



The European Left's unjustifiable standoff

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Abstract

It is obvious that the 2007 financial collapse, the accompanying refugee crisis, the health crisis, and the coronavirus pandemic have all had a role in the current bleak political climate. At the same time, the left lacks a distinct message or strategy for enhancing the lives of common people. In any case, the financial crisis' emphasis on austerity and competitiveness has made the social conditions of the populace worse. The need for a "new left" with a pertinent narrative is unquestionably important. The uncertainty and instability that the so-called social left is currently dealing with in general is a direct cause of this desire. , The call for a "new left" with a relevant narrative is undoubtedly necessary. This demand is a direct result of the present-day uncertainty and instability that the so-called social left, in general, is experiencing. As part of a public policy program with an effective welfare state at its core, the democratic Left needs a contemporary pragmatism in relation with realistic but substantial political objectives and demands. The new Left-wing narrative must place the goal of social justice at the center of a social realist framework that does not merely focus on the need for economic competitiveness and fiscal balance. Representation of a modern social "philosophy" of solidarity, advancement, and justice is necessary. This new agenda needs to be included into a long-term political reform strategy, which can only be realized when objectives are clear and obvious to the general public.

1- Introduction: The problem faced by the left

It is clear that the financial crisis of 2007, the subsequent refugee crisis, the health crisis, and the coronavirus pandemic have all contributed to a gloomy policy environment. The conditions for achieving political consensus have changed, favoring various forms of populism, the escalation of polarization, and political upheavals in particular (Kotroyannos;Mavrozacharakis, 2018:10-25).

Neoliberalism has failed empirically, but ironically, during the years of the economic crisis following 2008, its hegemonic and basic role as a policy tool in the entire structure has been further strengthened (Crouch, 2011). In other words, macroeconomic constraints and demands from the civil society don't seem to affect neoliberalism. Nevertheless, the integration of politics into the economy and the ensuing "dethronement of politics," as anticipated by Hayek in 1973 (Hayek, 1973:149–152), are factors that contribute to the systemic prevalence of neoliberalism.

According to Read (2009), Neoliberalism is accompanied by a "huge extension of the field and scope of economics," which is a different type of economism that assumes social and political realities are inevitably reducible to economic factors (Hall, 2011). However, it is this very development that poses a great deal of risks to the long-term viability of democracy. Politicians' private interests are openly revealed, among other things, as a sign of the integration of economics and politics. Governments of "technocrats," "bankers," or "experts" were founded without any democratic legitimacy, citing the "survival" of nations (Mounk, 2018, 98-112).

Some experts mention quasi-institutionalized coups, which face little opposition while the threat of default is present. Keucheyan & Durand (2015, 25) make the following claim in particular: «that the general political dynamic inside the EU since 2007 indicates to a retrenchment of democracy in front of the growth of an original element of "authoritarianism" that we shall name,..... Bureaucratic Caesarism.» What is the upper limit at which fear may actually create space for unrestrained and unjustified kinds of power? It is clear from the question itself that democracy itself is at its core.

It is inevitable that those civil forces that strive to protect the democratic acquis and the constitutional order will be discouraged since those who are entrusted to protect democracy break its rules. The end outcome is populist political conduct. In light of the foregoing, it is not unexpected that calls for weakening national

parliaments and reducing their veto power and prospects for policy co-creation are growing. Similar to how neoliberalism has become more dominant, a structural trend towards the destruction of the democratic *acquis* has become more pronounced in Europe. Parliaments are turning into vote-righteous, servile machines. Important decisions are made in closed-door committees of experts and ministries, where private sector has a significant impact.

In fact, numerous studies have demonstrated that there is a free flow of persons between the political and economic spheres. Ministries provide important posts to business representatives. The number of those who transitioned from political professions to wealthy economic roles is infinite. Even during their political careers, some people continue to preserve their "privileged contacts with the private sector." We must assume that a significant political and economic paradigm shift will take a long time to materialize because of the institutionalization of neoliberal prescriptions on the one hand and the growing connection of the market and politics on the other. Instead, a further escalation of the crisis is quite likely to occur.

