

Birgit Daiber, Cornelia Hildebrandt, Anna Striethorst (Ed.)

**FROM REVOLUTION
TO COALITION -
RADICAL LEFT PARTIES
IN EUROPE**

2

MANUSKRIPTE NEUE FOLGE
ROSA LUXEMBURG STIFTUNG

Birgit Daiber, Cornelia Hildebrandt,
Anna Striethorst (Ed.)

From Revolution to Coalition –
Radical Left Parties in Europe

Birgit Daiber, Cornelia Hildebrandt, Anna Striethorst (Ed.)

**FROM REVOLUTION TO COALITION -
RADICAL LEFT PARTIES IN EUROPE**

Country studies of 2010 updated through 2011

Phil Hill (Translation)

Mark Khan, Eoghan Mc Mahon (Editing)

IMPRINT

MANUSKRIPTE is published by Rosa-Luxemburg-Foundation
ISSN 2194-864X

Franz-Mehring-Platz 1 · 10243 Berlin, Germany

Phone +49 30 44310-130 · Fax -122 · www.rosalux.de

Editorial deadline: June 2012

Layout/typesetting/print:

MediaService GmbH Druck und Kommunikation, Berlin 2012

Printed on Circleoffset Premium White, 100 % Recycling

CONTENT

Editor's Preface	7
Inger V. Johansen: The Left and Radical Left in Denmark	10
Anna Kontula/Tomi Kuhanen: Rebuilding the Left Alliance – Hoping for a New Beginning	26
Auður Lilja Erlingsdóttir: The Left in Iceland	41
Dag Seierstad: The Left In Norway: Politics in a centre-left government	50
Barbara Steiner: «Communists we are no longer, Social Democrats we can never be the Swedish Left Party»	65
Thomas Kachel: The British Left At The End Of The New Labour Era – An Electoral Analysis	78
Cornelia Hildebrandt: The Left Party in Germany	93
Stéphane Sahuc: Left Parties in France	114
Sascha Wagener: The Left in Luxemburg	129
Clemens Wirries: A Party for the «Simple People»: The Socialist Party of the Netherlands	144

Daniel Schukovits: The Radical Left in Austria	163
Holger Politt: Left-Wing Parties in Poland	178
Stanislav Holubec: The Czech Radical Left	185
Norbert Hagemann: The Communist Re-Foundation Party: Development of the Contradiction between «Great Ambition and Little Power»	196
Mimmo Porcaro: The Italian Communist Refoundation Party: Apparent Continuity And Actual Break	215
Dominic Heilig: The Portuguese Left: The Story Of A Separation	233
Dominic Heilig: The Spanish United Left	255
Michael Müller: The Left in Bulgaria	276
Julian Marioulas: The Greek Left	292
Boris Kanzleiter/Đorđe Tomić: The Left in the Post-Yugoslav Area	309
Krunoslav Stojaković: Croatia Votes for Change	326
Dorothee de Nève/Tina Olteanu: Romania: The Search for a New Left Identity	330
Cem Sey: The Search for Unity: The Left in Turkey	348
Julian Marioulas: The AKEL in Cyprus	363
Roland Kulke/Mark Khan: The Electoral Systems in the Countries of Europe	372
Autors	382

EDITOR'S PREFACE

Since 2008, we – the Brussels Office and the Institute for Social Analysis of the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation – have been working to compile reports on the left parties of Europe. This is now our second publication on the topic. We published an initial compilation of country reports in the spring of 2009, which left many questions unanswered, and also provided no comparisons between the parties. This prompted us in the summer of 2009 to organize a meeting of authors, and to draft a list of questions for more thorough-going reports. Thus, we felt, it should be possible to analyse the situation of the left parties in Europe in a comparative manner. Initially, this investigation was completed in May 2010 and published in German, but delays in the translation and events in the countries involved made the English version obsolete before it was even finished. As a result, the texts have now been updated to cover events through the end of 2011. All 25 reports will be released internationally at the same time, as a compiled volume in the *rls Position Papers Series*.

The political spectrum of left parties in Europe ranges from social democratic, left-libertarian and green-alternative formations to classical communist parties. We have limited our investigation to those left-wing parties which, according to their own self-image, belong to the political left, but neither to the social democratic nor to the green-alternative family. We refer to these parties as the «left parties». A total of some 60 parties can be considered part of this party family. As one of the few verifiable criteria for the selection of these parties, we have used their membership in one of the relevant European cooperative networks, specifically the European Left (EL), the New European Left Forum (NELF) and the Alliance of the Nordic Green Left (NGLA). Those parties whose elected representatives in the European Parliament adhere to the federal Group of GUE/NGL are also included.

To compare common problems and issues of party development, strategy and programme, it is necessary to use the theoretical and empirical tools of electoral and party

research. These instruments have hitherto been applied to the parties discussed here in only a few cases. Comparative (western) European research on the development of the political systems in western and east-central Europe generally treats radical left parties – to the extent that they are politically relevant – as part of the left spectrum, without addressing their own development in any detail. Therefore, this publication is an attempt to enter into a comparative discussion of the development of radical left parties in Europe without as yet satisfying the demand for a well-grounded research effort of these parties.

The present anthology includes 23 country reports, one of which is on all the countries of former Yugoslavia, and two of which are about Italy. For some European countries, we have not been able to provide any analysis, since we were unable to find suitable authors within the required time frame. In some, we originally had reports, but were unable to get new ones for the present 2010/eleven publication.

The questionnaire developed for the country reports referred to the development of the parties, their political concepts and their self-understanding, their organisational structures, strategies and programmes, as well as their current use value in the political structure of the respective countries. Here, the focus of the authors of the different reports is again very different. There are several reasons for this: First, the national frameworks differ widely; second, there are also significant differences in their political traditions and goals; and finally, many of the parties are too small to allow for any meaningful statements about the social composition of their memberships. Hence, the country reports present differing segments of the histories and current situations of radical left parties.

The main focus of our interest was and is the question of the potentials of radical left-wing parties and their chances for breaking out of the predominantly defensive position that has prevailed since 1989: Under what conditions do radical leftist parties compete successfully in the political spectrums in their countries? What is the role of programme and self-image? To what extent are the parties in a position to bring together actors from various left tendencies? And, beyond that: to what extent are they able to bind various sub-cultures to themselves, and to create alliances to push through leftist demands? Do the parties concerned in fact address the building of counter-hegemonic societal alliances – or do they prefer to stay within their own «camps»? What answers do they provide to the existential issues of European development? And where can we find examples of transformational projects of a forward-looking character?

We hope to be able to provide answers to some aspects of these questions in our study, and thus to not only contribute to a better understanding of radical left-wing parties in Europe, but also to help spark some thought about their ability to act in a Europe of the future. The existential problems in Europe and the world, the global crises, climate change, the social political changes in Europe and elsewhere, and the growing number of regional wars call for left responses and common strategies.

We would like to express our thanks to the authors of the country studies, particularly for rewriting and updating their papers for the English edition, and to our translator Phil Hill for incorporating these changes into the final version. Finally, we would especially like to thank the European Left Party and the European Foundation transform! Europe, the European network for alternative thinking and political dialogue – the most important actors in the development of common strategies.

Berlin, November 2011

Inger V. Johansen

THE LEFT AND RADICAL LEFT IN DENMARK

The parliamentary elections in Denmark in 2011 brought the Danish left back to power again after ten years of a right-wing government which had opened the door to government participation by the anti-immigrant, populist right wing in northern Europe. Yet even half a year later, there are signs that the new government is not living up to its promise.

Taking aim at the right-wing government

Starting in 2009, the four parties of the centre-left, the Social Democrats (SD)¹, the Socialist People's Party (*Socialistisk Folkeparti/SF*), the Radical Liberals (*Radikale Venstre*²/RV) and the Red-Green Alliance Unity List³ (RGA) developed a close partnership to replace the right-bourgeois government; it began with a cooperation agreement between the SD and the SF. The crucial role of the Social Democrats in the building of the Danish welfare state in the 20th century made the Social Democrats the only truly sizeable party of the Danish working-class over that period – especially after the Second World War when the Social Democrats became the party which more or less determined Danish politics. As such, they participated in a system of so-called «left-right» – or «right-left» – parliamentary deals on a number of issues. By and large, the right wing bourgeois parties, particularly the Conservatives and Liberals, accepted to

1 Officially, the abbreviation for the Danish Social Democrats is simply «S»; for clarity, we will use «SD» here.

2 This means «radical left», just as the right-wing Liberal Party is called «the Left», but this has never had any connection to socialism; rather, it is a relic of the 19th century, when the Liberals were «the left» and the Conservatives «the right».

3 Enhedslisten – de Rød-Grønne actually means «Unity List – the Red-Greens». The English translation of the party name used here, «Red-Green Alliance», and its abbreviation «RGA», date back to 1990, when it was still a true electoral alliance which tried unsuccessfully to incorporate the Danish Green Party; the subsequently formed party has retained the name.

preserve the Danish welfare state, albeit reluctantly, as it enjoyed the overwhelming support of the Danish population for maintaining the welfare state.

This system of right-left parliamentary deals was effectively broken during the first decade of the new century by the bourgeois government of Anders Fogh Rasmussen⁴ which came to power in 2001 with the support of the extreme right-wing Danish People's Party (*Dansk Folkeparti*/DF). It cut spending for the public sector massively, especially in the hospital sector. Only in rare instances did the government seek consensus with the SD and the RV; more rarely still with the SF. One example was a deal on defence in 2009, for an increase in the military budget.

This parliamentary situation contributed to the development of cooperation between the SD and the SF, for the first time in Danish politics. Previously, the Social Democrats had preferred to cut deals with the left-liberal RV. But this new Social Democratic departure was also a pragmatic reaction to the party's loss of support over the past 10 to 15 years. This is very much due to the economic effects of the party's efforts during its years in power to adapt to the monetarist stipulations of the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) and join in the general Social Democratic/New Labour acceptance of neo-liberalism, with such measures as dismantling and privatisation of the public sector. To important sections of the Danish population, there no longer seemed to be any difference between the policies of the Social Democrats and those of the bourgeois parties with regard to support for the welfare system.

Other important factors for this new departure included increasing trade union activity during the preceding years for wage rises, and equal pay in both the public and private sectors, accompanied by the emergence of a social movement against cuts in public welfare, from which the SF had benefited, at the expense of the SD. This social movement was and still is quite a strong popular undercurrent, but was slow to emerge. Social unrest is a new development in Denmark, as there had been no widespread trade union or social movement action in Denmark since 1985. The strongly centralised, but reformist trade union movement built up during the last century was closely connected to the Social Democratic Party, as both had the same roots in the 19th century. But the onslaught of neo-liberalism undermined the trade unions, reduced their membership, and weakened their position, although they are still reasonably strong compared to countries outside of Scandinavia.

For a remarkably long time, there was no social reaction to the government's neo-liberal policies, probably because they were being introduced only gradually, to avoid reactions, for the government was fully aware of the overwhelming popular support for the welfare state. At the same time, the government pursued a policy of tax caps and tax cuts, promoting individualism at the expense of solidarity. These years of social inaction shifted public opinion to the right – aggravated, too, by an immense

4 Anders Fogh Rasmussen became Secretary-General of NATO in the spring of 2009 and was replaced by Lars Løkke Rasmussen (no relation); both are from the Liberal Party.

government and media campaign regards the «problem» of immigrants and of Islam, and how better to curb terrorism and crime.

The attractiveness of the SF for the newly mobilised public workers was not surprising, considering the poor record of the SD since the 1990s; it did not, however, mean that these workers had now been radicalised or moved further to the left. The big question was what their concrete expectations of a new centre-left government would be. An opinion poll survey in January 2010 of prospective SF voters, some 18–19 % of the electorate, left no doubt as to those expectations, in spite of the SF's compromising on some of its former policies. There thus emerged a new inter-dependence between the SD and the SF, with the former depending on the SF to appeal to voters, while the partnership itself increased the SF vote, as it lent it credibility as a future government party. On the other hand, the new partnership meant that the SF adapted to many Social Democratic and centrist positions, which held the risk of undermining its position later on – and this is the in fact what has happened.

One problem was that the lower middle and working classes and the elderly, many of them former Social Democratic voters, were split with regard to their electoral preferences, with many attracted to the extreme rightist DF, which supported both such traditional values as social security and also focussed on the issue of «un-Danish» Islam. Even the economic crisis did not automatically increase electoral support for the centre-left parties; rather, there was some confidence that the bourgeois government would maintain an acceptable level in the social realm, and allow Denmark to weather the economic crisis with the help of a growing budget deficit, which reached €13 billion by 2010 – although the policies of the bourgeois government clearly contributed to badly undermining the Danish economy.

The origins

The modern radical left in Denmark, i.e. parties to the left of Social Democracy, originated in the split in the socialist and labour movement around the time of the First World War. Social Democratic defectors were the main founders of the Danish Left Socialist Party (*Danmarks Venstresocialistiske Parti/DVP*), formed in 1919, which immediately affiliated with the Third International, and changed its name to the Danish Communist Party (*Danmarks Kommunistiske Parti/DKP*) in 1920. The DKP did not succeed in attracting any substantial popular support until around 1931, as a result of the dissatisfaction of growing numbers of Danish workers with the response of the SD to the social and economic crisis. In general, the DKP toed the CPSU political line. The Second World War made the party immensely popular, due to its important role in the Danish resistance to German occupation.

The Socialist People's Party (SF)

However, the DKP subsequently suffered a downturn during the Cold War. Particularly the insurrection against the communist regime in Hungary in 1956 and the ensuing Soviet military intervention had serious repercussions for the party, leading to internal ferment and a split – and subsequently to the formation in 1959 of the Socialist People's Party (*Socialistisk Folkeparti/SF*), detached from Soviet control and based on so-called «popular socialism». The party was established by former CP members, including Aksel Larsen, the former CP Chairman, who became its new leader.

A really new departure in the socialist/communist movement was not seen until the end of the 1960s, with the upsurge of grassroots movements which transformed, radicalised and decisively strengthened the socialist and left movement. It even had an impact on the traditionalist DKP, otherwise criticised by the new grassroots, which reaped the fruits of the popular mobilisation against Danish membership of the EEC (later EU) in the run-up to the Danish referendum on membership in October 1972. This was also due in no small part to the chaotic splits and divisions of the radical left at that time, which made many grassroots activists turn to the DKP.

The radicalisation of the Danish left undoubtedly contributed to the first and only split in the SF, when it won 20 seats out of 179, following on its first huge success in the elections of 1966. It decided to support the formation of a Social Democratic government, but with no SF cabinet seats, due to internal resistance to such a move. When, in 1967, it supported a government suspension of a cost of living allowance for workers, there was uproar within the party, including its parliamentary group. At an extraordinary SF Party Congress, the radical wing won the support of nearly half the delegates, leading to a split and the formation of the Left Socialists (*Venstre-socialisterne/VS*), a party of the New Left. In the parliamentary elections in early 1968, the VS won four seats, while the SF dropped to eleven.

Since the 1960s, many within the SF have aspired to governmental cooperation with the SD. This has affected SF policies, sometimes to an extraordinary degree. At times, the party has been able to attract much support in parliamentary elections – especially, after 1966, in 1987 (27 seats) and 1988 (24 seats), as a result of the successful anti-nuclear missile movement – only to lose it again soon thereafter, usually due to a shift towards Social Democratic positions, with the intent of laying the foundation for future cooperation. In 1993, for example, the SF supported the compromise Edinburgh Agreement, after having supported the Danish «no» to the Maastricht Treaty in 1992. This led to parliamentary losses in the 1994 elections (down to 13 seats) and paved the way for a new party formation on the basis of the loose alliance called the Red-Green Unity List (RGA), which had won six seats in the elections. But the downturn had already begun at the previous election in 1990, when the SF had only 15 seats, probably as a side-effect of the collapse of the Soviet Bloc.

The SF: Socialist, social democratic or green?

Internationally, the SF⁵ is associated with the Green parties in the European Parliament and with the red-green parties at the Nordic level – the Left Socialist Group in the Nordic Council and the Nordic Green Left Alliance (NGLA); it also has observer status in the European Greens. This causes some confusion as to what kind of party the SF really is. However, its move out of the Left Parliamentary Group in the European Parliament to the Greens Group in 2004, which it repeated in 2009, is an indication of a policy turn from the «radical left» to a more centre-left position, although it explained the move with the desire to no longer belong to a group of «communist» parties. Nor does the SF seem to see itself as part of the European «radical left» dialogue concerning the economic crisis and its alternatives, and is not very interested in the European Left and its discussions. Moreover, although it was one of the founding parties of the New European Left Forum (NELF), it has not been very much involved in the activities of the Social Forum (SF) processes since its change in electoral strategy, or in the grassroots movements behind them. But some of its members were active in the alternative climate activities during the Climate Summit in Copenhagen in December 2009. The SF is not a «natural» green party. However, green policies have been important on the Danish left since the 1970s, not only in the grassroots movements, but also in the SF and the VS, a precursor to the RGA, which is one reason the Danish Green Party has never really taken off. During the 1980s, both the SF and the VS had contacts with the German Greens.

It is difficult at this point to assess the long-term strategic orientation of the SF – whether the party will finally become more or less social democratic, green or with some kind of socialist orientation, or a combination of all the above, will prevail. A break with capitalism does not seem to be part of the SF's strategy. In 2010, Party Chair Villy Søvndal explained that «The way to change modern and complex societies is by gradual reform, not by ways that will totally destroy stability».⁶ The party describes itself as a «modern socialist party working to create a world where people and the environment have a higher priority than money and profit».⁷ Originally, the SF was based on a socialist ideology, termed «popular socialism», and was later also inspired by democratic socialism and green politics. Since the early 1990s however, it has moved from being an EU-critical party to being pro-EU, albeit still critical of some EU policies, just as it now recognizes the market economy as the basis of society, but demands greater economic redistribution than exists today. The party has also been fully in support of the EU's Lisbon Treaty. Nonetheless, there is disagreement within its ranks over these issues. For example, probably around half the members still

5 Website of the Socialist People's Party (SF): <http://www.danskfolkeparti.dk><http://www.sf.dk/>

6 Politiken, Jan. 5, 2010. Feature article by Villy Søvndal, «Vejen til en regering med SF» (The Road to a New Government with the SF).

7 Website of SF: <http://www.sf.dk/>. «SF's politik i hovedtræk» («An outline of SF politics»; in Danish only).

seem to be opposed to the introduction of the euro – one of the Danish opt-outs to the Maastricht Treaty.

