an ideological and organizational fragmentation of the left that resembles a shattered mirror. From this point of view, concepts such as 'reform' or 'modernisation' do not have a uniform interpretation in the left's conceptual arsenal and even take on a negative connotation, since they are interpreted as the ominous dynamics of society against which active resistance must be shown. Left-wing politics today often means defending the gains of the past. Since we cannot turn the wheel of history back to a golden age of the past, we must at least maintain the status quo. The question

therefore arises: does the left express the new conservatism?.

To this question the 'postmodern centre-left' comes up with a supposedly realistic vision and at the same time hollow rhetoric of modernisation embedded in the failed tradition of the so-called third way and the new centre. The concept of reform dominates this new ideology. Its exponents forget the negative experiences of the new centre and modernisation from which the centre-left and social democracy in Europe has so far been unable to recover.

In the context of excessive realism, which refers mainly to the need for fiscal consolidation, the clear and comprehensible objective of social justice is completely absent. The political thread and the accompanying 'narrative' of a modern social 'philosophy' of justice, progress and solidarity is completely missing. For all these reasons, a new narrative should focus on the democratic polarisation with neoliberalism and populism , with the project of social justice and equality as its epicentre.

Yet pragmatism is a virtue only if it is measurable in specific principles of justice and policy goals. Politics requires realism but also substance. In the long term, people are only moved and moved politically if the goals are clear and understandable. In times of crisis, the camp of 'populists and vigilantes' on the one hand and 'hard managers' on the other prevails. The political essence of both is clear and is translated into exhaustive but clear political abstractions. Subversion of the existing order on the one hand cuts and impoverishment on the other. In between, no concrete and clear vision of 'social peace and justice' and 'balancing of social interests' has been formulated as befits a social democratic or centre-left party.

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