The likelihood of democracy working in the sense that rights and citizenship are diminished due to the crisis decreases in proportion to how prosperous the western world is. The various civic, political, and social rights that have been historically attained and codified are unquestionably connected to modern European citizenship. However, the crisis is limiting political rights and harming social rights, making them invalid. It is undermining citizenship itself in this way. So, the crucial question is: What type of democracy can we talk about with crippled citizenship?

In its most persistent and extreme form, neoliberalism as an economic and social system does not require a democratic government. But because it is a system that stands for the economic elite, it only ensures profit and the expansion and institutionalization of these elites' power. This commonplace diagnosis is what explains the paradox above.

According to Chantal Mouffe (2011, 4-5), the liberal component of current neoliberalism has become so prominent that the democratic component has all but vanished. The concept of popular sovereignty is today regarded as outmoded and appears to have been abandoned in favor of democracy being interpreted solely as the upholding of the law and the protection of human rights. People who insist on giving the people a voice and room to meet their needs while criticizing the elites' regulations are labeled "populists." One of the fundamental characteristics of our "post-democratic" environment is this displacement of the democratic heritage. Currently,

the left faces a problem in that it does not have a clear message or plan for how to improve the lives of ordinary people.

2. Europe's political impasse

The EU has split into creditor and debtor countries, each with its own objectives, as a result of a neoliberal politico-economic strategy for managing global instability in the middle of the global economic crisis (Hall,2012:357). Conflicts at the European Council level are a blatant manifestation of this split, which affects all Community institutions, including the ECB. Germany has been the primary creditor from a wholly national standpoint since the start of the crisis, with the primary goal being to preserve the stability of the German banking system particularly the publicly-owned state banks (*Landesbanken*) and savings banks (*Sparkassen*) (Steinberg,Vermeiren, 2015). The first bailout in 2010 was intended to help Greece and other eurozone countries by reducing the multiplier effects of mistrust against the stronger eurozone members that are creditors(Verney,Katsikas,2021:251-264)

In other words, if the markets' confidence in Greece decreased, it unanticipatedly decreased for other eurozone members like Spain, Italy, and possibly even France, raising the risk level indefinitely. The euro's tarnished reputation is due to this violation - each country was in fact responsible for its part of the bailout, but there was no bailout clause in place. This has made many people in wealthy northern nations skeptical of the euro (Collignon, 2012:2-14). It is clear that this attitude would immediately be confronted with strong opposition from the people of northern Europe, particularly the German populace, who were unable to continue to understand the bailout costs and their allocation.

Many people believe that people in debt are lazy and opportunistic, and that they need to learn fiscal discipline in order to get out of debt. Greece was no exception and was treated as a "sinner", making it an "unworthy cause" for financial assistance. According to some authors, the German word for debt, Schuld, is the same as guilt (Sool,2015) . Even German economists, who ought to be more concerned with the statistics, think that Greece has to be taught a lesson about living in the past. According to Cohen (2013), "Growth is the payoff for good action in the moral mentality. Such virtue entails being thrifty and staying out of debt. It goes without saying that it is unethical to increase the fiscal deficit in order to promote growth. There is a reason why this issue is known as "moral hazard" among economists.

In reality, there was no bailout clause and each state was in fact responsible for its debts. Exactly, the violation of this rule is the reason why the euro was

discredited in the public opinion of the powerful northern countries. It is clear that this attitude would immediately be confronted with strong opposition from the people of northern Europe, particularly the German populace, who were unable to continue to understand the bailout costs and their allocation. These German residents' complaints echo the reluctance of citizens in other EU nations as well. This hesitation should not be seen as a display of nationalism but rather as a sign of a democratic deficit inside the European Union. The methods used to address the Euro crisis not only conflicted with existing European law, but also repeatedly transgressed the authority of national parliaments.