The SF experienced a sharp increase in membership during the last half of the decade, as well as in electoral support, especially after Villy Søvndal took over in 2005. He has been a media asset to the party, leading long-term change in electoral strategy along with changes of party policy, both in the context, of the party's efforts to present itself as fit to take office. He seems to have succeeded at least in that: he is now Denmark's foreign minister. He also focussed on professionalizing the party, which at the SF Annual Congress in April 2009, involved an organisational centralisation which shrank the party leadership from a 39-member National Board with a 9-member Executive Committee, to a National Executive of 17. Internal critical debate has also been reduced.⁸

The SF's membership reached over 16,500 in February 2009 with the share of women at 51.5%. In the general election of November 2007, it achieved 13% of the votes and doubled its seats in the Folketing, Denmark's unicameral parliament, to 23, out of 179. In the local government elections of November 2009,⁹ the party elected 372 members of regional and local councils, and six «mayors»¹⁰, a huge gain, and again increased its nationwide vote share to 15.3%¹¹, after having elected two MEPs in the European election in June 2009. The SF's support is primarily concentrated in the cities and big towns, and among the middle class with secondary or higher education; to a lesser extent it draws support from working class people with less education.¹²

But at the same time, the party has developed quite a pragmatic approach to its policies – with very little hesitation to compromise with bourgeois parties. Comments by the centre-left media and by left-leaning letters to the editor have often focused on this «turn to the right». Ole Sohn, chair of the SF parliamentary group, was quoted in an article on the «tightening of the party's political line» in 2009 to the effect that the SF is «just as left-wing as ever, but compromises are necessary as tangible steps to gain power.»¹³ Villy Søvndal wrote around the same time that, «compromising your ideals is not the same as renouncing them.»¹⁴

8 Kim Jørstad (SF), «SF på magtens vej» («SF on the road to power») Politiken, Jan. 12, 2010.

9 The local government elections are both local council and regional elections.

10 «Borgmestre». As in Germany («Bürgermeister»), these include both mayors of smaller towns and deputy mayors – in effect, «cabinet members» – of larger cities; in Denmark, that means only Copenhagen, where the SF has two. The «Overborgmestre» – often translated as «lord mayor» – is a Social Democrat.

11 The Social Democrats too did better in the regional elections (30.3%) than in the 2007 general elections.

12 Vælgerundersøgelse for Enhedslisten (November 2008). The study is based entirely on previous academic studies concerning the preferences and attitudes of the Danish electorate.

13 Article based partly on an interview with Ole Sohn, Information, Dec. 28, 2009, p. 5.

14 Villy Søvndal, «Vejen til en regering med SF» (The road to a government with the SF), Politiken, Jan. 5, 2010

Media and letter comments have focussed on the following policy changes:

- A tightening of the party political line with regard to immigrants: The SD and SF have tried to meet the challenge of the extreme right-wing DV, which has attracted very many previously Social Democratic voters, by adapting their policies with regard to immigrants and refugees to some extent to those of the DV, or of the old bourgeois government.
- In 2008 the party supported the so-called 24-year rule, a minimum age for the immigration of family members, purportedly adopted to prevent arranged marriages, in order to adapt to the position of the SD; this move also met with criticism within the SF.
- In 2009, the SF joined in a broad consensus on defence, entailing increased military spending and the purchase of new jet fighters, as well as support for the Afghanistan War, after having voted for the principle of NATO membership being the basis of Danish foreign and security policy, although this conflicts with the SF's programme. It was explained by Ole Sohn in the above-mentioned interview as a result of changed reality: «There is no credible alternative to NATO.»
- The SF also supported the bourgeois government's tax cap, which benefitted the middle and upper classes, and voted in favour of the government's budget, which provided for more motorways; moreover, it voted for recognition of Tibet as being part of China.
- The party has also adopted tougher positions in legal and judicial policy, supporting longer sentences and the introduction of minimum sentences in new areas; this too was explained by Ole Sohn as the result of changed reality.

However, such issues have also led to conflicting views and statements from SF representatives. During the Copenhagen Climate Summit in December 2009, for instance, the SF parliamentary spokesperson on judicial policy applauded the police action against the demonstrators. The next day, Villy Søvndal criticised the police on his Facebook site. Similar disputes have emerged with regard to the forced deportation of Iraqi refugees.

The youth organisation of the SF, the Socialist People's Party Youth (*Socialistisk Folkepartis Ungdom/SFU*), is the largest Danish party political youth organisation with 3162 members (2008). It is a separate organisation, but with close ties to the SF.

The Danish radical left today

The term «radical left» refers to all parties to the left of social democracy, with a perspective of breaking with capitalism, not merely what is called the «extreme left». With the shift of the SF towards more social democratic positions, that party presents a problem with regard to the term «radical left». A few years ago this would have been different; in any case, we are here not including the SF under this term. The largest Danish party that can be considered «radical left» is the RGA.

In Denmark there are also a number of small radical left parties and groups with 300 members or less.¹⁵ They are mostly communist, including two Trotskyite groups whose members are also in the RGA. They have no chance of attracting sufficient support to achieve parliamentary representation by themselves, but their members and activists are often very active in extra-parliamentary activity, in such movements as the People's Movement against the EU, or solidarity work with Palestine, etc.

The RGA

The Red-Green Alliance (RGA) was formed in 1989 based on the hard-won experiences of the parties of the revolutionary, communist and new left during the 1970s and '80s, which showed that in order for the currents of the radical left to gain relevance and political influence at the parliamentary level as well as outside parliament, it would be necessary not only to cooperate, but to transform that cooperation into a new kind of alliance or party, with room for diversity and different tendencies. The main basis for this was the political reform of the DKP in the late 1980s, which opened the way for closer cooperation with the VS and the Trotskyite Socialist Workers' Party (SAP, a Fourth International party), and led to the formation of an electoral alliance able to achieve the 2% of the votes needed to enter the Folketing. In 1991, the RGA introduced individual membership, at the same time admitting a number of ex-Maoists into the Alliance. It soon grew into a party, the great majority of the members of which had no prior experience in the founding parties.

The RGA is based on socialist ideology and a Marxist analysis. It sees itself as a party of the grassroots, and is working for a society based on democratic socialism and ecology. The party is opposed to capitalism and neo-liberal globalisation. The RGA is the most leftist party in the Danish Parliament, which it entered at the election in 1994, winning six seats.¹⁶ In the 2007 election, it achieved 2.2% of the votes and four MPs. In the local elections in November 2009, it elected 16 members of regional and local councils, and one deputy mayor in Copenhagen.¹⁷ The RGA has never stood in European elections, but has chosen to support the two Danish EU-critical movements. It has no youth organisation, but cooperates closely with Socialist Youth Front (*Socialistisk UngdomsFront/SUF*), with just over eleven00 members.

Membership/party structures

The membership of the RGA now exceeds 4500, having doubled since 2003-'04; 44% are women. The average age of members is 43–44 years, but with a wide age-

15 For more information on the small Danish radical left parties and groups, see Inger V. Johansen: «Denmark – the Social and Political Left», p. 52, in Cornelia Hildebrandt/Birgit Daiber (ed.): *The Left in Europe*, Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, 2009.

16 Website of Enhedslisten/de Rød-Grønne: <http://ehedslisten.dk> <http://www.ehedslisten.dk/>

17 «Borgmestre»: see FN 10.

class distribution: Approx. 25 % were born between 1945 and 1959, and approx. 34 % after 1980. The party's greatest strength is in the capital and larger towns: half of the members live in Copenhagen, and some 16 % each in Zealand and Mid-Jutland, which includes Århus, Denmark's second largest city.¹⁸ The social background of the members is mixed. Around half are trade union members, mostly in three or four unions for professions requiring higher education – school teachers, child care centre employees, and other public sector workers – as well as the unskilled workers' union «3F».

The party is pluralist, with participatory democracy expressed in various ways: There is traditional representative democracy, with the election of delegates to party congresses and of members of the National Executive Board, as well as of the parliamentary lists – but combined with mechanisms that seek to counteract centralisation and increase democracy: There is no party chairman, but rather a collective leadership, and a high degree of autonomy of local branches, committees etc., some with meetings open to non-members. Elections to the National Executive Board include provisions for minority protection. The party leadership, MPs, deputy mayors, and party secretaries and employees are subject to a system of rotation, with a maximum tenure of seven years. In practice, this is extended somewhat for MPs, as the rules have been adapted to the electoral system and practices. All employees, including MPs, receive equal pay – that of a skilled worker in Copenhagen; the MP contribute the rest of their salaries to the party. The party has also remained true to its origins in terms of its rooting in various left currents, and guarantees the right to form factions and tendencies. In 2004, it adopted a gender quota system for the National Executive Board. The party often uses outside speakers and «experts» to help address critical issues. In 2007, university students prepared a study to improve the inclusion of women in party leadership work; it has subsequently been used as a basis for new initiatives in the party. Similarly, it has asked or hired outsiders to analyse the RGA electorate after recent elections.

The electorate

One such study¹⁹ after the 2007 election showed that the party was especially strong among voters with higher education, and, geographically, in Copenhagen; compared with the 2005 election, it lost votes among women and workers/people with less education, as well as, geographically, outside Copenhagen. This loss of working class votes was new for the party, and due in part to the fact that the 2005 elections had given the RGA an especially high vote of 3.4 %, and increased the vote both among women and outside of Copenhagen. The age-class groups voting for the RGA are especially the «60s generation» and the young. But the study also showed that there has been a

18 These three of Denmark's five regions account for approx. two thirds of the country's population.

19 Vælgerundersøgelse, op. cit.

general tendency over the past 10 to 20 years for working-class voters to move toward the right – to the bourgeois parties, and in particular to the DV. The same profile of the RGA electorate was apparent in the local elections in November 2009, when the party won nearly eleven % of the vote in Copenhagen, a 1.4 % increase over the local elections in 2005, while suffering a setback nationwide. But the regional election in 2009 showed that it had improved its vote since the general election of 2007, from 2.2 % to 2.6 %.

Trade unions and social movements

Generally, the party works to combine parliamentary and extra-parliamentary activities, as it considers the strength of the labour and other progressive movements as crucial for political and social change. RGA members and activists are reasonably active in their trade unions, but they are few. In order to improve their efforts, the party has put quite a bit of work into starting to build up trade union branches within the party (the strongest branches mentioned above), with the goal of improving their contribution to strengthening the trade union movement.

With the weakening of Danish trade unions, their close ties to the Social Democrats also have weakened since the turn of the century. Under the bourgeois government, this led to deals and an understanding between the Trade Union Congress (*Landsorganisationen/LO*) and the government, but also to financial and political support by the unions for the election campaigns of all the three left parties, the SD, the SF and the RGA. In some unions, such as the public workers' union FOA and the unskilled workers' union 3F, the left-wing has gained strength and influence.

RGA members are often involved in civil society organisations, from parent-teacher associations to grassroots movements; these are generally centre-left or left-leaning, including environmental and climate action movements and solidarity movements with Palestine, Latin America etc. A number of RGA activists were also involved in a campaign last summer to defend Iraqi refugees who had sought refuge in a Copenhagen church to avoid being deported, and lived for some time in a refugee camp. Some RGA members have been active in the People's Movement against the EU, and previously also the anti-EU June Movement, which was dissolved after losing its seats in the last EP election. A number of prominent RGA members have stood in EP elections on the lists of these EU-critical movements, which are centre-left. The People's Movement's present MEP, Søren Søndergaard, sits with the GUE/NGL (United European Left/Nordic Green Left) Group; he is a previous MP for the RGA.

International cooperation

The RGA is very active internationally, and takes part in such left networks as the European Left (EL), the New European Left Forum (NELF), the European Anti-Capitalist Left (EACL) and, as an associate member, in the GUE/NGL in the European Parliament. The party is also – like the SF – part of the Left Socialist Group

within the Nordic Council, where the Nordic left parties, including those of Greenland and the Faroe Islands, cooperate to advance their common political goals. The RGA has opposed the EU from the outset, but also sees it as providing an international perspective for working for a democratic red and green European alternative – a «different/another Europe». While supporting the Danish EU-critical movements, the RGA seeks to project its own left-wing criticism of EU neo-liberalism and militarism, in cooperation with left parties in Europe. And while cooperating with parties and movements elsewhere with differing views, it sees political and economic neo-liberalism, and a lack of democracy, as an integral part of the EU, which it believes cannot simply be change; rather, the whole institution must be abolished. The issue of how to view the EU is probably the most divisive on the European radical left, even among groups that agree on other key policy issues. These differences need to be further discussed, and a way found for dealing with them, without creating problems for future cooperation. The RGA is involved in such European and international events as the European Social Forums, and to a lesser extent World Social Forum, and the anti-G8 meetings. The RGA Women's Committee cooperates with the EL-Fem network, connected to the European Left, as well as with other women's organisations and networks at the European level.

The economic crisis

The economic crisis of recent years is a clear challenge to the broad Danish left. There are different views of the crisis here, with the SD and SF being inclined to call for reforms of the financial sector, as well as increased investment in the public sector, while at the same time supporting the government bailout packages for the banks. Unfortunately the policies of the centre-left do not seem all that different from those of the present government, which also wants to invest in the public sector. The RGA sees the crisis as one of the capitalist system, but provoked and deepened by the effects of the deregulation of the financial sector, particularly the real-estate bubble, and by neo-liberal policies in general over the past decades, implemented both by bourgeois and Social Democratic governments. The party was the only one in the Folketing to refuse to support the government bailout packages for the Danish banks in 2008 and 2009.

The electoral battle

Initially, the close cooperation and partnership between the SF and the SD caused them to move away from the RGA in parliamentary work, such as in drafting questions to government ministers, or submitting debate proposals. Moreover, on some issues, such as those related to immigrants and refugees, the left-liberal RV was often closer to the RGA than either was to the SD and the SF. Nonetheless, there was no doubt that an alternative government with the SD and SF in a central role would mean a positive change in social and environmental policies. For example, they planned to set up a state bank, to tax millionaires more heavily, and thus redistribute

wealth in favour of the less well-to-do. They also planned public investment projects in, and solutions to, environmental problems.

The RGA was firmly opposed to neo-liberalism and privatisation, military action, NATO, and the EU Lisbon Treaty and its consequences. On these issues, compromises would have been necessary for any cooperation with an SD-SF government. In general the RGA was ready to support such a government, but rejected participation in it; as the election approached it saw no reason to change its position in that regard. While it would have preferred a left alternative based on cooperation with the SD and SF only, since the participation of the liberal RV would mean that the difference from the bourgeois government would not be great enough, both prospective ruling parties seemed to want the RV on board; moreover, it was likely that they would need its votes for a majority.

It seemed that compromises between the RGA on the one hand and the SF and the SD on the other might be possible on immediate demands and alternative policies to improve the daily lives of people.

The RGA raised demands in both the environmental and the social welfare areas intended both in the short and longer term to shift the balance of power in favour of the working people. These included:

- A large-scale employment plan with massive investment in public and democratically controlled production in green energy and health, to counteract the rapid increase in unemployment;
- A sharp increase in unemployment benefits to the level of the minimum wage of a skilled worker in Copenhagen, and a massive increase in social security benefits;
- The following demands to secure the economic basis for welfare and jobs for all:
 - nationalisation of the banks, placing them under full public and democratic control
 - a tax on financial and currency transactions, modelled on the «Tobin tax»
 - significant boost in the corporate tax rate, to force companies which had made huge profits creating the crisis to pay for solving it;
- Expansion of environmental and energy policies to counteract the climate crisis, with tight restrictions on emissions, both at home and as Danish proposals at the European and international levels; here, party policies were very detailed;
- Measures to achieve an 80–90 % reduction in CO₂ emissions in Denmark by 2040–’50, while upholding high standards of welfare, and a 50 % reduction by 2020;²⁰ and, internationally, a 40 % reduction by 2020 for the rich countries, as the RGA had demanded at the COP15 in Copenhagen.

The RGA is opposed to the privatisation of energy, and to bio-fuels.

20 The RGA's climate plan for CO₂ reduction (in Danish): http://klima.enhedslisten.dk/sites/default/files/Klima-plan_web_0.pdf

European parliamentary elections, June 2009

The EP elections were a success for the right-wing EU-critical DV, the SF and the People's Movement against the EU, while the Social Democrats, the Radical Liberals and the June Movement lost one seat each (Denmark lost one of its 14 seats in the EP). Thus, the People's Movement eclipsed the June Movement within the EU-critical camp, due in part to the fact that Jens-Peter Bonde, a well-known veteran of the movement, had stepped down as the June Movement's MEP earlier in the term.

The SF's vote was interesting in that the party attracted 15.9% of the vote, yet scored around 18.8% in opinion polls soon thereafter. This can be explained from an analysis of the votes for the People's Movement²¹ according to which the Movement attracted the votes from the broad centre-left, taking 6% of the Social Democratic vote, 13% of the SF vote, and 64% of the RGA vote.²² The last figure was considerably lower than expected, since the RGA supported the Movement, and did not itself stand in the election, but apparently, many RGA voters – an estimated 40% – did not go to the polls. The reasons are probably, first, that their party was not on the ballot, and second, because, like many other EU-critical voters, they saw no reason to vote in an election for a body they rejected in the first place. More women than men voted for the People's Movement.

The large number of Social Democrats and SF voters who supported the People's Movement is interesting, as it shows that the EU-critical position has not died out in those ranks, despite the very pro-EU line of those two parties. However, the popularity of the SF was apparently not hampered by its pro-EU position – which it, like other pro-EU parties, modified during the election campaign with greater than usual criticism of the EU.

Judging from the very many former Social Democratic voters attracted by the EU-critical DV and from the SD and SF votes for the People's Movement, it can be assumed that there are still relatively strong EU-critical sentiments in the Danish working class.

As the election loomed, it became clear that the RGA's parliamentary seats would be decisive in forming a centre-left government. Although the party might not influence the policy of such a government very much, the fact of its key position heightened its role and the public focus on its policies and demands. The RGA thus began to formulate policies it intended to push in order to move a future centre-left government more to the left, realizing that this would also depend on trade union/popular pressure. These proposals included a green employment plan, a stop to further priva-

21 Folkebevægelsens stemmer til EU-valget 2009: Valgstatistik fra EP-valg (People's Movement votes in the 2009 EU election: Election statistics of the EP election). The analysis is based on three surveys: An exit poll on EP election day, three opinion polls, and a separate poll of 3652 respondents.

22 People's Movement support was estimated to consist of approx. 20% SD, 20% SF, and 20% RGA voters, with the rest from the bourgeois parties.

tisation, no measures worsening the conditions of the unemployed, no more bailout packages for the banks, and a peace plan for Afghanistan.

The centre-left takes power

On September 15, 2011, the parliamentary elections ousted the right-wing government and brought a new centre-left government to power, consisting of the Social Democrats, the Socialist People's Party (SF) and the Radical Liberals (RV), with the RGA as a supporting party not participating in the government. The new prime minister is the leader of the SD, Helle Thorning-Schmidt.

Compared to the elections of 2007 however, the results were also a setback for the SD and in particular for the SF, the real loser of the election. They were unable to form a new government without the seats of both of the two other parties, which had made gains in the election. The result were as follows (results of 2007 in parentheses): The RGA was the big winner, and tripled its previous result, winning 6.7% (2.2%), for 12 seats; the SF dropped to 9.2% (13%) and 16 seats; the Social Democrats' 24.8% (25.5%) and 44 seats was their worst result in history; and the RV's 9.5% (5.1%) and 17 seats provided the margin of victory. On the government side, Rasmussen's Liberal Party held its ground with 26.7% (26.2%) and 47 seats; the small Liberal Alliance climbed to 5% (2.8%) and 9 seats; and the Conservative Party was the big loser, dropping to 4.9% (10.4%) and only 8 seats. The right-wing extremist Danish People's Party, also lost key votes, winning only 12.3% (13.9%) and 22 seats. With that, the left had bare majority of the 175 seats in the homeland, in addition, one of the two Faroe Islands deputies and both Greenland deputies joined the left, giving it a majority.

Politically, this meant that the SD and SF depended more heavily on the RV, which during the negotiations on the formation of the government exerted pressure to retain as much as possible of the economic and labour market policies of the former government. The new government programme thus turned out more neo-liberal than anticipated, although some of the measures, such as the Euro Plus Pact, were supported by the SD and the SF as well. Unwillingly, they had to accept the restriction on early retirement, and do without their proposed tax on millionaires. However, both the RV and the RGA agreed with the SD and SF on a more ambitious programme on climate and environmental policy, and very probably contributed decisively to reducing restrictive policies on immigrants and refugees.

