



| FEBRUARY 19, 2017, Lübeck, Germany - Chancellor candidate Martin Schulz from the SPD in conversation in Gollan Kulturwerft.

SOCIAL DEMOCRACY: DARING UNCERTAINTY

by Laura Slimani

To prevent further decline, European social democracy requires a comprehensive and radical structural overhaul, one that encompasses substantive changes and improved voter engagement.

The danger of stunting growth

This trend has caused the social democrats to decline for a number of years, despite isolated victories across various quarters. I do not consider that the cycle theory succinctly explains how the same parties with the same ideas can lose

one election and then seemingly win the subsequent election due to the inevitable pendulum swing. Political cycles are dynamic in nature. It is unlikely that social democratic hegemony will ever return to the political left in France, Spain, Greece, the Netherlands, or Germany. We are witnessing a structural weakening of social democracy and the vacuum is being filled by

a variety of political movements. These movements pose serious questions (often appropriately) of social democracy that go beyond a simple 'inventory' exercise.

Firstly, social democracy has been irrevocably damaged by public disappointment; from the failure to adapt social development policies initially implemented during periods of

| PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION, FRANCE
Vandalised campaign posters of the socialist candidate Benoit Hamon.



strong economic growth to periods of weaker growth to the gradual transition towards a conservative stance on social issues. When placed under pressure from corporate shareholders we have, in certain circumstances, conceded ground on employment provisions and on occasion we have permitted salary stagnation or even salary regression. We have acted to privatise public services that have become costly and ineffective and reduced taxes on the highest wage earners in return for hypothetical economic growth. However, this does not mean that progress has not been made in other respects. But these decisions have discredited us. We require a complete structural reconstruction and not simply a superficial renovation where the outcome has been pre-determined.

Do not be afraid of radicalism

To re-establish socialism, we must embrace a degree of radicalism. The environmental crisis and increasing inequality across all levels of society coupled with the severe democratic crisis mean that we must implement systemic solutions and not simply a solution aimed to permanently change our past considerations. We cannot simply add a new idea to an already finalised program, we must reflect on what we can do today to ensure that society is fairer, more sustainable and more democratic. It is for this reason

that we must listen to academics on key issues. We must consider how to redistribute wealth whilst limiting production. We must consider how to acquire new rights for the oppressed whilst ensuring a cohesive society. We need to find local solutions to global issues, and European solutions to social welfare issues as well as corporate and fiscal dumping (predatory pricing), which are now matters which fall within state jurisdiction.

A "daring" political strategy

New ideas and unexpected personalities have emerged during recent election campaigns. The common feature between Benoît Hamon, Jeremy Corbyn, Bernie Sanders and Pedro Sanchez is the contrast which exists between the mobilisation of the people that successfully advanced each of their respective campaigns and the resistant attitude of the political elite within their parties. The power of elected representatives gradually took precedence over political ideas within our political programmes. However, the elite within each organisation seek only to preserve the status quo because it favours their position; this applies equally to elected representatives as it does to party leaders. Any candidate or political idea, even where they receive strong support from the public often faces institutional resistance that should not be underestimated. The Corbynist example serves

as an encouraging and practical illustration of such a populist movement. After being virtually destroyed by the Labour Party's Blairist establishment, no one thought a year ago that Corbyn could become Prime Minister but today it is not only possible but it is carried by an unparalleled level of public enthusiasm. To achieve this goal, the Corbynists implemented an ingenious strategy intended to conquer the hearts and minds of the public; they empowered a powerful collective imagination with promises of large-scale investment in the internet and openly engaged with the public in an intelligent manner. Jeremy Corbyn successfully identified his opponent thanks to his campaign slogan "For the many, not the few."

If the electoral system within the United Kingdom is better suited to change, this is only true insofar as it has enabled the Labour Party to re-structure themselves. The same cannot happen within other countries - discredited parties will have to start afresh or concede and form a broad left-wing coalition in order to succeed.

In order for such a political re-shaping to take place we must devote all our strength to it. It is time for us to put our political strategy at the service of our ideals and not allow the reverse to happen. We must dare to propose new concepts that are so new that they are unpopular today. We must dare to identify our opponent: the financial elite

who get rich whilst others are reduced to poverty, the same group which has no intention of taking action to reduce global warming because they will not suffer the consequences. Dare to pursue generational, social, ethnic revival, not for superficial reasons but to enable us to share power. Dare to put everything on the table, including our partisan affiliation so that we can put the collective need before the disputes over the means.

This transformation could happen with ease. But it could also take a long time and be hampered by setbacks. Nevertheless, we must persevere. The earth was not made in one day and the left even less so. So, we must remain prepared.



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