Under the guise of an emergency, the responsible institutions of the Eurozone, particularly the so-called Troika, imposed presidential decrees, ministerial decisions, and urgent parliamentary procedures that were against the EU's institutional and regulatory framework as well as the democratically expressed wishes of the people. Given the foregoing, it is reasonable to believe that, if there is a revival of regression towards the nation-state, this will be due to a weak European response to the crisis. a course of action that was mostly decided upon by Angela Merkel's German administration. Even if this argument may be fundamentally oversimplified, it does include some kernels of truth, especially when we look at the European crisis response strategy as a whole, which includes the refugee and Ukraine issues. The publicly increasing confrontation between state leaders also demonstrates the propensity to renationalize European policy. In the absence of the required safeguards, the dysfunctional European political system constantly causes splits and makes it impossible to reach consensus. Because there is no one federal European welfare state that could step in to regulate and normalize the many Member States through a common federal policy in both the fiscal and socioeconomic sectors, European integration is consequently fragmented.

While monetary union first had the appearance of a political endeavor, it now resembles a technocratic superstructure where everything is governed by open institutions that are subject to lobbying. Sadly, Maastricht did not achieve the intended goal of laying the groundwork for a European Political Union that would offer the required direction, stability, and, in the long run, a set of safeguards. Due to the Euro crisis, Europe is currently paying a price for the delayed unification of Germany.

After all, a significant transaction between Germany and France produced the euro as a hard currency. France committed to advancing and integrating German unity, as it did, while Germany demonstrated its willingness to give up its own,

extremely hard mark and actively take part in the euro adventure with soft currencies. However, Germany insisted that the European Central Bank (ECB) be established under rigorous German standards and have its headquarters in Frankfurt.

Despite the severe effects of the European financial crisis, it is now widely believed that the separation of the political and monetary unions was a historical error. All of the Eurozone nations have shown their willingness to push political integration one step further. The risk of the executive authorities' autonomy must be avoided if the EU is to democratically recover from its crisis of legitimacy and confidence. The critical sovereign right of budget approval can only be transferred to the European level once the European Parliament is able to control national governments as effectively as national parliaments do.

3. Political legitimacy is mutable

In conclusion, the once-strict requirements for attaining political legitimacy are now essentially a moving target. Traditional political forces have been given obvious limits to their expansion, but at the same time a dynamic front has developed to challenge the assumptions of democratic sovereignty in Europe (Habermas, 2014:89-93). This transformation can be attributed in part to the way democratic and progressive forces operated during the crisis. In particular, the Social Democrats and the dominant Left failed to actively oppose neoliberalism by being silent while it played out in Europe and failing to take a stand in favor of growth and against unemployment, particularly in the South. The shortsighted risks of Germany-imposed fiscal austerity creating a competitive Europe were not really questioned by the center-left.

According to Schmidt & Thacher (2013) « *neoliberal ideas have generally been more successful in policy debates and political discourse, winning in the 'battle of ideas' against weaker alternatives. In some cases, that strength may come from the seemingly common sense nature of neoliberal arguments. For example, appeals to the 'virtue' of sound finances using the metaphor of the household economy—extrapolating from the need to balance one's household budget to the need to do the same for the state budget—may resonate better with ordinary citizens than the Keynesian counter-intuitive proposition to spend more at a time of high deficits and debts. In other cases, neoliberal success can be attributed to the re-framing of current problems—say, as a crisis of public debt rather than of the banks; to the narratives—about public profligacy being the problem, belt-tightening the solution; and to the myths—for the Germans, that belt-tightening is the only way to avoid the*

risks of hyperinflation of the early 1920s, thereby ignoring the risks of deflation and unemployment of the early 1930s that led to the rise of Hitler. Equally importantly, it may be that neoliberals are not so strong but their opponents are weak. Where, after all, have the center-left parties been in all of this, in particular in Europe throughout the Eurozone crisis? Notably, only very recently have European social democratic leaders called for growth, even as they continue to dole out austerity».

All political forces have given the crises' political and social components, which frequently have dark overtones, second-class status. Even the center-left accepted the competitiveness priority, which was achieved by reducing consumption while reducing salaries, pensions, and public spending (Freeden, 2013:42-44;Mavrozacharakis;Tsagkarakis,2018).