Although an RGA gain had been expected for some time, increased support had begun to show in the opinion polls – along with a parallel downturn for the SF during 2010 and 2011. Nonetheless, the tripling of its seats from four to twelve was a huge surprise. Moreover, since the elections, both the SD and the SF have seriously declined in the opinion polls, while the RGA has gained further, from 6.7% to 7.5%,

according to one poll published in November 2011;²³ that would put it ahead of the SF, which scored 7%. The disturbing fact is, however, that the radical left can't make up for the decline of the SD/SF partnership and the present weakening of the new centre-left government.

The main reason for this development is not the adoption of the state budget, supported by the government parties and the RGA, which voted for a state budget for the first time in its history. Rather, from the outset, there has been a media campaign to the effect that the SD and especially the SF had broken their election promises, with even many SF members openly expressing their dissatisfaction. These broken promises were largely due to the power of the RV. There were also a number of unfortunate cases of mismanagement by some ministers and other top party people.

However, the most fundamental cause of the problems seems to be an unclear political profile due to the confused policies of the SD/SF partnership. This was already apparent in 2010, as the two parties decided to support a new point system introduced by the government to tighten its policies on immigrants and refugees; that seems to have been the start of the decline of SF, whose role in the partnership with the SD seems mainly to involve adapting to the latter's policies. In the election campaign, this had even more dire consequences, as traditional SF policies and even SF leaders receded ever further into the background.

Conclusion

The disappointment with the new government has opened up a broad space on the left for the RGA, but it only partially explains the party's electoral success, with a massive increase in votes all over the country, even on the tiniest islands – a major swing to the radical left. There is no doubt that other important factors have also contributed, included the RGA's clear radical profile, and also a very popular leading figure, Johanne Schmidt-Nielsen, a young woman MP who seems to have been able to voice the anger and frustration of broad sections of voters – wage earners, women, the young and immigrants – with the ten years of right-wing, neo-liberal and xenophobic policies of the former government.

Moreover, since the electoral defeat of 2007, the RGA had carried out very consistent and conscious work to better combine the party's socialist and visionary perspectives with concrete demands and policies. Many of these policies – small steps to improve the lives of especially the most disadvantaged, and also support for environmental measures – were successfully brought into the negotiations on the state budget.

However, with regard to the large number of economic and labour market policies contained in the government programme and influenced by the policies of the former

23 See Politiken, an opinion poll by Megafon, November 25, 2011, p. 6. Also an article on the issue.

government, the government will very probably seek the support of the right-wing parties in parliament in the future. This may again affect the situation on the left. The RGA does not see the recession coming to an end, as do bourgeois economists and politicians. Even if it lets up, its effects, especially rising unemployment, will very probably last for several years. Increasing antagonism and conflict can be expected between employers, wage earners, and politicians, with attacks on social rights by employers and bourgeois politicians, using the crisis as a lever. While the unemployment level is not yet alarming, it will very probably rise in future, due to the poor economic prospects of Danish economy, after years of bourgeois neo-liberal misrule.

Anna Kontula/Tomi Kuhanen

REBUILDING THE LEFT ALLIANCE – HOPING FOR A NEW BEGINNING

Introduction

The Left Alliance (*Vasemmistoliitto/VAS*) is Finland's most leftist parliamentary group. In the last parliamentary elections, the party won 8.13 % of the votes and 14 seats in Finland's 200-seat parliament, down from 17 seats four years earlier. The party was founded in 1990 by a merger of the Communist Party of Finland (CPF) with the Democratic League for the Finnish People (DLFP), which had previously been its own «mass organisation». The two had gone separate ways during the 1980s, as the CPF hewed to its orthodox pro-Soviet line, while the DLFP moved in a Eurocommunist direction. Another split-off from that era, the Democratic Alternative, also joined the Alliance.

Throughout the existence of the Soviet Union, the left in Finland had cooperated closely with the Soviet system, and had to some extent been subordinated to it. Especially for the older generations, socialism still means Soviet socialism, so that the use of traditional socialist terms is still a taboo for many people. In its party platforms, the Left Alliance carefully defines itself as a «red-green party with fundamental values, which are freedom, sustainable development and equality.»²⁴ In that definition, «green» of course refers to environmental issues, while «red» stands for the tradition of the workers' movement, but also, in a broader sense, the demand for social justice. The party supports the so-called Nordic model of the welfare state, which includes healthcare, nursing and educational services made possible by a strong public sector and income-related unemployment benefits, as well as social security for all.

The building of the welfare state was the largest and most successful project of the left and the social democrats. The political change at the beginning of the 1990s, and

24 Vasemmistoliitto a

the enforcement of the neo-liberal agenda have, however, led to the gradual dissolution of that system, causing the role of the left to change from reformist to conservative – in the sense of conserving the welfare state. Although it is still hard to see the full extent of the change, it is evident that in light of recent reform efforts, the VAS is experiencing its greatest turning point since its founding days. It is attempting to change from a fortress protecting the old to a radical alternative to current bourgeois hegemony.

From the underground to the cabinet

The Communist Party of Finland (CPF) operated underground until the end of the Second World War. The Democratic League for the Finnish People (DLFP) was founded after the war to function as the electoral organisation of the CPF, and as a broadly-based people's front. It gained significant electoral support, and was even at times Finland's strongest party. However, at the end of the 1960s, the CPF/DLFP was plunged into drastic internal conflicts between those who accepted compromises, the so called majority or moderates, and those who wanted to continue opposition politics of principle, the so-called minority or hardliners. In the mid-1980s, CPF/DLFP finally split into two political forces that competed against each other in the elections.

The VAS was founded in 1990 as the continuation of this network of communist and «democratic» organisations. The new party was supposed to unite and reform the bickering left that had been shaken by the collapse of the socialist system. In its founding document, the VAS declared that it stood «on the side of workers, of peace and disarmament, of nature, and of the oppressed majority of humankind.»²⁵ The party was intended as a forum in which various left-wing supporters could exchange thoughts and receive support from each other. However, this attempt to unite various groups also led to the continuation of internal conflict: the split between the hard-line and the more reformist wing was passed on from the old movement into the new party. This manifested itself as an insurmountable prejudice, and resulted in bickering about how great the compromises might be that the party would allow itself to make.

The party's internal contradictions reached an acute stage when the recession of the early 1990s led to a temporary electoral victory of the Left in Finland in 1995. The VAS took part in the so-called «Rainbow Government» together with the Social Democrats, the Greens, the Swedish Party and the moderate-conservative National Coalition Party, which ruled from 1995 to 2003. While in the government, the VAS surrendered many of its goals and compromised on key issues; for example, the minimum social assistance and children's benefits were cut. In order to understand the dramatic nature of the VAS's government participation, it is essential to remember that this was the first time the leftists had ever taken part in a government together

25 Vasemmistoliitto b

with a right-wing party. In hindsight, the Rainbow Government must be said to have established neo-liberal politics in Finland, and to have served to neo-liberalize the leftist parties.²⁶ Some of the VAS's MPs who had opposed the cuts were expelled from the party's parliamentary group; claiming loyalty to the party manifesto,²⁷ they founded their own parliamentary group for the rest of the term. Many active members were also expelled from the party for supporting the re-foundation of the Communist Party.²⁸

From the mid-1990s until recently, the leaders of the VAS saw joining the government as of intrinsic value, because «only as a member of the government is it possible to have power.» Leftist labour movement leaders had a key role in the adoption of this policy. For them, cooperation with the Social Democrats and consensus politics with employers was the natural way of operating. As the party took part in the government, its non-parliamentary activity almost vanished altogether. Moreover, the VAS effectively broke off its relations with NGOs and popular movements. During the time of the anti-neo-liberalism movement, the party concentrated on governmental activity and was, for example, left out of the establishing of the Social Forum movement. The extensive peace movement triggered by the Iraq War was not on the party's agenda in any way. Foreign-policy statements were generally cautious.

Taking part in the government coalition chipped away at the credibility of the VAS as a party that questioned the system and enhanced the decline of its support. Due to the structural change in society and the fate of real-existing socialism in Eastern Europe, electoral support had previously been sharply declining.²⁹ During the 1990s, support for the VAS hovered around 10–12 %, but has since dropped to under 9%.³⁰ The crisis caused by the electoral defeat of 2003, and loss of credibility, culminated in the resignation of two chairs and the reformation of the party organisation. After the party's time in the government ended and people began demanding more leftist politics, some of the trade union leaders, including a former party secretary who acted as the architect of governmental cooperation, resigned from the party along with the chair. In the autumn of 2009, the 32-year-old MP Paavo Arhinmäki, a child of red-green urban activism, was elected chair of the party.

The predecessors of the VAS were traditional workers' parties. The trade union movement, permanent jobs and the work-identities of people were central to their self-realisation. However, a slow, wavelike change began in the early 1970s, as new groups, such as university students, artists and educated people joined the ranks, and

26 See: Patomäki 2000 and Alho 2009

27 Tennilä 1995

28 The CPF was re-enrolled in the Register of Political Parties in February 1997. There are nearly 3000 members in the CPF, but it has never gained significant support in national elections. See: <http://www.skp.fi>

29 Until to the end of the 1960s, CPF/DFLP received over 20 % of the votes, and in the 1970s still about 17–19 %.

30 The party is more popular in cities than in the countryside, but has its biggest stronghold in northern Finland. In Lapland, the party won 23 % of the vote in the 2007 elections.

has continued to this day. The precarity of working life, which has intensified since the VAS was founded, has accelerated the development. Especially in recent years, many active new members have joined the party who are highly educated but low-paid workers with short-term or temporary jobs. These changes have activated the party to critically re-examine itself and build a much-anticipated «new left», as a result of which the party is moving closer to some of its European sister parties, both functionally and ideologically.

For the first time since the 1960s, the traditional division of the party into two competing tendencies – moderates and hard-liners – seems to be becoming a thing of the past. The change in society has, however, created new lines of division. As early as the 1990s, there was a perceivable split between the nationally oriented, industrial-union-based trade union people and the activists who emphasised internationality and environmental values. Issues relating to animal rights and power production became important. The indifference that the party's industrial wing exhibited towards these issues is one reason why the party lost support to the Greens, especially among younger age groups. The discrepancies between the generations continuously affect the party's operations in an increasingly essential manner.

«Materialism, not moralism»³¹

Party dynamics currently appear to be led by the interaction of generational fractions, as is shown, for example, in the debate over value and benefit policies. Until the 1980s, the movement felt it represented a united group: the workforce, with a collective interest to fight for. However, the founding of the VAS occurred at a time when the public felt that class boundaries had become blurred. Instead of concrete benefit policies, people began discussing abstract values, such as equality, justice and community, which they saw as forming the basis of leftist ideology, and as the basis for uniting a heterogenic following. As the decade ended, this tendency was increasingly being criticised. The party's youth, in particular, is demanding radical concrete objectives in order to change society. In any case, different age groups see the party, its ideology and its general political functions in clearly different ways.

The most senior active generation, 55 and older, was politically socialised at a time when a significant part of society was tied to political activity. They were active in workers' sport clubs, bought food from workers' coops, met their life-companions at the social gatherings of workers' clubs, and if wages stopped coming in temporarily, received financial aid from workers' associations. Belonging to a trade union was a matter of course. Supporting a party was part of one's identity: it was the golden age of leftist activity. For this group that grew up in the old Marxist workers' movement, the party's essential objective is to protect the concrete benefits of the average working

31 Dan Koivulaakso, chair of the Left Youth in Tiedonantaja, Sep. 25, 2009, p. 13.

Finn, particularly issues concerning services and subsistence. Common areas include pensioners' clubs, the peace movement, friendship associations of various countries and sectoral activity within the party and trade union movement. In addition to activity in municipal councils and Parliament, they are also interested in public debates and assemblies. They appreciate the preservation of the history and theory of the workers' movement. However, after real-existing socialism fell apart, some people from this generation moved away from issues not concerned with daily politics. Not everyone wanted to take part in ideological discussions.

The political socialisation of the middle generation, aged 35–55, happened at a time when the connection between party politics and people's daily lives had weakened considerably. The socialist system was about to collapse and leftist parties were continuing to lose support. This active group often comes from left-wing families, but displays its own leftism guardedly. The people emphasize consensus, compromise and cooperation inside the party as well as with other parties. On the other hand, members of this generation are often committed to the VAS as an organisation, whereas younger and older members are more prone to criticizing the party itself, and identify with the leftist movement and ideology in a broader sense. The VAS of the middle generation is no longer a workers' movement based on class division, but rather a group of people sharing a common set of values. Issues of equality and tolerance, especially regarding ethnicity and sexual orientation, are emphasised more than before. In terms of economic benefits, this generation does see itself as fighting for justice for itself, as did its predecessors, but rather that it is protecting those most disadvantaged. The environment is also an important value issue. The middle generation is not particularly excited about cultural or trade-union activity, but instead helps run the party apparatus, and pushes small practical reforms. Perhaps the most visible representative of the middle generation is former party chair (1998–2006) Suvi-Anne Siimes, who resigned from the party, went to work for the pharmaceutical industry, and became a supporter of the conservative National Coalition Party, which is at the complete opposite end of the political field. She thus became the personification of the ideological confusion that has beset the VAS after it dabbled in neo-liberal governments.

The youngest generation, the under-35-year-olds, once again recognizes political colour in a more radical way than the middle generation did. It has reawakened the tradition of demonstrating, and demands that contradictions be made visible. These people have become active in a Finland where welfare services are being cut and income disparity is increasing, in the spirit of neo-liberal hegemony. In addition to parliamentary electoral activity, young people organize parties, demonstrations, and educational and solidarity activities. To their elders' distress they do not attend local party annual general meetings, but rather build completely new leftist networks on Facebook. For the activism of this generation, the leftist way of life and the community of like-minded people are «home» more than the political party *per se*. Although

only about 5 % of the VAS members are under 30, young people have a visible place in the party, and they now own the space occupied by the middle generation only a few years ago. It is actually the youth that have criticised the party for having a moralistic attitude, demanding old benefit policies back – although they did so from the point of view of the «precariat», the workers living in a constant state of flux, unlike the stabile industrial workers. The issues they push within the party include criticism of a consumer-oriented lifestyle and economic growth, immaterial rights, immigrant rights and the uncertainty of the new working life.

The categorisation above does not, of course, correlate directly with every person's biological lifespan, but it nevertheless, presents a picture of the background of the party's internal tensions. The differences in attitudes between generations, appears, for example, in discussions about basic income. The goal of «citizen's pay», or basic income for all, has often been discussed, but its content and models vary according to the speaker. Representatives of the middle generation rarely take part in the debate on basic income, because such drastic reforms are not their political style. Indeed, they too discussed the issue during the 1990s, but saw it as just another model of social security, which was shelved after it was seen as too expensive. Their political perspective is that innovations are separate, technical reforms carried out within the bounds of the prevailing system. Esko Seppänen, the party's recently retired long-time MEP, gave a speech typical to the senior generation, in which he voiced the suspicion that basic income enthusiasts were slackers who do not understand that welfare is generated by work, and would rather live off the work of others.³² In addition to a strong moralistic tone, the written speech is interesting because in it Seppänen, a representative of the so-called hard-line wing, allies himself with the trade-union bloc, who generally belong to the so-called moderate wing: the VAS's trade union wing has refused to take part in the discussion on basic income because it sees it as showing disdain for paid labour. In these arguments, the disapproval of the youth ignores the fact that actually «basic income» has already become the reality for the vast majority of the baby-boomer generation in the form of income-related unemployment and pension security. The young challengers claim that a basic income would only provide them with that same status – income security independent of the vagaries of the labour market and of the employers' arbitrary rule. Young people must live with the fact that they can access income-related benefits only in round-about ways. They point out that, in addition to being a collective insurance, basic income is also a radical reform meant to change structures, limit the movement of capital, and support activities which do not necessarily generate surplus value.

The VAS and leftist organisations

The VAS is one of the most male-dominated political parties in Finland. Over 60% of its members are men. There is no accurate information concerning the professional break-down within the party, but it is possible to draw some conclusions on the basis of the party's supporters. The basic supporter of the VAS is mostly from the working class (43%), but there is also a significant number of supporters from other professions.³³

The largest single age group is the over 70-year-olds, who account for almost one third of all the party members. A quarter of the party members are 61–70 years old and another quarter is 51–60 years old. Only one fifth of the members are under 50 years old. Just recently, the number of members under 30 has doubled to over 5%.³⁴ Among voters, it should be noted that seniors are slightly over-represented among VAS supporters. However, in recent years, the party has managed to gain more support amongst middle-aged and young people as well.³⁵

The number of VAS members (9200) is relatively small compared to that of its voters. The activity of members and of local party sections is also quite insignificant, with the exception of member activity in municipal positions of trust. This is a typical characteristic of the other parties too. What presents a problem in terms of intra-party democracy is that party activity has been very much dominated by party staff and elected officials, and members have not been forced to participate. Only once has a membership vote been held.³⁶ The influence of a single member of a political party within the organisation is quite limited. In many regions, election campaigning and unpaid party positions are the party's only activity. In practice, the party consists of local sections that operate in various parts of the country, for example, different urban neighbourhoods. However, especially younger generations no longer feel they particularly belong to any one area; hence, participating in the activities organised by local divisions is of no interest to them. The decrease in the number of members especially affects small communities, where party members are old, and new people rarely join in its activities. Within ten years, this fact could cause local activity to die out in many parts of the country.

In big cities, party activity has in fact expanded in recent years, and a substantial number of new people have joined. This is shown by the founding of new local chapters in big cities. These divisions are not tied to place of residency or line of work; instead their activity, which is initiated by their members, helps build a «new left». Many of the members of these chapters are young people and people of working age who are interested in active campaigning, forming citizens' organisation alliances, and

33 Borg 2007

34 VAS membership statistics

35 Borg 2007

36 The process was also criticised as having been manipulated (see: Tuominen 2009, 174).

participating at the grassroots level.³⁷ The Finnish Left is not the same as the VAS, for most VAS members are not party activists, and not all activists are party members. A significant amount of VAS activity takes place outside the party. There are also many active organisations connected to the party or on its fringes, with many active members who identify with the VAS; all these people together total more than the actual party membership.

The Left Youth of Finland that defines itself as a «red-green, feminist and radical socialist youth movement»³⁸ has especially become more prominent in recent years. Unlike the party, the Left Youth has participated visibly in demonstrations, campaigns and non-parliamentary activity. It has also commented in a more radical way than the party on such controversial issues as immigrant rights, sexual minorities, climate change and drug policies. The Left Youth is not officially affiliated with the party, but cooperates closely with it in elections and programmatic work. Recently, its perspective has very obviously received more emphasis in the party. Previously for example, party leaders were selected mostly from among the consensus-oriented trade union movement, but now the party has elected former Left Youth members who are in their thirties to many administrative positions. Of all the political tendencies, the left was the only one to make gains among students in the student elections in the autumn of 2009. The victorious Left Students are an independent organisation for all leftist students, without regard to course of study or party status.³⁹ The Democratic Union of Finnish Pioneers (SDPL) is also a fairly active leftist organisation for young people. It defines itself as an educational organisation for active children, youth and adults based on socialist and humane principles and Marxist ideals. It is mostly involved in camping and club activities, where such leftist issues as environmental protection, peace and international solidarity are discussed. The left-wing and feminist Leftist Women is the party's women's association, and is an open network for women who want to have influence without belonging to the party.⁴⁰ All female members of the VAS are counted as members of the Leftist Women, although the actual activity of the association is carried out by a few dozen activists and some local sections. In addition, there is the People's Educational Association, also a member of the network of organisations, which organizes leftist cultural and educational activity. The association has its own local radio station with many programmes aimed at immigrants, women and the elderly.⁴¹

The left in Finland is integrally connected to the trade union movement. Finland is second only to Sweden in the degree of unionised employment – 80 %, compared

37 See for example Vasemmistolinkki («Left Link»), <http://www.vasemmistolinkki.fi>

38 Vasemmistonuoret 2007

39 Vasemmisto-opiskelijat

40 Vasemmistoliiitto c

41 Kansan Sivistystyön Liitto

with only 10–20 %, for example, in central and eastern Europe. Since salaries, working hours, social policies, financial policies and labour policies have been centrally agreed upon in Finland for 30 years now, the political import of the trade union movement is remarkable.⁴² A large, if not the most significant, part of the leftist activity still takes place in and around the workplace, via the trade union movement. Especially traditional party members still see unions as playing a key role in party activity. Many union stewards and local union officials accept the VAS mandate, even though they are not party members. The leftist groups of trade unions are also important sources of financing for the party and electoral activities of the VAS.

Around 2000, criticism of neo-liberal politics and precarity in working life engendered a new research-oriented generation that conducted a leftist analysis of societal development. The research community has gradually become political, and in the late 21st century, it released numerous books and pamphlets concerning the state of the left-wing. Simultaneously, after a pause of many years, the party has begun building connections to researchers and academic people. The party expects to receive from them an analysis on how the Left could regain societal initiative and upgrade itself to the 21st century. An example of this is the founding of the Left Forum, which is closely to the VAS and is building a collaborative network, shares a leftist set of values and extends from political parties to universities, research institutions and expert organisations. It is also active in Transform! Europe, a European-wide organisation of leftist think-tanks.⁴³

Among artists, a similar phenomenon of political reactivation has occurred at a slower pace. Many artists are considered left-wingers, and the VAS is seen as a culture and art-friendly party. However, there are relatively few artists involved in party activity or anything connected to it. The party did not tap into such phenomena as the rise of political rap-music, or the renaissance of the revolutionary songs and the New Song Movement, which had previously been tied to the CPF/DLFP. Yet attitudes are changing: In 2010, an action group of leftist artists and cultural workers was founded which, seeks to reform the left through art and bring new initiatives and views to political discussions.⁴⁴

The party, society and Europe

As stated in many sections of its Programme, the VAS is a benevolent general party that supports the democratic control of the economy, defends the rights of minorities, protects the environment, supports public services, demands work for all and thinks globally. In practice, the Programme seems to have varying significance. For example, in 2008 the issues upon which key party leaders commented most were

42 Kauppinen

43 Vasemmistifoorum

44 Kansan Uutiset, Dec. 18, 2009

public services, especially those concerning families with children, the abolition of poverty, worker rights, and the reinforcement of democracy. But of nearly 150 statements, only one concerned EU policy.⁴⁵ Even the parliamentary actions of the VAS MPs were strongly focused on traditional issues of social security and working life, and also environmental issues, but many other objectives stated in the Programme were not addressed at all.⁴⁶ Prior to the 2011 election, this could be explained by the homogeneous composition of the parliamentary group, and it reflected the personal areas of interests of the MPs, whose average age was high, and included only three women out of 17. The Finnish electoral system too had its impact, as the MPs elected are determined not by a ranking on the party list, but by personal votes. There is thus some distance between the parliamentary group and the party apparatus.

With regard to particular issues at the pragmatic level, the VAS is clearly against capitalism. This is shown in the intuitive formation of opinion in regarding such struggles as privatisation of healthcare or funding of universities. So far, this has not led to any comprehensive analysis of capitalism. The evasion of the issue is most likely due, in part, to the lack of alternative points of view. On the other hand, it may also reflect a desire to avoid internal divisions within the party, as broaching the topic on an alternative economic system could lead to destructive conflicts.

In its Manifesto of Principals (2007), the VAS draws a clear distinction between capitalism and the market economy. The VAS opposes capitalism, which it sees as being a set of policies that one-sidedly favour the owners' economic interests and prerogatives. Instead, it demands a market economy which is «ecologically, socially and humanly sustainable». This goal is to be achieved by subordinating the market to national and international democracy.⁴⁷ However, the difference between «bad capitalism» and a «good market economy» remains, unclear, for the programmatic documents do not explicitly state how much the market economy can play capital's game before turning into capitalism. In 2010, party members initiated serious ideological discussions, since the financial crisis revived interest in Marxism, the nature of capitalism and the return of a class-based society. At the same time, many such new issues, as immaterial rights, free movement and male rights, have emerged.⁴⁸ Also, new alliances and forums have been created; even the institutionalised trade union movement and «precariat» activists, who previously strictly avoided each other, have organised common meetings – albeit under the conditions of the trade union movement.

The predominant criticism from within and outside the VAS concerning the party's future focuses mainly on the idea that the party's politics are reactive. Instead of responding to its own initiatives, the VAS concentrates on propositions made by oth-

45 Ruuth 2009

46 Soikkeli 2009

47 Vasemmistoliiitto d

48 Based on an analysis of the contents of the Party's newspaper *Kansan Uutiset* and its online version

ers – usually defensively. The primary objective of the current reform efforts is for the left to regain the societal initiative. One proposal put forward is that of a «people's bank,» a publicly owned monetary institution that would focus on the financial administration of the general public instead of investment speculation.

Supporters, members and organisations close to the VAS have naturally participated in NGOs, movements and demonstrations – even, at times, when the party organisation has kept its distance from them. The party's parliamentary group has even occasionally acted as the mouthpiece for more radical leftist politics than those of the official party lines. In the project of rebuilding the VAS, the party organisation is intensifying its links to the general public and the social movements. The goal is to combine parliamentary and non-parliamentary activity. Also, policy definitions have been made stating that running for government is not an end in itself for the party. The objective is a red-green based government without right-wing parties.⁴⁹

The VAS has always had a difficult relationship with the European Union and European cooperation. When Finland was negotiating EU membership at the beginning of the 1990s, the majority of party's members were strongly opposed to the EU, and most of its key figures participated actively in anti-membership movements. Running for government changed the party's official line on this issue; later VAS documents of the have included vague notions of a «social Europe». The party has now set as its goal «a Europe that promotes its member states' endeavour to build welfare states which are based upon freedom, democracy, equality and sustainable development.»⁵⁰ At the same time, the most visible figure of the party's EU policy, MEP Esko Seppänen, represented a very EU critical line – as did the majority of the its voters. Ultimately, EU policy degenerated into a personal dispute between Seppänen and the party leadership. The result was that the party had no line of any kind on EU policy. Subsequently, discussion of the party's EU policy has been very much avoided. Unlike other European left parties, the VAS has not taken a strong stand on major political issues, such as the EU Constitution or the Lisbon Treaty. Seppänen strongly opposed the ratification of the Treaty, and the majority of the VAS Parliamentary Group voted against ratification. However, some MPs, supported by the trade union leaders, voted for ratification of both the Lisbon Treaty in 2008 and the EU Constitution in 2006; they included the then-party chair.⁵¹

The same contradiction between Seppänen and the VAS organisation was reflected in the party's involvement in European cooperation. The organisations of the party and trade union movement brought up the possibility of the VAS belonging in the political group of Social Democrats, rather than to the GUE/NGL, in the European

49 Kansan Uutiset Aug. 4, 2009

50 Vasemmistoliitto e

51 Tuominen 2009, pp. 174–175

Parliament.⁵² This was turned down by Seppänen and his supporters. Party cooperation has taken place mostly via the New European Left Forum (NELF) and the Nordic Green Left Association (NGLA). However, the VAS had reservations about the European Left Party. In 2009, after the party's defeat in the European election, when it got only 5.9% of the vote and lost its only seat in Brussels, and the election of its new chair, Paavo Erkki Arhinmäki, the VAS changed its position completely, and joined the European Left. It thereafter became more interested in the activities of other parties, especially the experiences of its Dutch and German sister parties. As Laura Tuominen points out, one reason why the VAS did poorly in the EU election may be its lack of coherence and credibility on EU matters. The only direct conclusion which can be drawn from this is, she says, is the need for a more open debate on the EU and the building a concrete common agenda on what the leftist alternative should be.⁵³

The new situation after the 2011 election

The parliamentary election in 2011 created a new political situation in Finland – and for the VAS. The biggest loser was the right-liberal Centre Party of Prime Minister Mari Kiviniemi, which dropped by 7.3%, to 15.8% and 35 seats, a loss of 16. The main reason was the political corruption around the party, which had been revealed during the previous two to three years. The Social Democrats lost less than expected, since they managed to regain a more leftist public image, with such demands as that for haircut payments by financial institutions as a precondition for accepting more loan guarantees for the indebted Euro countries. This demand was raised by the VAS as well – and also by the True Finns. The VAS suffered a setback, dropping to 8.1% (-0.7%), and losing three seats; it won 14. However, in the Helsinki election district, the party increased its share from 6.8% to 10.4%, and Party Chair Arhinmäki got the largest number of personal votes of any candidate in Helsinki District (17,099 votes), and the fourth-largest nationwide. The new parliamentary group consists of eight men and six women, six of them less than 40 years old. The general outlook of the group is more «red-green» than before.

The real winners of the elections were the nationalist-traditionalist True Finns, who got 19% of votes (+14.9%) and 39 seats (+34) in the 200-seat parliament. They are a protest party against the establishment of the National Coalition Party, the Centre Party and the Social Democrats, which has for the past 30 years held a monopoly on political power. During this period, people have become increasingly disinterested in politics, as shown by the low election turnouts. The True Finns are certainly right-wing, but at the same time more socially than market-oriented. Indeed, a better translation than «True Finns» for their name, *Perussuomalaiset*, might be «Ordinary Finns» or «Basic Finns». Their candidates represent outspokenly anti-immigrant positions.

52 Vasemmistonuoret 2006

53 Tuominen 2009, p. 177

The big victory for the «True Finns» meant that no longer could any two of the three big parties dictate the programme and structure of the government. The VAS decided to take advantage of this, and pushed for as leftist a government as possible. Since the True Finns refused to budge on their anti-EU policies, it was possible to form a government under Prime Minister Jyrki Katainen of the moderate-conservative National Coalition Party, in which the Social Democrats, the VAS and the Greens together had a majority. The trade unions have praised the solution. One of the biggest tabloids and the biggest business magazine wrote that the government's programme was a «Socialist Manifesto». The Confederation of Finnish Industries and representatives of the financial industry have been in a rage.

Since the economic situation is poor, the coalition agreement included some provisions that were hard to accept for the Left. For many, cooperation with the National Coalition Party is hard to swallow in any case. Two of the 14 VAS MPs voted against the government when it was formed, and then left the VAS parliamentary group to form their own two-man group.

The main points in the new government programme are:

- A €100 monthly increase in unemployment benefits
- A €25 monthly increase in basic security
- An increase in housing benefits
- Cuts in rents in state supported flats
- An increase of the capital gains tax from 28 % to 30–32 %,
- A 33 % cut in the tax-free corporate dividend limit
- An increased inheritance tax and tax cuts for small incomes
- A new tax on nuclear power
- Big cuts in the military budget and corporate subsidies
- No increase in the VAT
- Finland will not apply for NATO membership
- Finnish participation in the war in Afghanistan will end, and Finland will focus on aid to civilians
- The retirement age will not be raised
- No new nuclear power plants
- All education will be free of charge
- Finland will push for a European financial transaction tax and multilateral tax cooperation to close tax havens.

There will be cuts in state aid to municipalities and to higher education, and development aid will grow more slowly than planned.

Finland will not block neo-liberal solutions and IMF involvement in European financial mechanisms, although it will try to make them more fair.

The final decision to join the government was taken by a joint session of the party's parliamentary group and the Party Council. Both bodies approved the party's participation in the six-party coalition (the small Christian-Democratic and Swedish

People's Parties are also members) by a vote of 40 to 23. Three members abstained. Two ministries were allocated to the VAS: the Ministry of Transport, to be occupied by Merja Kyllönen, and the Ministry of Culture and Sport, assigned to Party Chair Arhinmäki.

Summary

The VAS is at a significant turning point; hence, predicting its future is difficult. A look at its base of support and its general politics provides a discordant picture of the party.

The VAS has lost ground in all parliamentary and municipal elections since 1995. Its gradual decrease in support is connected with its manner of implementing its politics, the aging of its membership, and the decline in traditional activities at the grass roots. Together, these factors indicate that the VAS has been incapable of providing a credible leftist alternative. Yet the latest opinion polls show an increase in support for the party by younger groups of voters; in fact, support for the party is stronger among young people than among the population as a whole. Many young people have become party activists, and leftist groups have had success in student body elections. At the very least, this promises a potential increase in support in future. The involvement of people from the academic and cultural communities, links to social movements and citizen organisations, strengthened cooperation with European sister parties and a renewal of the party organisation together with the many smaller local projects all indicate that a new beginning may be in the offing for the VAS. The potential for reconstructing the party into a radical and red-green political force may be real.

The future of the VAS will be determined by how the party is able to renew itself and take new political issues onto its agenda. It has been pointed out that the VAS will have to be able to establish a coherent political and social agenda independent of those of the Social Democrats and the Greens. One important matter in that respect would be to update the concept of who the workers of today are.⁵⁴ The VAS should seriously formulate European-level and global-level strategies against global capitalism; its nation-state based concepts have been shown to be incapable of solving the supranational problems that humankind faces. This mission will not be easy, because the party's following consists of many different kinds of groups, and it has no tradition of handling disagreements constructively. Everyone understands that a generational change must take place, but it must happen without alienating the old party following.

54 Tuominen 2009, p. 177

References

- Alho Arja: Kovan tuulen varoitus (Storm warning). Helsinki: 2009
- Borg Sami: Vaalit ja puolueiden kannatus. Suomen poliittinen järjestelmä (Elections and party support. Finland's political system), University of Helsinki, 2007. <http://blogs.helsinki.fi/vol-spj/puolueet/vaalit-ja-puolueiden-kannatus>
- Kansan Sivistystyön Liitto. <http://www.ksl.fi>
- Kansan Uutiset (newspaper of the VAS, <http://www.kansanuutiset.fi>)
- Kauppinen Timo: Suomen työmarkkinamalli. Suomen poliittinen järjestelmä (The Finnish labour market model: Finland's political system) University of Helsinki. <http://blogs.helsinki.fi/vol-spj/etujarjestot/suomen-tyomarkkinamalli>
- Patomäki Heikki: Beyond Nordic Nostalgia: Envisaging a Social/Democratic System of Global Governance, Cooperation and Conflict, (35): June 2, 2000, pp.eleven5–154
- Ruuth Saila: Kannanotto – tavoiteohjelmavertailu vuodelta 2008. Unpublished, 2009.
- SDPL: Principles of the Pioneers. <http://www.sdpl.fi/english/principles.htm>
- Soikkeli Niina: Vasemmistoliiton eduskuntaryhmän lainsäädäntöryö versus poliittinen tavoiteohjelma 2007–2010 (Left Alliance Parliamentary Group: of legislative programme versus a political goals), Unpublished, 2009.
- Tennilä Esko-Juhani: Sateenkaaresta vasemmalla. Vasemmistolaisen kansanedustajan muistiinpanoja, kevät ja kesä 1995 (Rainbow on the left. Notes of a VAS MP, spring and summer 1995), Helsinki: Otava 1995
- Tiedonantaja (newspaper of the Communist Party of Finland, www.tiedonantaja.fi)
- Tuominen Laura: Towards Building a New Left Alternative – the Crisis of the Left and the Case of the VAS in Finland. Global Crisis. Resistance, Proposals, Strategies. Transform 5/2009, pp.172–177
- Vasemmistofoorumi: Left Forum. http://www.vasemmistofoorumi.fi/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=46&Itemid=68
- Vasemmistoliitto a: Parempaan maailmaan. Vaihtoehto on olemassa (A better world. There is an alternative).
- Vasemmistoliitto b: Very short history of the VAS. http://www.vasemmistoliitto.fi/history/en_GB/history
- Vasemmistoliitto c: Vasemmistonaiset (Left Women)
<http://www.vasemmistoliitto.fi/organisaatio/vasemmistonaiset>
- Vasemmistoliitto d: The Left Road to a Just World. VAS Party Program. http://www.vasemmistoliitto.fi/party_program/en_GB/program
- Vasemmistoliitto e: Tulevaisuuden sosiaalinen Eurooppa (The future of a social Europe). <http://www.vasemmisto.fi/politiikka/ohjelmat/971.html>
- Vasemmistonuoret: Vasemmistoliiton liityttävä Euroopan vasemmistopuolueeseen (Left Alliance joins the European Left Party), Feb. 19, 2006. http://www.vasemmistonuoret.fi/uutiset/2006/helmikuu/20060219_euro_vasemmistopuolue.html
- Vasemmistonuoret: Poliittinen ohjelma (Political Programme), 2007. http://www.vasemmistonuoret.fi/?asiakirjat/poliittinen_ohjelma
- Vasemmisto-opiskelijat (Left students), <http://www.vasemmisto-opiskelijat.fi>

Auður Lilja Erlingsdóttir

THE LEFT IN ICELAND

The Icelandic party system – An introduction

From the mid-19th century on, the question of Iceland's independence from Denmark dominated the country's political scene. With sovereignty in 1918 and full independence in 1944, Icelandic society began to change, its agricultural society becoming more industrialised, and causing swift changes in settlement, life style and living conditions. The Icelandic party system was not immune to these changes in the social structure.

The Progressive Party (Framsóknarflokkurinn) and the Social Democratic Party (Alþýðuflokkurinn)⁵⁵ were both founded in 1916, the former generally representing the interests of the farmers and the rural areas, while the Social Democrats represented those of the workers. Today's right wing, the Independence Party (Sjálfstæðisflokkurinn), emerged in 1929 with the merger of the Conservative and Liberal Parties; in 1930, the Communist Party was founded after a split-off from the Social Democrats. In 1938, the left-wing of the Social Democrats split off and joined the Communist Party, but then changed its name to Socialist Party. In 1956, yet another fraction of the Social Democrats joined the Socialist Party to form the People's Alliance (Alþýðubandalagið).⁵⁶

Although other parties have emerged and been elected to the Alþingi (parliament), they have not managed to gain a firm footing in the political landscape. Thus, a big right wing party, a centrist party, a social-democratic party and a left-wing party have dominated Icelandic politics over the past decades. One additional party that deserves mention, however, is the Women's Alliance (Kvennalistinn), founded in 1983

55 The Icelandic letters þ and ð are both pronounced like English «th» – the þ as in «thorn», the ð as in «this».

56 Cf. Harðarson, Ólafur Th. (1995). *Parties and Voters in Iceland*. Social Science Research Institute, Reykjavik, esp. pp. 27–28.

and based on the women's candidacy the year before. It did not position itself in the left-to-right spectrum, but as a feminist movement had great influence in Icelandic politics, especially for women's representation in the Alþingi. Before the Women's Alliance, there were at most three women in Parliament at a time.