Using this perspective as a foundation, Berman and Snegovaya (2019, 6) emphasize that the primary cause influencing the left's collapse is, *«the left's shift to the center on economic issues, and in particular its acceptance of "neoliberal" reforms such as privatization of parts of the public sector, cuts to taxes and the welfare state, and deregulation of the business and financial sectors»*. This shift over the long term had deleterious, perhaps even fatal, consequences. Berman & Snegovaya (2019,6) point out that the right shift of the left *«watered down the left's distinctive historical profile; rendered socialist and social-democratic parties unable to take advantage of widespread discontent over the fallout from neoliberal reforms and the 2008 financial crisis; created incentives for parties to emphasize cultural and social rather than economic or class appeals; and undermined the representative nature of democracy. The shift in the left's economic profile, in short, deserves center stage in any account of its decline. Moreover, this shift and its consequences have been crucial to the rise of a nativist, populist right and to the broader problems facing democracy today in Western and Eastern Europe, as well as other parts of the world»*.

In any event, the citizens' social circumstances have gotten worse as a result of the financial crises' emphasis on austerity and competitiveness. Greece, a nation with long-term deficits, serves perhaps the best illustration of how the race to implement austerity measures has resulted in surpluses in foreign trade. But all of this contributed to a serious social and political crisis, which was followed by a protracted period of political and social unrest.

Additionally, social democrats handled the refugee crisis casually and supported an open borders rhetorical policy, which once again disproportionately affected the South. It also displayed a careless unwillingness to deal with the

pandemic dynamically by bolstering the welfare state. The compromises and solutions put forth by the center-left to address the issues are therefore unconvincing, despite the fact that Europe has been in a state of crisis since 2007, and the heads of state and prime ministers of the countries have been slipping from one emergency to another (Andor, 2020: 642-654).

Due to the rising unemployment, Germany's stabilization program has not been able to find the required counterbalances. According to Fisoussi & Sacareno (2013:7) « ... *Germany and EU institutions blamed the crisis on public finances excesses, imposing austerity and the signature of the fiscal compact to introduce in member countries' constitutions the balanced budget requirement*».

The left-leaning parties must mount an anti-hegemonic onslaught against attempts to undermine the welfare state's fundamental institutions, privatize all aspects of social life, and submit it to market principles if the democratic component of politics in Europe is to be revived. Right-wing populist parties may attempt to take this space if the political left fails to address the aspirations of the public for a society that is more just and egalitarian (Mouffe, 2011: 5)

4. The lack of options, German politics, and the democratic left

The assumption that public policies, state injections of liquidity to revive the economy, and programs to strengthen the welfare state to deal with the pandemic and the refugee issue are necessary for a way out of the crisis has not been adequately defended by progressive forces and the center-left over the past ten years. To summarize, the democratic left insists on a certain easing of social repercussions through appropriate social transfers but has not redefined the state in an advanced and modern manner (Wang, 2020: 59–60). Nevertheless, Rodrik (2011; 2012) observes that effective economic policies have always relied on the state to foster growth and quicken structural transformation, notwithstanding the criticisms made by neoliberal economists regarding the functions of the state. In particular, as is evident, national governments were responsible for saving significant businesses, stimulating financial markets, and bailing out banks during the financial crisis. They also provided a social safety net (Rodrik, 2012).

According to Legatum Institute research (Alfaiate, et al. 2014), nations with a relatively high regulatory role of the state and the ability to provide high levels of social welfare, education, and individual freedoms while also integrating immigrants and minorities into the real economy, such as New Zealand, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Canada, Australia, Finland, Sweden, Denmark, and Australia, have the best

economic indicators for the years 2009 to 2014. Therefore, social cohesion has a beneficial impact on the real economy. The majority of empirical research demonstrates the connection between welfare and income security and a broad institutional framework, which includes a range of legal and regulatory frameworks derived from the level of governmental involvement on the economy (Rodrik, 2004; Zattler, 2004: 19-25). Prior studies, in particular, by the IMF (IMF, 2003), the World Bank (WorldBank, 2002), and a number of reputable scholars (Hall & Jones, 1999; Acemoglu, Johnson & Robinson, 2001; Rodrik, Subramanian & Trebbi, 2002), highlight the critical importance of the institutional role of the state for economic growth. The creation of a solid institutional structure at the national level aids in the smooth operation of society and averts situations of political, economic, and social unrest, which are typically associated with weak, unstable, and states with low efficiency metrics (Fukuyama, 2004; Zattler, 2004).