Table 1: Results of parties in number of MPs in general elections to the Icelandic Parliament, Alþingi, 1963–1995⁵⁷

	1963	1967	1971	1974	1978	1979	1983	1987	1991	1995
Social Democratic Party	8	9	6	5	14	10	6	10	10	7
Progressive Party	19	18	17	17	12	17	14	13	13	15
Independence Party	24	23	22	25	20	21	23	18	26	25
People's Alliance	9	10	10	Eleven	14	Eleven	10	8	9	9
Union of Liberals and Leftists	.	.	5	2	.	.	.	.	.	.
The Alliance of Social Democrats	.	.	.	.	.	.	4	0	.	.
Women's Alliance	.	.	.	.	.	.	3	6	5	3
Citizens' Party	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	7	.	.
Association for Equality and Social Justice	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	1	.	.
Þjóðvaki, People's Movement	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	4
Others and outside parties	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0

However. The left in Iceland has been quite unstable, with new splinter parties emerging occasionally, mostly from the Social Democrats; the right wing has been much more stable. These new left parties, such as «Þjóðvaki – the People's Movement», the Union of Liberals and Leftists, and the Alliance of Social Democrats have generally not lasted long, although some have even briefly rivalled the Social Democrats. In this respect, Iceland differs from other Scandinavian countries, which normally have a large social democratic party and a small left party. At the end of the 1990s, a number of smaller parties, including the Women's Alliance, merged with the Social Democrats, so that after the 1999 election, Iceland had a structure more similar to other Scandinavian countries.

57 Source: Statistics Iceland, <http://www.statice.is/Statistics/Elections>

In Iceland, issues of security and foreign policy – especially that of the U.S. military base at Keflavik and NATO membership – are easiest to fit into the left-right spectrum; leftists generally oppose the base and the alliance, while those on the right have been more likely to support them. The second issue that polarizes Icelandic voters along the left-right divide is economics, particularly taxes and the expense of public services.⁵⁸ Other important matters are gender equality and giving the environment priority over economic growth, with the left supporting these values more than the right. These issues have played an increasingly larger role in Icelandic politics in recent decades.

1999: The year of change in the Icelandic party system?

In 1998 and 1999, discussions about the unification of the left-wing parties came to a head. The fact that the left of centre forces were often unstable and divided allowed the big Independence Party to form a government after most elections. Unification was, proponents argued, the only way to challenge the right wing and gain real power and influences. A group of politicians began to prepare for the unification of four parties on the left, the Social Democrats, the People's Alliance, People's Movement and the Women's Alliance, into one social democratic party. The Social Democrats and the People's Alliance had held seats in Parliament for decades. The People's Movement had broken away from the Social Democrats in the 1995 elections, and elected four MPs that year. The Women's Alliance, in Parliament since 1983, had been losing support, and won only three seats in 1995. There were however those, especially in the People's Alliance and the Women's Alliance, who did not want unification on such a large scale, and were concerned about the values that would dominate afterwards. Again, the issues of the market economy and security, which had divided the left in Iceland for years, were at the core of the dispute. The alliance was formed, and stood for Parliament on May 8, 1999 as the Social Democratic Alliance (*Samfylkingin*); it constituted itself as a party a year later, on May 5, 2000. The dissident minority, led by four MPs from the People's Alliance and the Women's Alliance, founded the Left-Green Movement (*Vinstrihreyfingin – Grænt framboð*) on February 6, 1999, bringing together socialist and environmental groups to stand for Parliament as an alternative to the Social Democratic Alliance. Two additional parties, the Humanists and the Christian Democratic Party, also stood, but neither received enough support to elect MPs. Table 2 shows the results of the 1999–2009 general elections in numbers of MPs for the parties.

58 See Harðarson, Ólafur Th. (1995). *Parties and Voters in Iceland*. Social Science Research Institute, Reykjavik, pp. 219–220 and Chapter V.

Table 2: Results of parties in number of MP in general elections to Alþingi, 1999–2009

	1999	2003	2007	2009
The Progressive Party	12	12	7	9
The Independence Party	26	22	25	16
The Liberal Party	2	4	4	0
The Social Democratic Alliance	17	20	18	20
The Left-Green Movement	6	5	9	14
The Citizens movement				4

The upshot was that the changes were not particularly drastic. The Left-Green Movement won 9.1 % of the vote, and elected six MPs; the Social Democratic Alliance, 26.8 %, and 17 MPs. In the previous Alþingi, the four left-wing parties had boasted 23 MPs, after winning a total of 37.8 % of the vote in 1995, so that the result was a slight overall loss of votes and the same total number of seats. Thus, not only had the left failed to form one big party, it had also gained nothing.

Since then, however, the Left-Green Movement has been growing, gaining seats in every election, except in 2003, when it lost one. Today, the party has 5.359⁵⁹ members (47 % women, 53 % men). The average age of the members is 42.5, but 27 % are 30 or younger; 49 % live in the Reykjavík area.⁶⁰

The Left-Green Movement today bases its policies on five cornerstones:⁶¹

Conservation of the environment

All natural resources should be public property and utilised sustainably and carefully. Green economics must be used to estimate the value of untouched nature, and green taxes applied to encourage environmental protection. Iceland can produce all the energy it needs in the future. The party rejects the construction of further power plants for the sake of large-scale polluting industry, and demands that the highlands be conserved. Emphasis is placed on dynamic, international co-operation and environmental conventions.

Equality and social justice

All individuals should have equal rights; no discrimination should be tolerated. The party demands full equality in education, social service, public information and freedom of speech. It is the duty of the state to guarantee the welfare of every citizen,

59 On January 28, 2010

60 Reykjavík has over 35 % of the population; another 25 % live in the capital region.

61 The policy declaration of the Left-Green Movement on its homepage <http://www.vg.is/stefna/stefnuyfirlýsing/>

especially the elderly and the disabled. The party supports strengthening rural areas of Iceland through quality social services, education and culture. The wages paid for a 40-hour work week must be sufficient for a normal standard of living.

A fair and prosperous economy

The Left-Green Movement wants to strengthen the position of wage earners to influence the development of society. It supports the development of a more diverse economy in Iceland, and encourages the use of environmentally friendly technologies. It opposes all monopolies and the centralisation of capital, and supports industries which make use of Iceland's special status in order to create diverse jobs for all the country's inhabitants.

An independent foreign policy

The Left-Green Movement fights for an independent foreign policy to maintain the sovereignty of Iceland, and supports all means for establishing global peace. The party opposes participation in military alliances such as NATO. It also rejects accession to the European Union and prefers simple, bilateral treaties on trade and co-operation. The Left-Green Movement is willing to strengthen co-operation with all nations, on the basis of mutual respect for different opinions and different cultures. The party supports and wishes to strengthen the country's participation in democratic organisations such as the United Nations, the Council of Europe and the Nordic Council. It believes that Iceland should support the goals of the UN and the Declaration of Human Rights by making a contribution to the abolition of poverty and hunger, social injustice, the unequal division of wealth, racial discrimination, violation of human rights and militarism.

Feminism

The Left-Green movement is a feminist party. Just as the party fights against the power of financial owners and capitalism, it also rejects men's oppression of women and a patriarchal society that prevents women from enjoying full human rights.

2009: The election after the crisis

On October 6, 2008 Geir H. Haarde, then prime minister of Iceland, addressed the nation on national television, to report on the major financial difficulties that the nation faced. He said that there was real danger for the Icelandic economy, and that in the worst case, it could be sucked into the whirlpool with the banks, resulting in national bankruptcy.

Each following day brought a new shock for Icelanders. The financial situation was much worse than most had realised, as the government of the Independence Party and the Social Democratic Alliance struggled to save the Icelandic banking system. They failed; all three of the country's major banks collapsed and were taken over by the state. The value of the Icelandic crown plummeted, and unemployment soared.

Starting on October eleven, people gathered in front of the Icelandic Parliament every Saturday and held meetings, rallies and demonstrations, demanding that the

people who had caused the situation resign from office. This was the beginning of what is now called the Kitchenware Revolution, because of the noise the protesters made banging pots and pans. Most of the criticism was directed at the Independence Party, which had been in government for 18 years straight, for 12 years with the Progressive Party, and then for two years with the Social Democratic Alliance. On January 20, 2010, the protests intensified, with people clashing with riot police armed with pepper spray and batons in front of Parliament. The protests continued the next day, as government buildings were surrounded by protesters making noise and throwing eggs. On January 22, the police used tear gas to disperse the crowd for the first time since the protests against Iceland's joining NATO in 1949. The next day early parliamentary elections were called, but this did not stop the protests, as people filled the street calling for immediate elections. On January 26th the government coalition of the Independence Party and the Social Democratic Alliance fell apart.

The Left-Green Movement and the Social Democratic Alliance formed a new government on February 1, 2009. The coalition lacked a majority, but the Progressive Party agreed to support it. The cabinet consisted of four Social Democratic, four Left-Green, and two non-party ministers. Its goal was to carry out urgent measures for the benefit of Icelandic homes and businesses, to reconstruct the banking system, and to improve Icelandic governance and administration with respect to increased democracy and transparency. The government intended to prioritize social values, the principles of sustainable development, women's rights, equality and justice. It was also clear from the outset that elections would be held as soon as circumstances allowed, and a new government could be formed on the basis of a renewed mandate from the voters.⁶²

The government was in many ways successful, particularly with regard to sharing information with the public by weekly meetings with the media. It reorganised the Central Bank, put a temporary hold on foreclosures, permitted people with low incomes to gain access to their retirement funds, increased tax credits for interest payment, adopted a new action plan to fight human trafficking, introduced an ethics code for the administration and more. But although the new government emerged under extremely difficult circumstances, many people thought it hadn't done enough.

The elections campaign was difficult. The Left-Green Movement pointed out that since 2006 every year the party had warned that the neo-liberal policies of the government were threatening the economic stability of Iceland. Often, the party spokespeople had talked without being listened to. In the past, the party had been considered old-fashioned and its members accused of lacking understanding for the new era, and for the glory that Iceland's «financial Vikings» would bring to the country. This time, the party was successful. On April 25, elections were held with the Left-Green Move-

62 The Policy Declaration of the Government of the Social Democratic Alliance and the Left-Green Movement http://eng.forsaetisraduneyti.is/media/frettir/Policy_declaration.pdf

ment, the Social Democratic Alliance, the Independence Party, the Progressive Party, the Liberals and a new party, the Citizens' Movement, standing. The latter combined both leftist tendencies, such as the call for open and citizens-based democracy, a reformed administration and citizens' rights, with such rightist policies, as privatisation of the public infrastructure. The Left-Green Movement got 21 % of the vote, and 14 seats in Parliament; together with the 20 seats won by the Social Democratic Alliance, the government now had a majority, the first two-party left-wing coalition in Icelandic history. In the new cabinet, the number of ministers was increased back to the traditional twelve, with each party holding five, plus the two non-party ministers. The Left-Green Movement holds the ministries of Finance, Education, Health, Environment, and Agriculture and Fisheries.

From opposition to power

From the beginning of the coalition some dissatisfaction has been apparent among the MPs of the Left-Green Movement about the direction of the new government. It has been obvious that for the party's members, some compromises have been harder to swallow than others. While the cooperation has worked relatively well in many areas, considering the circumstances, three issues in particular have proven to be difficult for the Left-Green Movement. They would most likely have caused no dispute, were the party still in opposition, but government coalitions often require compromises, which can be especially hard for a radical left party.

The first major dispute between the coalition parties was about the coalition programme itself – whether it was acceptable for the Left-Green Movement to be in a coalition that was going to apply for membership to the European Union, even though the final decision would be in the hands of the people. After much discussion, it was decided that the foreign minister, who is in the Social Democratic Alliance, would present a parliamentary resolution to the spring session of the Icelandic Parliament proposing an application for EU membership. The two parties agreed to respect each other's differing positions on EU membership, and their rights to express their own opinions.⁶³ However, the debate flared up again when the matter reached Parliament, and it became clear that if all the Left-Green Movement MPs were to vote against the resolution, it would fail. The Social Democratic Alliance was unwilling to accept this, and the coalition became unstable. Some members of the Left-Green Movement felt betrayed when some of their own MPs, including the party chair, voted for the resolution, explaining that they were compromising to save the government. Moreover, they said, in the long run the vote didn't matter, since the people would ultimately decide the issue. Some claimed to be pro-democracy, though against the EU; they were giving Icelandic citizens the power to decide.

63 Government Coalition Platform of the Social Democratic Alliance and Left-Green Movement <http://eng.forsetisraduneyti.is/news-and-articles/nr/3730>

Another issue is the presence of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in the country. From the beginning of the financial crisis, the Left-Green Movement had been very critical of the IMF and its policies, claiming that it was capitalistic and unsuitable for creating social justice in Iceland. However, the IMF's programme in Iceland had already been instituted when the party took power, and Party Chair Steingrímur Sigfússon, now the Minister of Finance, suddenly found himself in the position of having to work with the IMF, and to argue in favour of cooperation.

Icesave

The biggest issue has without doubt been the Icesave Agreement made with Britain and the Netherlands by the previous Independence Party/Social Democratic government, under which Iceland was to assume responsibility for almost €4 billion in losses suffered by British and Dutch depositors when one of Iceland's three major banks, the Landsbanki, went into receivership in October 2008. In order to force the Icelandic government to agree to the measure, the British government had even invoked its terrorism laws against Iceland.

Prior to entering government, the Left-Green Movement had spoken against the agreement, which it saw as too much of a burden for Icelandic tax payers, and, most importantly, as unfair to Icelandic citizens, as it had been due to the action of a few Icelandic investors. After the election, a new Icesave Agreement was made, and the new government claimed it was the only to regain the trust of the international community. Furthermore, it argued that unless the dispute was settled, the Icelandic economy could not be stabilised, that ratings agencies would rank Iceland below investment grade, and that this would greatly increase the interest rate at which the country could borrow funds internationally. Finally, the IMF would probably refuse to release any further funds to Iceland unless the dispute were resolved, making it impossible to rebuild Icelandic society and its financial markets. Once again, party chair and Minister of Finance Steingrímur Sigfússon had to present his case to the public. The party's MPs were split on the issue, and for a while it was unclear whether the government bill would pass. It finally did, but President Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson refused to sign it, thus submitting it to the electorate in a national referendum. It was rejected by a majority of over 90 %. The President was a former People's Alliance MP, who was obviously not unsympathetic to Red-Green, although his office is considered non-political.

The application to join the EU had benefitted Iceland's international standing, but the referendum caused a crisis. In 2010, another deal was struck with Britain and the Netherlands, calling for a 30-year repayment period of the claimed debt. Once again, the bill passed Parliament; once again the President refused to sign; once again, it went to a referendum; and once again, the voters refused to saddle their little country, with a total population much less than those of major British or Dutch cities, with such a huge debt. This time, over a third of the electorate voted for the measure – but

it failed nonetheless. At present, the issue is before an international court, and the two big EU countries are blocking Iceland's application for EU membership.

Conclusion

These issues have been hard for the government, especially for the Left-Green Movement. Although some people may see that as a disadvantage, others have welcomed the heated discussion in Parliament, and interpreted them as a sign of a new type of governance, under which MPs do not blindly follow the political line of their party. Whichever way people interpret the situation, the fact is that the government has survived the turbulence. It will be exciting to see how the Icelandic party system will evolve in future. After all, it took nothing less than a major financial crisis to remove the right wing from power.

Dag Seierstad

THE LEFT IN NORWAY: POLITICS IN A CENTRE-LEFT GOVERNMENT

Introduction

Norway has been no exception to the neo-liberal transformation of European societies. The starting point came with the bourgeois government elected in 1981. However, when the Labour Party returned to power in 1986, there was no change in policy. Since 1981, the Norwegian political system has undergone two fundamental changes: First, extensive deregulation and privatisation have taken place – with the support of all parties in parliament except for the Socialist Left Party (SV) and to a certain extent of the Centre Party (SP). Second, that same majority in parliament approved Norwegian membership in the European Economic Area – the EEA treaty – which made Norway a 100 % part of the internal market of the European Union. This membership locks in most of deregulation and privatisation measures already implemented – and forces Norway to undertake additional reforms in the neo-liberal direction.

In September 2005, a three-party «red-green» alliance won a majority in the Norwegian parliament and established a centre-left coalition. The partners were the Labour Party, which is neither red nor green, the Socialist Left Party (SV), which claims to be both, and the Centre Party, which is partially green. The coalition held on to its slight majority in the 2009 election, despite losses for the SV. Two years later, in the aftermath of the murderous right-wing terrorist assault on a group of young Social Democrats on Utøya Island, regional/local elections gave Labour a boost, and punished the far right wing, to which the murderer had belonged. The SV, however, has continued to decline. The preconditions for this coalition were provided by a strategy of the unions and social movements prior to the 2005 elections. Due to the character of these parties, a real left alliance is ever less likely to emerge. However, some significant gains have been made after seven years.

The left in the party system of Norway

Since the 1920s, a relatively strong Labour Party (*Det norske Arbeiderparti/DnA*⁶⁴) has been confronting a non-labour camp fragmented into four to five political parties whose policies have always proven difficult to aggregate. In 1935, the Labour Party established a minority government together with the Farmers' Party – what is now the Centre Party. That same year, the central trade union movement and the employers' organisation agreed to a social compromise between labour and capital. Procedures for negotiating collective agreements at the national, industry and workplace level, including rules for labour conflicts, were established. From 1945 to 1961, the Labour Party had a majority in parliament. The Socialist Peoples' Party (SF) was created in 1961, mainly by Labour members who opposed Norwegian membership in NATO and the nuclear arms race. Since the break-away, Labour has never again won a parliamentary majority.

Aside from a brief period after the Second World War, when it profited from popularity gained by its armed resistance to German occupation, Norway's Communist Party (NKP) has never been an important political factor, due in no small part to its extreme and stubborn adherence to Stalinism. For all practical purposes, it is defunct. In the election in 2009, it received less than 700 votes.

In 1972, Norway's accession to the EU, supported by the Labour Party, was rejected in a referendum. Thereafter, some EC-critical Labour members, a split-off of the NKP, and activists from environmental and feminist movements joined with the SF to form the Socialist Left Party (*Sosialistisk Venstreparti/SV*). Between 1961 and 2005, several minority Labour governments ruled with the tacit support of the SV parliamentary group, but with no formal agreement between them.

The Red Election Alliance, created during the 1970s as the electoral front of a Maoist cadre party, now goes by the name Red (*Rødt*); its goals in practice – with few exceptions – hardly differ from those of the SV. Its main assets are several well-known labour representatives in big industrial plants and a daily newspaper, also called *Rødt*, which it now only partially owns, and which, during the past 15 years, has become the major non-sectarian paper of the Norwegian radical left.

Norway also has a small Green Party, which, in spite of almost tripling its votes in the 2009 election, still fell below the 10,000 mark; it did only slightly better in the local election of 2007, but then doubled its vote in 2011. The main reason for its weakness, compared with Greens elsewhere in Europe, is that the SV has pushed environmental policies since the early 1970s, and has presented itself as both red and green; a somewhat similar situation exists in Denmark. The «green» element in the current «red-green» coalition is a party that is not of the left – the Centre Party (*Senterpartiet/SP*), which until 1959 called itself the Farmers' Party. However, it has

64 Until 2011, this name – lit.: «The Norwegian Labour Party» and abbreviation «DnA» were official; it is now simply Arbeiderpartiet (the Labour Party/Ap).

since the early 1990s developed into a reliable supporter of the public sector, and has opposed privatisation and market orientation in the municipalities. In relation to the prevailing neo-liberal policy, it has moved clearly to the left of the Labour Party. However, its recent actions in government have called its position as a «green» party into question.

Table 1: Election results in the last four parliamentary elections, and the 2011 local election. In the table, the parties have been grouped in the traditional categories of left, centre and right.