Market economies require robust state institutions at the economic and fiscal levels in order to maintain macroeconomic and fiscal stability as well as transactional legal certainty, efficient market operation, and social cohesion. With the help of suitable incentives and regulations that foster trust, transaction certainty, and efficiency, a reliable state institutional framework may create the overall conditions for investment and growth. In this situation, it is obvious that the state's role is essential to the proper regulation of the labor, financial, and products markets. Acemoglu et al. (2019) even go so far as to say that democratization often results in a 20 percent boost in GDP per capita over time.

A suitable institutional structure (institution building) for the adequate political regulation of the economy, however, has not been able to develop at the national and international levels due to the advent of neoliberalism during the 1980s and the social democratic compromise. Instead, market liberalization, deregulation, and privatization have been the main focuses of economic reforms.

The escalation of the austerity policies recommended by the German political leadership and its simultaneous adoption in several EU nations led to a complete political standstill of all democratic political groups because there was no new social democratic narrative about the state. Only gullible individuals, however, could believe that the German political establishment was unaware of the severe effects that the policy of extreme and ongoing austerity would have on political systems, causing governments to fall, political morale and parliamentary life to deteriorate, and even disintegrating collapses.

Along with these misleading changes, the extreme political poles on the right

and left are becoming stronger. The center-left is failing to persuade people of the alternative course, while people across Europe are doubting the legitimacy of their governments and Eurobarometer polls reveal that a significant part of Europeans are gloomy about the future of the EU. Social democracy appears to be stuck in the past, unable to move past or perhaps even transcend the Third Way era, instead of appropriately addressing the issues of the day. During this time, the democratic left underwent substantial neoliberal market model adaption. The Schröder-Blair manifesto, which was released 10 years ago on June 13, 1999, provided the framework for the Third Way agenda's subsequent changes, was perhaps where this development was most noticeable in Great Britain and Germany. It has since come to light that social democracy's shift to the New Center was a form of political marginalization.

5. The right's ascent, the need for reapproaching the working class, fresh issues and dated demands

Ironically, the escalating crises have compelled all political forces—including those on the right—to accept the necessity of an active state that performs social paternalism functions. Evidently, the electorate has the greatest mistrust for the established political forces of parliamentary democracy, particularly social democracy, because of this paradox (Dalton (2004: 157).

However, it is undeniable that the right has expanded across Europe in all of its forms, while the left has solidified its position. A crisis of left-wing politics, in fact of left-wing ideology as a whole, is at the root of this downturn. In order to create a new progressive, multiparty movement devoted to redistribution, the modern center-left must develop a new social alliance. It involves forming a diversified movement of many socioeconomic groups that split their votes between liberal parties, environmentalists, and socialists and the left.

In order to create a comprehensive agenda that will appeal to this complex new multiracial social movement, the new social democracy should identify social groups that support a new economic model, a new welfare state, and the expansion of social rights.

Inadvertently, the majority of social democratic parties across several European nations have as their "reference subject" a white, middle-aged man employed in manufacturing whose voice needs to be "won back." The working class as we know it today is not like this image. In a wide range of productive industries, we have low-wage workers of all stripes. Therefore, the key question is: What kinds

of policies may be modified to take into account the diverse interests that exist within this huge and diverse social group? It is obvious that one party cannot represent all of these interests. It requires a fresh perspective and cutting-edge demands that address the social body's modern makeup while emphasizing the most vibrant and forward-thinking segments of the populace. The call for wealth redistribution between generations should come first and foremost. Younger voters confront a number of challenges, including a far more competitive job market, greater housing costs, frequent training debt payments, increased social risk exposure, and more. What political actions should the new social democracy adopt to create an intergenerational contract, then?

It is obvious that there is no reason to equate this objective with the nationalization of sizable portions of the economy or with a socialist strategy that is especially interventionist. Nowhere does it say that if the left wants to win over younger voters, it must always cling to the antiquated political tools of the 1970s. Many progressive middle-class groups are afraid of the center-left because it frequently bears extreme political baggage. These groups advocate fair distribution of wealth and believe that a radical political agenda is not the best way to achieve these goals.