Political Party	Votes in Percent				Seats in the Stortinget		
	1997	2001	2005	2009	1997	2001	2005 2009
Left:	42,7	38,0	42,7	43,0	74	66	76 75
Norwegian Labour Party	35,0	24,3	32,7	35,4	65	43	61 64
Socialist Left Party (SV)	6,0	12,5	8,8	6,2	9	23	15 eleven
Red Electoral Alliance	1,7	1,2	1,2	1,4	-	-	-
Centre:	26,1	21,9	19,2	15,6	42	34	32 23
Centre Party (SP)	7,9	5,6	6,5	6,2	eleven	10	eleven eleven
Christian Democratic Party	13,7	12,4	6,8	5,5	25	22	eleven 10
The Left (Venstre – the Liberal Party of Norway)	4,5	3,9	5,9	3,9	6	2	10 2
Right:	29,6	35,8	36,2	40,1	48	64	61 71
The Right (Høyre, conservative party)	14,3	21,2	14,1	17,2	23	38	23 30
Progressive Party (populist right)	15,3	14,6	22,1	22,9	25	26	38 41
Splinter parties:	1,6	4,3	3,1	1,3	1	1	0 0

Dimensions of party competition

The Norwegian party system results in line-ups of parties that confuse many foreign observers – and Norwegian voters, too. On such issues as taxes, social and health services, labour law, etc., the usual left-right pattern prevails. But in these areas, the centrist parties are often close to the parties of the left, and the populist right-wing Progress Party, too, sometimes supports «left» positions. In questions concerning structural changes of the economy, e.g. privatisation, deregulation and EU membership, the neo-liberal pole in Norwegian politics consists of the Conservatives (*Høyre*, «the Right»), the Liberals (*Venstre*, «the Left»)⁶⁵ and the dominant part of the Labour

65 As elsewhere in Scandinavia, this designation is a relic of the 19th century, and has nothing to do with modern leftism.

Party. Indeed, the SP with regard to neo-liberal policy moved clearly to the left of the Labour Party.

On environmental issues and questions of international solidarity, such as development aid and refugee policy, the three centrist parties and the SV generally have similar pro-environmental and pro-solidarity positions. They also all oppose Norwegian membership in the European Union, although the Liberals are split on the issue.

The question of Norwegian membership in the European Union

The relations between Norway and the EEC and later the EU have been the most controversial issue in Norwegian politics for almost 50 years. The leadership of the Labour Party has since the early 1960s been pushing for accession to the EEC/EU, and its party congresses have always voted for membership by large majorities. The Labour government applied for membership in 1961, together with Britain and Denmark, but that enlargement was stalled by French President Charles de Gaulle's veto of British membership. A centre-right government then re-applied in June 1970, together with Britain, Ireland and Denmark. In a referendum in September 1972, a majority of 53.6% voted «no», while in Denmark, a majority voted «yes». Britain and Ireland also joined the EC at that time.

In the parliamentary elections of 1973, the Labour Party lost one third of its votes. Although it regained most of them in 1977, it has never returned to its strength of the 1950s and 1960s, when it could count on 45–48% of the vote; since 1985, its share has dropped to around 35%. Nonetheless, a free trade agreement was reached with the EC in 1974, which excluded agricultural and most fisheries products. Norway was also a member of the European Free Trade Association, the «outer ring» of the EC. After 1986, further negotiations between the EFTA and the EC for a joint internal market resulted in the establishment of the European Economic Area (EEA) in October 1992, by a treaty which the Norwegian parliament ratified by a vote of 130–35. Since it transferred sovereignty to EU/EEA institutions, a three-quarters majority (124 votes) had been needed, and all parties except for the SV and the Centre Party voted in favour of the Treaty. The mainstream of the Labour Party saw it as the first step to EU membership, while the anti-EU wing saw it as a way to forestall membership. In 1994, the Labour government applied for membership again, this time together with Sweden, Finland and Austria, but another referendum in November 1994 yielded the same result as in 1972: a «no» vote of 52.5%.

Once again, the voters were split along three dimensions:

- A centre-periphery dimension: Oslo voted 2:1 in favour of membership, while the countryside, the fishing communities, and the North voted 2:1 against membership.
- A social dimension: The power elite, the better-off, the well-educated, and the upwardly mobile tended to vote in favour of membership, while, the poorer and less-educated, and the ordinary workers tended to vote against membership.

- A political right-left dimension: People on the right of the political spectrum tended to vote in favour of membership. This was true not only among voters in general, but even more so within the labour movement, inside the Labour Party, and in the unions.

The main reasons why the SV opposes Norwegian membership in the EU

Two issues have been at the centre of Norway's rejection of EU membership. First, there is the perception that cherished democratic values at the national and local levels can best be protected outside the EU. Second, there is scepticism towards the market liberalism embedded in successive EU treaties.

The market freedoms of the EU require that national, regional or local communities not intervene in the processes engendered by the free run of market forces. Regulation of the markets is supposed to take place only at the level of the European Union. This idea is the basic democratic weakness of the European project. Nowhere in Western Europe is the lack of freedom of movement an important problem today. On the contrary: there are challenges of a far different nature that are much more important to resolve, including rising unemployment, increased social inequality, the decline of the welfare state, disintegrating communities, health queues, drug abuse, increasing levels of violence, organised crime across internal borders, and the integration of ethnic minorities.

These problems can only be resolved through popular commitment to credible social projects, designed to make people take social and political responsibility where they live and work. At all crossroads in the development of the EU, ever more power and more decision-making authority has been transferred to EU institutions. This makes the essential core of democracy vulnerable, and undermines the ability of democratically elected representatives to control decisions on human and social concerns at all levels of society.

The point of departure for the Norwegian anti-EU movement is that the EU should be limited to tackling challenges that can only be controlled at the international level: transnational conflicts, transnational environmental problems, social imbalances between the regions of Europe and the establishment of common minimum workplace standards.

Supra-national arrangements are sometimes necessary, but in order to win grassroots support, they must be limited to what is absolutely necessary. Supra-nationalism in the EU is applied in far too many areas, and limits national autonomy in areas where it should not.

The development towards a red-green government:

The 2001 election – a historic defeat for the Labour Party

Since the early 1990s, the most important trade unions had gradually reached the conclusion that the big Labour Party was no longer a left party upon which they could rely. They realised that the only way to get left policies out of the Labour Party would be to force it into a coalition with the Left Socialist Party – and at the same time make the demands of trade unionists so visible and so well supported by struggle that a coalition government would have to listen.

The unions' perspective can be summarised as: Left policies will only be possible if it is obvious for all that we have created this government – and that we have won the election because our demands have had the support of a majority of the voters. The minority Labour government that held office from January 2000 to September 2001 carried out the most aggressive policies of deregulation and privatisation in Norwegian history. The come-uppance followed in the elections in September 2001, a historic defeat for Labour, and a doubling of the votes for the SV. The result was, however, a general shift to the right, since the Labour Party lost almost twice as much as the SV gained. After the 2001 election, a centre-right minority government was established by the Conservatives, the Christian Democrats (KF) and the Liberals, with just 62 of the 165 seats in the Storting. It depended for its majority on the unpredictable and partly xenophobic Progress Party, which appealed to law-and-order and anti-immigrant sentiments, but also made lavish promises of better services for all – Norwegians! – who needed them, particularly the elderly and the sick.

The trade unions demand a left-wing Coalition

This disastrous election and pressure from various parts of the trade union movement forced the Labour Party leadership to change its strategy. Traditionally, the Central Trade Union Association (LO) had worked very closely with the Labour Party; indeed, they had been considered «Siamese twins». During the 1990s, many branch unions, and gradually also the central trade union leadership, were forced to recognize that they could no longer rely on the Labour Party on several issues of great importance, including market orientation and privatisation of telecommunications, the postal service, the railways and other public services. Often, unions had to work with the SV to pressure the Labour Party group in parliament to listen to their complaints and proposals. They came to the conclusion that the only way to make the Labour Party turn left would be to force it into a coalition with the SV. Even before the 2001 election, the LO and many branch unions for the first time stated publicly that voters should defend their interests by voting either for Labour or for the SV. The turning point was reached in the autumn of 2004, when the LO started what was called the «long election campaign», based on 58 specific demands to the parties. The goal was to establish for the first time a left majority government, based on a coalition between the Labour Party and the SV.

The elections of 2005: A narrow centre-left victory

During the spring of 2005, the Labour Party, the SV and the Centre Party decided at their party congresses to establish a common government, provided they were able to win a common majority in the elections that September. They conducted the election campaign on separate platforms, but with a common, well publicised intention of establishing a coalition together. The centre-left alliance won the election narrowly, with 87 seats to 82 for the right. The SV lost almost a third of its votes, compared to the 2001 election – and even more compared to the polls, which had seen the SV getting between 14 and 18%; in fact, they got less than 9%. The main government parties also lost, as many of their voters moved to the populist right.

There are a number of reasons for this loss of voters by the SV:

1. The unions and the SV had been able to force the Labour Party towards the left, and to break with previous policies of privatisation and market competition in the health and social services. This allowed Labour Party leaders to «steal the SV's thunder» in the election campaign.
2. The parties of the right attacked the Labour Party mainly indirectly, by attacking the SV, with a fierce «red menace» campaign, using all kinds of accusations. While failing to prevent a centre-left victory, the campaign did drive some left-wing voters back to Labour.
3. The most prominent SV campaigners did not come out clearly on the strategically important political differences between the SV and Labour – positions on foreign and structural economic policy issues.
4. Many voters primarily wanted to get rid of the old government, and decided in favour of Labour, so as to achieve that goal.

The centre-left government

The elections gave the Labour Party 32.7% of the vote, more than twice as many as the combined total of the SV (8.8%) and the Centre Party (6.5%). In view of this balance of forces, the coalition agreement was astonishingly positive: The Government Platform is an extensive document of 74 pages (84, in the English version)⁶⁶, detailed and surprisingly concrete on many issues – quite the opposite of the brief, general document that would have better served the interests of the dominant partner. In a cabinet of 19 ministers, ten were to be provided by the Labour Party, five by the SV – including the Minister of Finance – and four by the Centre Party, giving the Labour Party the smallest possible majority within the cabinet. On many issues, the platform represented views to the left of the Labour Party election programme, both in international issues and in economic, regional and social policies. The coalition government committed itself to stopping the deregulation and privatisation of public

66 Cf. Political Platform as Basis for the Government's Work, 2005–09, Soria Moria, October 13, 2005, in: <http://www.senterpartiet.no/getfile.php/Dokument/sm2-a4-web-english.pdf>, accessed Feb. 1, 2012.

services in the state sector, and to work for similar goals in such international institutions as the World Bank, the IMF and the WTO.

What has been achieved?

Part of Norway's multilateral development effort was switched from the World Bank to development programmes under UN agencies, and was increased to 1 % of GDP. All Norwegian demands made by previous governments in GATS negotiations to LDC countries, including that they open their borders for international competition in educational services and power and water supply, were withdrawn.

Norwegian staff and training officers were withdrawn from Iraq, as were Norwegian special forces units serving as part of Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan, although some 500 Norwegian soldiers remained part of the ISAF forces in northern Afghanistan. A clear UN mandate was made a precondition for Norwegian participation in international military operations.

All changes in labour law introduced by the right-wing majority before the election in 2005 were reversed. Stricter rules for temporary work and for the use of overtime were re-established, and protection for workers who speak out on conditions at their workplace was strengthened. Employee and trade union rights were improved. The tax on stock dividends was reintroduced, and capital income taxed at the same rate as the maximum level of tax on wage income. A law prepared by the previous government, which opened the way for the privatisation of schools, was withdrawn. The comprehensive privatisation of the railways, also prepared by the previous government, was stopped. A programme for providing guaranteed kindergartens spaces for children between one and six was completely implemented by 2009. Parents' fee levels were almost halved, to a maximum of €280.

The only area where the Platform was not satisfactory for the SV was immigration. In 2008, five SV ministers formally dissented against government proposals for restricting immigration rules even further than had been specified in the Government Platform.

The elections of September 2009: An even narrower centre-left victory

The main result of the parliamentary elections in September 2009 was that the centre-left government could continue, with an 86–83 majority in parliament. The two right-wing parties achieved a much stronger position in the parliament. The losers were the parties of the centre, with only the Liberals gaining two seats. The SV too was among the losers, dropping from 8.8 % to 6.2 %, and losing four of its 15 seats. This was almost exactly compensated by an increase in votes for the Labour Party, which went from 32.7 % to 35.4 %. The Centre Party dropped slightly, from 6.5 % to 6.2 %.

The main reason so many voters moved from the SV to Labour is that the SV has trouble convincing left-wing voters that the government's policies are to the left of what they would have been under a pure Labour Party government – and that sup-

port for the SV is necessary to keep it that way. The main achievement was nevertheless that the red-green government could continue for four more years, and that the privatisation-happy parties of the right did not come to power.

The second centre-left government

There was no opposition within the SV to entering government negotiations with the two other coalition parties, although it was obvious that strong forces within the Labour Party would insist on »giving in less to the SV» than they had in 2005. The negotiations led to an agreement which strengthened the Labour Party's position in the government. It now has twelve ministers, while the SV and the Centre Party have four each. The SV holds the ministries of Knowledge and Childhood Affairs, headed by the Party Chair Kristin Halvorsen; Environment and International Development under former Chair Erik Solheim; Children, Equality and Social Inclusion, under Audun Lysbakken, who is likely to become party chair when Halvorsen steps down in 2012, and of Education, Research and Higher Education, headed by Tora Aasland. The new government platform reconfirmed most of the policies in the Government Platform of 2005, but was less concrete, and did not specify the government goals in language as binding as in 2005.

The political situation in other Nordic countries

The experience of the centre-left government in Norway is also important for the political development in neighbour countries, particularly in Denmark, where a similar political constellation took power in 2011. In Sweden, that opportunity was missed in 2010, when the right-wing government was re-elected in 2010. In both countries, however, as well as in Iceland in 2009, the model of a coordinated campaign with the social democrats aiming for a coalition, and based on alliances with the unions and civil society, was copied. In Iceland, a two-party alliance won the election. In Greenland, the SV's sister party is the biggest party in government with six ministers out of nine, after getting 44% of the votes in the election in June 2009.

Characteristics of left-wing parties in Norway

The social structure of voters⁶⁷

Today, both Labour and SV have more support from women than from men. Twice as many women as men vote for the SV. This has not always been the case: In the 1960s, both parties had a male majority among their voters. The present female majority has developed gradually since the early 1990s, probably as a result of women finding employment in the growing public sector, which is supported politically by these two parties against attacks from the right-wing parties.

67 Cf. Valgundersøkelsen 2005 (Electoral investigations, 2005), in: SSB Rapport 2007/31.

Table 2: Percentage of votes for Labour and SV by sex

	Labour	Socialist Left Party
Men	31	7
Women	37	14

However, the voters of the two parties show opposite age distributions. The Labour Party is most popular among voters over 50, while the SV has only a few supporters over 60, but is strongly supported by voters in their twenties.

Table 3 shows that the Labour Party has more support from the relatively few voters with only a primary education, while the greatest support for the SV is from voters with education beyond the secondary level.

Table 3: Percentage of votes, by education level

	Labour	Socialist Left Party
Primary education	45	5
Secondary education	34	8
Higher education	30	15

During the 1960s, the two parties had almost identical social profiles in terms of their type of employment; today these profiles differ greatly. The Labour Party is still very much a «labour» party, while the SV has become a party for employees in the public sector. In 2005, half the voters and 75 % of the members of the SV were employed in the public sector, although 28 % of the working population as a whole were employed there.

Table 4: Percentage of votes, by type of employment

	Labour	Socialist Left Party
Blue collar workers	40	2
Lower white collar	35	14
Higher white collar	29	12
Farmers/Fishermen	9	0
Self-deployed	17	eleven
Students	37	23
Retired	41	3

When voters were asked in 2005 which party had the best policy on various political issues, the Labour Party was considered best in the fight against unemployment

(54 %), health policy (39 %) and care for the elderly (38 %), while the SV scored best on environmental policy (35 %), education (22 %) and care for families and children (21 %).⁶⁸

Party membership

As in other European countries, Norwegian parties have seen a decline in membership in recent decades. While in 1995, the Labour Party had 72,600 individual members, this figure dropped to 51,500 in 2007. The SV reached its maximum in 1992, with 14,000 members. That dropped to 7300 in 2001, but has since increased to 9500 in 2009. Since 1990, a majority of SV members have been women. The latest comparable data for both parties dates back to 2001, when 57 % of SV members and 40 % of Labour Party members were women.⁶⁹ A women's quota – the 40 %-rule – for all party positions has been in the SV statutes since the party's formation in 1975, and was inherited from the Socialist People's Party. The Labour Party introduced a similar provision ten years later.

In 2001, 64 % of the members of the Labour Party were members of a trade union; for the SV, the figure was 76 %. For membership in other organisations, there are noticeable differences: 26 % of SV members were members of an environmental organisation, while this was true of only 3 % of Labour Party members. A similar result applies to membership in internationally oriented organisations: 37 % of SV members were thus active, but only 6 % of Labour Party members. For membership in the «No to the EU» campaign, the figures were 38 % and 2 %, respectively. And only 1 % of SV members and 7 % of Labour Party members belonged to organisations in favour of EU membership.⁷⁰

SV members are more likely to be politically active outside their party than Labour Party members. In 2001, only 12 % of SV members had never taken part in action groups, demonstrations or strikes, signed petitions, or given money in support of such activities. The Labour Party figure was 53 %.⁷¹

Proportions of non-western immigrants in political parties

There is no reliable information about the position of non-western immigrants in the two parties. In general, it is assumed that the proportion of non-western immigrants is greater in the two left-wing parties than in the other Norwegian parties. This is consistent with data from the municipal council elections in 2007. Then, 180,000 non-western immigrants, approx. 5 % of the electorate, had the right to vote. Of all non-western voters, 37 % voted in the election, compared with 62 % for the whole

68 Ibid, pp. 32–34.

69 Cf. Knut Heidar/Jo Saglie: *Hva skjer i partiene?* (What's happening in the parties?), Oslo 2002, p. 82.

70 Cf. *ibid*, pp. 274–75.

71 Cf. *ibid*, p. 284.

electorate. Hence, less than 3 % of those who actually voted were non-western immigrants. The 136 non-western immigrants elected to municipal councils accounted for 1.3 % of all council members, so that non-western immigrants were clearly under-represented. The two left-wing parties were the only ones with above-average shares of non-western immigrants among their councillors – 2.4 % for the Labour Party and 4.5 % for the SV.⁷² The chief countries of origin of the non-western SV councillors are Iran (41), Iraq (22), Chile (19), Bosnia-Herzegovina (18) and Somalia (17).

The financing of political parties

Norway has a system of public support for political parties at the national, regional and local levels. The level of support was the highest in the Nordic countries in 2002, and about ten times that in Germany, Britain, Canada and Australia.⁷³ The amount of support depends largely on election results. After the 2001 election, a success for the SV and a disaster for Labour, the two parties received NOK 30 million and NOK 70 million in public support in 2002, respectively.⁷⁴ After the 2009 elections, these amounts changed to NOK 15 million and NOK 100 million, respectively.

The tensions within the centre-left government

Until 1993, there was no real discussion inside the SV on the question of mutually binding cooperation with the Labour Party in parliament or in government. Both the gap between the parties' electoral results success – 5–6 % versus 35–45 % – and their political disagreements were considered too great. During the next decade, several Labour minority governments sought support from the SV on social issues, and from the right in order to implement neo-liberal structural projects (deregulation, privatisation etc.). The SV party leadership – and, gradually, the rank and file – realised that this situation could only be improved by drawing the Labour Party into an alliance in which forces outside the parties could push back the neo-liberal tendencies within the Labour Party

Since 2005, the SV and the unions have been able to move the Labour Party back toward the left. The Labour Party has accepted a break with its previous policy of privatisation and market competition in the health and social services. In several ways, the new government has reversed policies that were pursued by all Norwegian governments after 1981. In the present coalition government, the Labour Party finds itself promoting policies in crucial areas that many of its own leaders do not believe in themselves – they do not believe that it is possible to avoid the liberalisation prevailing everywhere else in Europe. There is no doubt that there are several serious disagree-

72 Cf. Vebjørn Aalandslid: Innvandrere og kommunestyrevalget i 2007 (Immigrants and local administration election, 2007), in: SSB Rapport 2008/47.

73 NOU 2004:25 «Penger teller, men stemmer avgjør» (Money talks, but votes decide), pp. 36–37.

74 *ibid.*, p. 53

ments between the three coalition parties that make work in a common government difficult. For example, the parties are divided on whether Norwegian forces should participate in wars far from Norway.

They also have differences of opinion on the importance of environmental concerns vs. economic advantages. The Labour Party – lately with the support of the Centre Party – is pushing for extensive oil and gas drilling in Northern and Arctic waters, while the SV is strongly opposed to such drilling. There is also disagreement on whether the right of reservation in the EEA Treaty should be used against European laws that threaten Norwegian interests or fundamental social values. Under the treaty, all internal market directives and regulations apply to Norway, unless it lodges a «reservation» against a specific provision – which it has never yet done. The Labour Party leadership believes strongly that that is as it should be; the SV would like to take such action if appropriate.

As part of the globalisation-critical movement, the SV – together with ATTAC Norway and the broad NGO front in the Norwegian Social Forum – has strongly criticised Norwegian policies at the WTO, the World Bank and the IMF. The Centre Party has in some cases shared this criticism, while the Labour Party has in previous government taken the lead in policies undistinguishable from those of other European countries and the USA. The foreign policy compromise for the parliamentary period until 2013 is based on three pillars:

- The Labour Party accepts that, as long as the government lasts, Norway will not join the EU
- The SV accepts that the government will continue Norway's membership in NATO and the EEA
- The Centre Party, a staunch supporter of NATO membership, accepts that the government will continue Norway's membership in the EEA.

This compromise is not a stable one. The fundamental principles of the European Union, the free movement of products, services, capital and labour, in combination with the right of establishment, limit the space in which any government can «correct market failures» in an efficient way. Due to its membership in the EEA, Norway is in this respect in the same situation as the EU countries. The recent judgements of the European Court of Justice (Viking Line, Laval, Ruffert and Luxemburg) have limited labour and trade union rights to such an extent that the dream of a «Social Europe» may turn into a social nightmare.

The toughest issue in the coalition negotiations in 2005 was that of military «out of area» operations. The crucial point was whether a clear UN mandate was a necessary precondition for Norwegian participation in international military operations. The Labour Party negotiators argued until the very last night for weaker preconditions, like «in accordance with international law», or «in accordance with the UN Pact», but at the end accepted the SV's demand for «a clear UN mandate».

The decline of the SV

The SV vote has declined continuously since the election in 2001. One reason is that the part of the Government Platform which has been successfully implemented is seen by media and many voters as the achievement mainly of the Labour Party. The enthusiasm for the «red-green» government has largely disappeared since 2005. Objectively, there should be no reason for voters to be disappointed by its policies. Since 2005, the economy has been soaring, unemployment was halved from 4.6 to 2.3 % within three years, more people are employed than ever before, and fewer are unemployed than they have been for decades. Salaries and real incomes are rising fast, although, sadly, the higher ones are rising faster. Investment in expensive cars, houses, yachts, and, especially, in second homes on the coast or in the mountains, is exploding. The government could be blamed for this wave of over-consumption, but that is not why many voters have lost their enthusiasm for it. Here are some of the reasons:

There seems to be an increasing tendency in all European countries that governments become scapegoats for everything that can be criticised in society, and that the parties in government are punished for this at the next election. The centre-left government in Norway came to power by means of the strongest mobilisation of trade unions in decades, and their demands, and those of civil society, were the main reason for the radical profile of the Government Platform of 2005. After the election, the unions were to a great extent demobilised, which made it possible for the Labour Party to use its majority in the government to pursue its own policies in questions not explicitly agreed upon in the Government Platform. This fact has been described in the media, and registered by the voters, as a series of defeats for the SV.

The biggest difference compared with the policies of the previous government is that the liberalisation and privatisation of the past two decades has been halted. For the voters, this means a policy of «status quo». But that is not sufficient to create that sort of enthusiasm which a government of left reform policies needs.

The big strategic mistake by the leaders of the three governing parties was a promise to the voters, given before the election in 2005, that the overall tax level would not be raised for the next four years. That promise may have been necessary in order to win the election, since the main opposition parties promised huge tax cuts. But the results have been disastrous, from a left perspective, as the country has entered a period of unprecedented economic expansion. Private consumption and investment have soared – much faster, thanks to the freeze in tax levels, than public investment. This has increased inequalities in society in a period in which it would objectively have been possible to carry through extensive welfare reforms. The increased wealth created during these years could have been used to reduce inequalities and to substantially improve the quality of public services.

After Utøya

On July 22, 2011, the right-wing extremist Anders Breivik carried out a terrorist attack in Oslo and nearby Utøya Island, in which he killed 77 people, mostly Labour Party youth group members. In the aftermath, Labour Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg became, to the world, the calm and caring voice of decency in Norway, as it struggled with the disaster. The Progress Party, of which Breivik was a former member, was suddenly on the defensive, for his justification for the attack addressed the same sentiment – hatred of immigrants – as that party's programme, albeit in a very different way.

Two months later, scheduled regional/local elections were held in Norway. As expected, the Progress Party suffered a serious setback (see Table 1, right column). Surprisingly however, the also expected «sympathy vote» for Labour was very modest – a gain of only 2% – and even that seems to have come from the SV. The big winners were the Conservatives, at the expense not only of the Progress Party, but also of the Liberals; apparently, the crime sparked a «law-and-order» reaction among many voters.

As the country got back to normal, it soon became apparent that the troubles of the coalition had not been obviated; on the contrary. The setback in the election caused SV Party Chair Kristin Halvorsen to announce that she would stand down in 2012. Former Chair Erik Solheim, who had served as finance minister in the first centre-left government, told the press that Audun Lysbakken, Minister for Children, Equality and Social Inclusion, would be a good successor. At the same time, some voices began to be raised to the effect that it was time to leave the government, which seemed to be destroying the party. Clearly, what was good for the country was not necessarily good for the party; whether that meant that one should necessarily choose what was good for the party and leave the country to its own devices, was of course not necessarily the conclusion to be drawn – but it was evidently one possible one.

The coalition was however showing other signs of wear. The Centre Party (SP), although traditionally a middle-of-the-road farmers' party, not a «real» green party, had from the start used the «green» label on every possible occasion to boost its public profile, all the way to wearing green jackets at press photo ops. But over the course of 2011, the SP's Energy Minister, Ola Moe, managed to infuriate the environmental movement to a degree that verged on open warfare, supporting, among other things, deep-water oil drilling, hunting of wolves and the maintenance of fur farms. Thus, if there was a bright spot on the SV's horizon, it was the fact that that the red-green party was ever more clearly the only credible «green» spot in the «red-green coalition». However, the survival of that coalition was, as of early 2012, very much open to doubt. In any case, its term runs only until 2013.

Barbara Steiner

**«COMMUNISTS WE ARE NO LONGER,
SOCIAL DEMOCRATS WE CAN NEVER
BE THE SWEDISH LEFT PARTY»⁷⁵**

Introduction

The Swedish Left Party (Vänsterpartiet) is the successor of the Communist Party of Sweden, but today distances itself from its communist past. It is unquestionably the most successful of the radical left parties in Sweden. In addition to the Left Party, Sweden has a large number of small communist, Trotskyist, and Maoist organisations and parties, which have now and again scored minor successes at the local level.

In 1917, the Social Democratic Left Party of Sweden (SSV) was formed as a split off of the Social Democratic Party. In 1919, it became a founding member of the Communist International, and in 1921 renamed itself Communist Party of Sweden (Sveriges Kommunistiska Parti, SKP). SKP members participated in the international brigades in the Spanish Civil War, and organised resistance against the Nazis. During the Second World War, the SKP was not officially banned, but its political work was suppressed by numerous restrictions and repressive measures. Toward the end of the Third Reich, the Party nonetheless enjoyed a major upswing in the elections, thanks to its resistance to Nazism. However, this was only a brief phenomenon, and with the beginning of the Cold War, election results dropped to around 5%, where they stayed until the historic electoral success of 1998. Until the 1960s, the SKP was largely «loyal to Moscow»; nonetheless, in 1967, it renamed itself the Left Party of Communists (Vänsterpartiet Kommunisterna, VPK), and assumed a Eurocommunist stance. It was one of the first parties to publicly condemn the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, an exceptional position among Western communist parties. With the end of the Soviet Union in 1991, the party renamed itself again, now calling itself the Left Party (Vänsterpartiet).

75 David Arter: «Communists we are no longer, Social Democrats we can never be»: The Evolution of the Leftist Parties in Finland and Sweden, in: *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, 1743–9eleven6, Vol.18, Issue 3, 2002, pp. 1–28.

The reconstruction of the party and also of the Swedish party system is the result of a long and difficult process. The Left Party has consistently moved toward becoming an electoral alternative to the Social Democrats, and a real option for that party's left-wing. It has emerged as an energetic protector of the welfare and social state achievements of Sweden. In terms of its position on issues, is now at a point where the Swedish Social Democrats once stood, fighting for the welfare state, for Keynesian economic and labour market policies, and for the expansion of the public sector. The Left Party's rejection of communism began with the end of the Soviet Union. In 1993, this transformation was anchored in the party programme. Under then-party chair Gudrun Schyman (1993–2003), to this day one of the most popular politicians in Sweden, feminist politics was established alongside socialism as one of the foundations of the Left Party at the 1996 Party Congress. Schyman herself originally belonged to one of the dogmatic communist tendencies, but under her leadership, the Left Party opened up towards new social movements. After being voted out of office as Left Party chair Schyman founded a new party, the Feminist Initiative, a unique Swedish feature in Europe's party landscape. As a result of its new party line, the Left Party in 1998 won 12 % of the vote, its peak election result. That electoral success was the result of the disillusionment of leftist voters with the Social Democratic Party, and was also thanks to the clear rejection by the Left Party of Sweden's entry into the EU in 1995.

In 2004, Lars Ohly was elected Party Chair. Like Schyman, he belonged to the leftist, more traditional wing of the party, and when, after his election, he described himself as a communist, there were loud protests. A counter-tendency formed within the party, the liberal group called Left Crossroads (*Vägval Vänster*), which called for a broader platform, and for a red-green discourse. However, it was possible to avoid a split, and this grouping which has described itself as independent has been dormant since 2009.

In the parliamentary elections of 2006, the Left Party suffered a historic setback, falling from 12.7 to 5.7 % of the vote. In its position as a supporter of the Social Democratic minority government, it no longer provided a credible alternative. Its electoral results thus confirmed the pattern that has appeared among many European left parties since the '90s, according to which entering coalition governments with the Social Democrats, or supporting their minority governments, will result in losses (cf. March 2008, 13). This was especially true in view of the fact that the cutbacks of the Social Democratic government supported by the Left Party, have since the '90s increased the gap between rich and poor and caused a dismantling of social supports. The largest right-wing party, the moderates, fairs the popular reaction to the cutbacks in welfare state supports and the privatisation introduced by the Social Democrats, in the last election to portrayed themselves as «the better Social Democrats» (cf. Nilsson 2010), thus sealing the fate of Social Democratic hegemony. This follows the trend «away from the unconditional welfare state for all,

towards the social state» policy, which argues for support conditional upon work performance («workfare instead of welfare»). This is a trend which the Social Democrats are pursuing across Europe, as embodied in the German slogan «Fordern und Fördern», literally «challenge and support»; or more accurately «rights and responsibilities».

The red green coalition

In the 2010 elections, the parliamentary left in Sweden for the first time presented a common electoral platform, with the Left Party, the Social Democratic SAP (Sveriges socialdemokratiska arbetareparti) and the green Environmental Party (Miljöpartiet) campaigning together for a «red-green coalition» government, with a common electoral programme and even a joint proposed budget. The effort was launched in December 2008 after some initial rejection of cooperation with the Left Party in the SAP had been overcome and the party's Chair Mona Sahlin was forced to yield to the pressure from segments of the membership. Some parts of the union movement were also opposed to a coalition of only the SAP and the Greens, since the latter party supports economic liberal positions, especially in labour market and economic policy. They also provided the conservative-liberal government with parliamentary majorities in some other issues, such as immigration.

The Left Party thus stood together with the SAP and the Greens against the bourgeois block. This had already been formed prior to the 2006 elections, and after its victory, formed the first purely conservative bourgeois government in post-war Sweden. The role of the Left Party vis-à-vis the Social Democrats, which had dominated the government until 2006, had been that of a corrective; criticism of the Social Democrats had gone hand in hand with support for Social Democratic government work. Now however, participation in government became the goal. In order to enter a red-green coalition, the Left Party had to make a number of substantive compromises. For instance, it had to drop its stubborn criticism of neo-liberal budget and tax policy, in order to achieve a common budget proposal. This included increased money for jobs and apprenticeships, «green» investments in environmentally appropriate infrastructure and housing, environmental taxes, such as on coal, tax breaks for small business, and investment in higher education. By contrast to the neo-liberal security discourse, «security» was interpreted as meaning social security, improved health care and unemployment insurance. After the major electoral losses suffered by the Social Democrats and the Left Party in 2006, the 2010 campaign was to ring in a new era of «red-red-green» government. For the first time, the Social Democrats, who have for decades ruled alone or in minority governments, now allowed themselves to be persuaded to agree to a coalition even prior to the election. And for the first time in Sweden, there was prior to the election not only the agreement to a coalition, but even joint appearances during the election campaign, and a joint web presence.

What Henning Süssner called the «long march into the coalition»⁷⁶ was for some time in the central programme of the Left Party: the desire to participate in government rather than operating from the opposition benches only. For the first time in history, the questions of government participation and having a share of political power were no longer theoretical abstractions, but an immediate possibility. However, joining in government in a «red-green cooperation for the future», as the slogan of the electoral alliance called it, is now once again a remote dream. In opposition, there will be no alliance of the left. The red-green coalition proved to constitute no attractive alternative; the similarities were placed ahead of the differences, the result may have been an agenda that was too close to the programme of the government.

«We have lost the election, we will win the fight against racism!»⁷⁷

However, the greatest stir caused by the election was the fact that a right-wing populist party with far-right roots. Sweden Democrats (Sverigedemokraterna) won 21 seats in parliament. For the Left Party and its youth league, this meant immediate mobilisation against right-wing populism, extremism and racism at all levels. Demonstrations were organised and media work initiated. They were determined not to yield an inch to the right wing. Currently, there is not yet any consensus regarding the issue of negotiation or cooperation with the Sweden Democrats. It remains to be seen whether this nationalistic, racist party and its contents will become as socially acceptable in Sweden, as similar parties have in other countries.

The structure of the left party

The electoral victory of the right wing and the extreme right, and the determined struggle against all forms of racism and right-wing populism, have brought the Left Party a lot of sympathy and also new members. Many have seen that the time has come to take action and get organised. Within two weeks, 3000 new members joined.

The Left Party today has approx. 12,000–13,000 members, although there is no exact list of membership. Women constitute a slight majority. The party is structured in party districts, and its highest decision-making body is the Party Congress, which meets every two years and is composed of delegates elected from these districts. It adopts the Party Programme, the Statutes and other basic political documents; moreover, it also elects the party «President» and a «National Board»⁷⁸, as they are called. The strong position of women in the party is expressed, among other things,

76 An oblique reference to the «long march through the institutions» of West Germany's '60s-era student rebel leader Rudi Dutschke – a call to «work within the system»; that was of course in turn a reference to the Chinese Long March. (cf. Süssner 2009)

77 Quote from Kalle Larsson, former Vänsterpartiet MEP

78 These terms according to the English version of the home page; Swedish: ordförande, which actually means something like «speaker», and styrelse, actually «steering committee».

by the fact that almost two thirds of the nominees for seats on the National Board' at the 2010 Party Congress were women, while more than half of those were elected.

There is a permanent Programme Commission, also elected by the Party Congress. It proposed changes in the Party Programme whenever this is seen as necessary. The electoral platform for the elections in autumn 2010 was prepared by the National Board, and adopted by the Party Congress that autumn. Party members proposed changes either individually or within their local party organisations. After the electoral defeat, Lars Ohly in the summer of 2011 announced his intention to resign. The Party Congress in 2012 elected his successor former MEP Jonas Sjöstedt, who is currently a member of the Riksdag.

Thus, the party is organisationally similar to most of the other membership parties in the European Left Party; however compared with other parties, the discussion culture is very open and tolerant toward dissident opinions – even unexpected or controversial positions are given space for expression at the party-congress and conferences. There is no tradition of factions and institutionalised controversial tendencies within the party but, the above-mentioned group «Left Crossroads» shows that party members can certainly organize themselves in an association independent of the party in order to achieve change within it. The last major split took place during the '60s and '70s, as a result of a massive conflict regarding the party's relationship to the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China.

The party has had problems in the past filling all electoral offices to which it has been elected. Therefore, there is now a tendency to turn to other forms of politics and contact with the public, particularly direct conversations with people on their doorsteps, in the streets, or at the workplace. Moreover, the Left Party is exploring the possibilities for digital communications and participation via Web 2.0.

The youth organisation of the Left Party is called the Young Left (Ung Vänster), and there is also the Left Student Association (Vänsterns studentförbund, VSF). They work closely together with the Left Party, and share its most important goals, but they have their own organisational structures and basic programmes⁷⁹.

The left party in the Swedish political system

Sweden is a parliamentary monarchy. The fact that the King is still the head of state and holds an expensive court is rarely the occasion of criticism in liberal Sweden. Traditionally, Sweden had the standard Scandinavian five party system, with a bourgeois and a socialist bloc. The former consisted of the Conservatives, the Liberals and the Centre Party, which is a farmers' party, a Scandinavian peculiarity.⁸⁰ The socialist bloc has been dominated by the Social Democrats.

79 cf. Vänsterpartiet 2007.

80 This reflected the relatively strong agricultural sector in the early 20th century, with its own parliamentary representation, and the long-time «urban-rural gap», along which voter behaviour was structured.

From 1998 to 2006, the Left Party entered into a formal agreement to support the Social Democratic minority government. But even before that, the Social Democrats could be sure that the Left would support their minority or single party governments, since the only alternative would have been de facto support for a takeover by the bourgeois bloc. Generally, no concessions were made to the radical left. Depending on what bill was at issue, the Social Democrats would try to achieve support from among the various smaller parties, either the Liberals or the Left Party. The formation of the red-green alliance marks the end of the era of the five, and now six, party spectrum, with the Social Democrats as its immovable focal point of power. There are now irrevocably two three-party blocs, with any cooperation across the boundary between them excluded⁸¹.

Entry into the Swedish Parliament, the Riksdag, requires surpassing the 4% minimum threshold, as the Left Party has always succeeded in doing since the introduction of the current electoral and parliamentary system in 1970.⁸² There are three electoral levels, the Riksdag, the provincial parliaments (Landsting) and the municipalities. Elections for all three levels are held every four years. The Left Party has 19 seats in the Riksdag, down from 22 before the election, in which it scored 5.6%, only a slight loss. Despite moderate gains by the Greens, the disastrous Social Democratic showing allowed the bourgeois government to be re-elected, albeit without a majority, thanks to the entry into Parliament of the right-wing populist Sweden Democrats. Since the Greens refused to join the government, a minority bourgeois government is in power.