However, policies involving significant investments in a tuition-free education, solutions to issues like housing, an increase in public housing, essentially guaranteed income, higher health care costs, moderate rather than irrational tax increases for higher incomes, environmental policy, gender equality, minority rights, investments in new technologies, innovation, and green energy, investments in the public telecommuting sector, etc. are undoubtedly appealing policies.

6. Conclusion: Unity and a new social agreement

Therefore, a new social compact is always a possibility, as we know from historical precedent. The two world wars and the Great Depression taught us that big crises led to a fundamental restructuring of the tax code. After COVID-19, we'll probably see it again. One explanation for this is the knowledge that lower socioeconomic groups or those directly affected by pandemics are the most severely affected by the crisis, whilst higher socioeconomic groups are largely shielded or can be insulated. A renewed sense of solidarity may require higher-income groups in society to shoulder a larger share of the burden of the rising costs of the welfare state through increased public spending on health care, possibly higher minimum wages, increased assistance for those with precarious employment, and other measures.

There is a chance for a brand-new social contract, much like there was one during World War II and the Great Depression. However, a brand-new genuine concern connected to COVID-19 is also starting to materialize, namely the threat to the right of each individual to freedom. The democratic left cannot watch helplessly while some people or groups are advised to stay home while other people or groups are permitted to walk outside while personal information is gathered, people's movements and behavior are observed, and so on. The public health system, the common good, and communal responsibility must not infringe on individual rights according to the social democratic political philosophy. At its essence, democracy must be based on freedom.

We predict that these issues will become a new source of conflict in the years to come since the center-right camp is less concerned about them than the center-left camp. The aforementioned observations undoubtedly support the idea that left-leaning politics need a paradigm shift in order to prefer policies that encourage historical advances in favor of mankind rather than against it.

People who support initiatives to resurrect the left as a whole shouldn't ignore the fact that basic aspects of human dignity and the inviolability and indivisibility of fundamental human rights, which serve as the cornerstone of all democratic politics, are being violated even in the developed Western world today (Flood & MacDonnell & Thomas, & Wilson, 2020). There cannot be social justice or peace when human rights are not upheld and maintained, and there can never be sustained economic growth. Then, is it any wonder that the "new center-left" has prioritized reform over asking all European and supranational institutions whether they believe that the rigid austerity policy is compatible with the idea of human rights and whether they think that the social war that Europe as a whole is currently going through is compatible with the idea of human dignity?

The call for a "new left" with a relevant narrative is undoubtedly necessary. This demand is a direct result of the present-day uncertainty and instability that the so-called social left, in general, is experiencing.

It is clear that the left is divided along ideological and organizational lines, much like a broken mirror (Müller- Hennig, 2018:7-9). According to this perspective, terms like "reform" or "modernization" do not have a consistent interpretation in the left's conceptual toolbox and even take on a negative connotation because they are perceived as an unsettling dynamic of society that requires active resistance. Today's left-wing politics frequently involve protecting the victories of the past. We must at

least maintain the status quo because we cannot turn the hands of history back to a glorious period in the past. Therefore, the question: Does the left represent the new conservatism? arises.

The "postmodern center-left" responds to this topic with an allegedly realistic vision while also evoking hollow modernization rhetoric through the failed traditions of the so-called third way and the new center. This new worldview is dominated by the idea of reform. The center-left and social democracy in Europe have so far been unable to recover from the unpleasant experiences of the new center and modernization, which its proponents conveniently ignore.

The purpose of social justice is not at all present in the framework of an extreme realism, which primarily refers to the necessity for fiscal consolidation. The political undercurrent and supporting "story" of a contemporary social "philosophy" of solidarity, progress, and justice are entirely absent.

However, pragmatism is only a virtue if it can be measured against certain legal standards and political objectives. Realistic but substantive demands are part of politics. Long-term political change only occurs when goals are intelligible and evident to the public. In times of adversity, the "hard management" side typically coexists with the "populists and vigilantes" camp. Both have a distinct political core that translates into extensive but understandable political abstractions. On the one hand, subversion of the established order; on the other, budget cuts and poverty. As befits a social democratic or center-left party, no tangible and distinct concept of "social peace and justice" and "balancing of social interests" has yet been developed.

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