The Left Party tends to have its greatest electoral successes in the major cities of Stockholm and Gothenburg and also, traditionally, in the North. In southern Sweden, where the population is concentrated, support tends to be smaller. Since the beginning of the '90s, considerably more women than men have voted for the Left Party.⁸³ This corresponds to a nationwide trend of women being more likely to vote left, for example 54% of women said they would vote for a red-green coalition.⁸⁴ One reason for that may be that women have a greater interest in preserving the welfare state, since it ensures that the state will assume tasks which in a patriarchal society, have traditionally been assigned to women as unpaid labour.

The Left Party has slightly higher support among voters of an immigrant background than do other parties. Non-EU foreigners, too, can vote in local elections; however, few actually do so.⁸⁵ However, the party is now supported in larger measure by the «new middle classes» than by the traditional workers. Students especially, professionals in socio-cultural professions such as journalism and education, trades and

81 cf. Süßner 2008

82 Prior to that, there had been a bicameral parliament.

83 Data taken from surveys. Cf. SCB IV, 2009.

84 cf. Eriksson 2010

85 cf. Wüst 2010

craftworkers and also public sector workers at municipal and provincial levels vote for the Left Party. Cultural workers have since the '60s been a significant group within the party, which is also reflected in the profile of those who vote for the Left Party.

People over 60 and pensioners are strongly underrepresented among the party's voters. There are two age groups in which the Left Party is particularly strong: those under 30, and those of the '60s generation', i.e. those between 45 and 59, the generation that was socialised at the time of the student protests and the emergence of new social movements starting in 1968.

Strategic direction in connection with the economic crisis

The global crisis has not yet had any drastic political, social or economic effects in Sweden in the form of bank failures or mass unemployment. After initially dropping by 4.9% in 2009, the gross domestic product has recently been climbing steadily, by 5.6% in 2010 and by an estimated 4% in 2011. Unemployment rose from 6.2% to over 9% in 2009, but has since dropped again to 7.2%; thus, economic growth and a budget surplus, rather than a rising public debt are the picture in Sweden. Nonetheless, social injustice and conflicts which originated prior to the current crisis have been aggravated; they may be the reason for the rise of right-wing populism.

Here too, the crisis has not meant any gain in support for the left, one reason being that the foundations for cutbacks in welfare state benefits were laid during the Social Democrats' term in government, so that it is difficult to argue credibly that the Left will now react differently to the crisis. The Left Party analyzes the crisis as an inevitable, intrinsic effect of the capitalist system. However in its demands on economic and financial policy, its position is that financial speculation should be harnessed and that productive capital and state controls should be favoured. In addition to broad democratic control of the financial markets and investments, it demands increased construction of affordable housing, and expansion of public employment, as well as an increase in public spending. There is a lack of any economic alternative, or of a vision which might be openly proclaimed to the public. Even criticism of privatisation, neo-liberal budgets and labour market policy became quieter in the period before the election, since these were already introduced by the Social Democratic government. An interest in the united appearance of the red-green coalition partnership became evident⁸⁶. According to the party leadership's proposal for the electoral platform for the red-green government, fighting unemployment and the renewed achievement of full employment should have top priority. Other issues, such as the reduction of gender inequality, defence of the welfare state and promotion of environmental professions have priority in the Left Party⁸⁷. This is in accordance with the priorities of the party's principles: jobs, welfare, feminism, and the environment. The importance of

86 cf. Nilsson 2010

87 cf. Vänsterpartiet 2009

environmental policy and the raising of awareness for climate policy goals have a very high priority in Sweden, as throughout Scandinavia. Within the Left Party too, there is strong awareness of the importance of measures against global warming, as delegates have stressed at party congresses again and again: the last ones have even adopted a «climate smart» image, advising delegates to travel there by train and levying compensation contributions on; those who came by car or airplane to be donated to UN projects for CO2 reduction in Asia.

The Left Party was always the only party, even within the «red-green coalition», to continually uphold demand for the withdrawal of Swedish troops from Afghanistan, this position has been maintained.

EU-Scepticism

Scepticism towards, and even rejection of, the EU is characteristic of the left in Sweden. This is in contrast to non-Scandinavian countries, where the demand for withdrawal from the EU is largely limited to nationalistic right-wing parties. In Sweden however, EU scepticism should not be assessed as purely nationalistically motivated; rather, the fear of dismantling of social achievements and the smashing of the «Swedish model», not only from within but also as a result of EU standards, is a major factor. This scepticism is strongly rooted throughout Swedish society, although it has been dropping slowly since accession to the EU. In a referendum in 2003 regarding the introduction of the euro, 56% voted against the European currency. Although for a time, polls showed a drop in rejection sentiment against the euro, the crisis of 2009 and the continuing crisis of the euro have once again generated a solid 60% majority against the introduction of the EU currency⁸⁸. In 1995, the Left Party was the only party to explicitly reject entry into the EU. For the European election in 2009, too, its main slogan was «Your EU-critical vote». The demands for withdrawal from the EU have however become quieter recently; only the rejection of the EU's Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) and of the euro remained strong. The voters of the Left Party had been far and away the most EU-sceptical, although they have now been surpassed in that by supporters of the right-wing populist Sweden Democrats; these are the only two parties which are the only parties which fully reject the EU. The Left Party supporters, like those of most other parties, softened their attitude toward the EU until 2009, but thereafter, their rejection rate increased again (SCB II 2009).

The Left Party supporters, like those of most other parties, softened their attitude toward the EU until 2009, but thereafter their rejection rate increased again⁸⁹.

In Scandinavia, the Euro-sceptical left is united in the Nordic Green Left Alliance. Within the EU, the Left Party in Sweden, the Socialist People's Party (SF) in Denmark and the Leftist Association (VAS) in Finland are members. The Left Party has

88 cf. S CB I, 2009

89 cf. SCB II, 2009

observer status in European Left Party (EL), full membership is not an issue. Since the Left Party is EU-sceptical but at the same time wants to fight for a different Europe, it stands in European parliamentary elections. In the 2009 EP election, the party lost one of its two seats. Its remaining representative, Eva Britt Svensson, belongs to the «Confederal Parliamentary Group» of the European Parliament, the United European Left/Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL). One explanation for the loss of the seat which has been put forward is that not enough EU sceptics could be mobilised to go to the polls.

The Swedish Left Party and the Sweden Democrats are the only parties which reject the EU. The Left Party holds fast to its demands for withdrawal from the EU, but only rejection of EMU membership and adoption of the euro have a high priority. The party position is that the EU stands for militarisation, and that the entry into it would cause Sweden to abandon its «independent and active foreign policy and neutrality».

The Left Party believed that the EU stood for militarisation, and that the entry into it would cause Sweden to abandon its «independent and active foreign policy and neutrality»; it now blames the end of Swedish neutrality on the EU. The actual role of Swedish neutrality during the Second World War, when Sweden provided support for German troops, had been examined critically, and since the end of the Cold War, neutrality was increasingly described as «having become obsolete» (Svåsand, Lindström 1996, 208), and as a dead letter.

The Left Party also criticizes the deficits of democracy and transparency of the EU, as well as its restrictive and unnecessarily bureaucratic refugee policies, and the fact that labour market standards are, the Party claims, neglected in stark contrast to EMU financial stipulations. Moreover, it claims the environment will suffer under the increase in the transport of goods. The important thing is not to let the EU become a super-state, of which Sweden would be a part. Agricultural policy should be the responsibility of national level government⁹⁰. All in all, the political attitude toward the EU does seem to follow a certain tendency within national isolationism, which correlates, too, with the economic policy orientation toward state regulation. Nonetheless, members of the Left Party are strongly involved in the struggle for a different Europe, particularly within the social forums. The Left Party actively supported the European Social Forum of 2008 in Malmö. The Young Left was also represented on the board of the European Social Forum North in 2008. Various functionaries and representatives of the Left Party made presentations, for instance on the militarisation of the EU, on feminism, on refugee policy etc.⁹¹. The Left Student Association is one of ten membership organisation of the support group formed to cover the debts incurred in Malmö.

90 cf. Vänsterpartiet 2006

91 cf. Vänsterpartiet 2008

Potential alliances in the left spectrum

In accordance with its red-green orientation, the Left Party supports the extra-parliamentary climate network «Climax», and was actively present at the Copenhagen Climate Summit. One potential ally in education policy is the Swedish «people's colleges»⁹²; they have a long tradition, and provide preparation for university study. The Left Party itself sponsors such colleges with the goal of providing progressive education, and works closely together with various party levels and other leftist organisations. The Left Party supports the Feminist Forum, but at the same time is in competition with the Feminist Initiative party. Potential allies of the Left Party include the unions and the antifascist movement.

Feminist Initiative

The Feminist Initiative party, while it should not be considered entirely part of the Swedish left, is nonetheless interesting. One reason of course is that former Left Party President Gudrun Schyman, an independent MP starting in 2004, was the founder and to this day remains the leading light of the Feminist Initiative. The only other countries in Europe which have «women's parties» are Germany and Slovenia, but their electoral results are far less than those of the Feminist Initiative. The party was founded in 2005, from a pressure group which announced a feminist candidacy for the election, in order to pressure the other parties running in the 2006 election to the Riksdag. The goal was to force them to set up «gender justice» electoral lists, i.e. lists with gender parity. The feminist initiative was founded by feminists from various political camps. Three members of the executive committee were elected as Speakers. Men too were permitted to occupy party offices. The media focused particularly on the campaign to abolish marriage and replace it with a cohabitation law, which would be independent of gender and even allow polygamy. In August 2005, one of the party's cofounders and a member of the executive committee, Ebba Witt-Brattström, left the party due to internal differences, but also because its political position was too radically left for her. University Prof. Tiina Rosenberg, who also supports the interests of gays and lesbians, resigned from her position as party speaker in October 2005, due to threats and the media smear campaign against her. In spite of achieving poll results of up to 10% in 2005, the party ultimately won only 0.68% of the vote in the 2006 parliamentary election. One of its basic difficulties was and is that the combination of the two approaches of liberal and emancipatory feminism did not work, and that the very broad concept of feminism alone did not provide a sufficient base to form a party capable of struggle and action. In the election to the European Parliament in June 2009 however, the party did win 2.2% of the vote. The current speakers are Gudrun Schyman, journalist and publisher

92 A north-central European institution, in German, Volkshochschulen, which provide adult education courses usually during evenings and at weekends.

Devrim Mavi, and Sofia Karlsson. The Feminist Initiative received just 0.4 % of the vote in the 2010 election.

The unions

The unions traditionally have firm roots in Sweden, in a specifically Scandinavian, strongly corporatist, form of consensus oriented government. Some 80 % of Swedes are union members, but here too membership figures are dropping. Unions have a relatively powerful position, and in Sweden there is no minimum wage, for the unions are responsible for wage negotiations and collective bargaining. Moreover, they are responsible for administering unemployment insurance⁹³. The largest union federation is the National Labour Confederation (*Landsorganisationen i Sverige, LO*), which groups 14 single unions, in which the workers are organised. Traditionally, they are social democratic, and until 1987 there was collective membership under which all union members were automatically members of the Social Democratic Party; the Party and the unions were often seen as «Siamese twins»⁹⁴, and the relationship is still symbiotic. The unionists within the SAP also tend to be the more left-wing Social Democrats. They were the ones who wanted to make sure that the Left Party was within the electoral alliance. Moreover, there is a union association of academics (SACO). The white-collar unions are not part of the LO, but rather have their own federation of unions, the TCO (*Tjänstemännens Centralorganisation*). This is the union in which the Left Party has the most support (7.1 %), followed by the workers in the LO (6.5 %) and among academics organised in unions (6.2%)⁹⁵. The trade union members within the Left Party are supported by the party in their workplace struggles.

Antifascist movement

Sweden holds a unique position in relation to fascism and the Nazis, it remained «neutral» during the war, but allowed German troops to pass through its territory on their way to Russia and allowed transport of materials by train. The white buses, (Swedish buses that brought liberated concentration camp prisoners to Sweden for care from state aid organisations) are legendary and have a much stronger effect on the official perspective of the relationship to fascism than the fact that Nazi troops were both passively and actively supported by the Swedish state. According to the mythology this was the only, way, Sweden could remain the only Scandinavian country which was not occupied. The group Antifascist Action (AFA) was founded in Sweden in 1993; its membership is composed primarily of young people and students. The AFA is a militant left radical organisation; research, demonstrations and sometimes

93 cf. Steffen 2006, p. 70

94 cf. Aylott, 2002, quoting Steffen, 2006, p. 14.

95 cf. SCB IV, 2009.

militant action are the core of its work. Recently, activists have been victimised by massive police repression. Within the left, however, there is also a discussion regarding whether it makes sense to use militant action in connection with protests against immigrant expulsion policies and extreme right wing demonstrations. While the extreme right-wing Swedish Democrats were able to enter parliament in the recent election, they are no longer growing; their demonstrations very often set the scene for left-wing counterdemonstrations.

Conclusion

The Left Party has today completely turned its back on communism and concluded its transformation to a modern leftist party which sees ecology and feminism as just as important as social and welfare state policies. The electoral campaign of the red-green alliance failed to achieve its goal of winning government power. The Left Party as a pluralist party uses new forms of political activity, coupled with the traditional party structure. The focus on issues involves a package of demands designed to not only continue the Social Democrats' Keynesian policies of the last century but to revive them, i.e. the preservation of the welfare state, full employment, expansion of government regulation of the financial sector, increased public spending and job creation, environmental protection and equality. The radical left in Sweden, like its counterparts throughout Scandinavia, is more sceptical of the EU than other left parties in Europe, and holds an Eurosceptic or even rejectionist position. Except for the instance of extreme public prominence of the Left Party in the 1998 elections, (after the debate over EU membership, with Gudrun Schyman as party president and the birth of the new social movements), The Left has existed in the shadow of the Social Democrats for decades, achieving electoral results in the 5% range. How the Left Party will develop with a new chair, to be elected in 2012, and with its struggle against the right wing inside and outside of parliament, is the most immediate pending question.

Bibliography

- March, Luke: Contemporary Far Left Parties in Europe. From Marxism to the Mainstream? Friedrich Ebert Foundation: Berlin 2008.
- Nilsson, Petter: Why the Crisis Seems to Favour Rather the Right than the Left in Europe? Study in transform! – Strategiseminar part I, 2010. Download: http://www.transform-network.net/uploads/media/Sweden_Crisis.doc.
- Steffen, Christian: Die Parteiensysteme Dänemarks, Norwegens und Schwedens [The party systems of Denmark, Norway and Sweden], in: Oskar Niedermayer/Richard Stöss/Melanie Haas (eds.): Die Parteiensysteme Westeuropas [The party systems of Western Europe], Wiesbaden 2006, pp. 67–108.
- Süssner, Henning: Schweden – Sweden: The Long March into the Coalition, in: Birgit Daiber/Cornelia Hildebrandt (eds.): The Left In Europe: Analysis of Left Parties and
- Party Alliances, essays for political education rls papers series, Berlin 2009, pp. 66–70. Svåsand, Lars/Ulf Lindström: Scandinavian political parties and the European Union, in: John Gaffney (ed.): Political Parties and the European Union, London/New York 1996, pp. 205–219.
- DN: Dagens Nyheter: Rödgrön ledning med drygt 10 procentheter [Red Green leading by some 10%], January 24, 2010: <http://www.dn.se/nyheter/valet2010/rodgron-ledning-med-drygt-10-procent-1.1032283>.
- ESF 2008: Board: <http://esf2008.org/about/who-organizes-esf/board>.
- Fria Tidningen: Vägvalet som försvann [The crossroads have disappeared], July 20, 2009: <http://www.fria.nu/artikel/80188>.
- LO – Landsorganisation i Sverige. News from LO, 2009: <http://www.lo.se/home/lo/home.nsf/unidview/E2A56001E93D5F3EC1256E760040952D>
- Novus: Svensk Väljaropinion. April 2010, in: [http://www.novusgroup.se/userfiles/file/Svensk Prozent20Valjaropinion Prozent20April Prozent202010.pdf](http://www.novusgroup.se/userfiles/file/Svensk%20Väljaropinion%20April%202010.pdf).
- Svenska Dagbladet: Eriksson, Göran: Kvinnor till vänster män till höger [Women to the left, men to the right], March 7, 2010: http://www.svd.se/nyheter/inrikes/kvinnor-till-vanster-man-till-hoger_4393487.svd.
- Stödföreningen för ESF i Norden [Support group for ESF in the North]. Uppmaning till organisationer och individer att engagera sig till stöd! Skulden ska betalas – stärk rörelsen! [Call for support to organisations and individuals! Pay the debts – strengthen the movement!], in: <http://www.esfsupport.org/index.php/contents/omstodforeningen.html>.
- Vänsterpartiet: Partistyrelsens förslag till valplattform [steering committee proposal for electoral platform], 2009.
- Vänsterpartiet: Vänsterpartiet deltar på European Social Forum i Malmö [Left Party takes part in European social forum in Malmö], 2008.
- Vänsterpartiet: Party Programme, 2007; Very brief abstract in English: http://www.vansterpartiet.se/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1062&Itemid=847.
- Vänsterpartiet: EU and EMU, 2006.
- Wüst, Andreas: Wahlrecht für Migranten bedeutet nicht automatisch bessere Integration (Voting rights for immigrants does not necessarily mean better integration). Deutsche Welle – World. March 29, 2010 <http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,,5402526,00.html>
- Sources:
- Konjunkturinstitutet: National Institute of Economic Research. GDP and Demand in Sweden, Stockholm 2010.
- Konjunkturinstitutet: National Institute of Economic Research. Output and Labour Market, Stockholm 2010.
- SCB I: Statistiska Centralbyrån [Central Statistical Office]: EU- och eurosympatier i november 2009: Stödet för euron ökar. SCB Press release [EU and Eurosympathies in November 2009: support for the euro rose. press release by the SCB, Swedish statistics], Stockholm 2009.
- SCB Ia: Statistiska Centralbyrån: EU- och eurosympatier i maj 2011: Klart minskat stöd för euron. Pressmeddelande från SCB [EU and Eurosympathies in May 2011: Clear minority for the euro. Press release of the SCB, Swedish statistics], Stockholm 2011.
- SCB II: Statistiska Centralbyrån: EU-sympatier efter partisympati [EU sympathies broken down by party sympathy] 1996–2009, Stockholm 2009.
- SCB III: Statistiska Centralbyrån, Stockholm 2009.
- SCB IV: Statistiska Centralbyrån: Partisympatier i befolkningsgrupper med särredovisning av Sverigedemokraterna [Party sympathies in population groups with reference to the Swedish Democrats], May–November 2009.
- SCB V: Statistiska Centralbyrån Pressmeddelande: Partisympatiundersökningen i november 2009 [Press release: Party sympathy investigations in November 2009].

Thomas Kachel

THE BRITISH LEFT AT THE END OF THE NEW LABOUR ERA - AN ELECTORAL ANALYSIS

«It was our generation's shot, and Blair blew it ... our hope must be for the new generation.»

Robert Harris, author, in a BBC documentary on Blair's legacy

In April 1999, German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder and British Prime Minister Anthony Blair published their common declaration of a Third Way for Social Democracy. In it the newly elected leaders devised a blueprint for a «whole new era» of social democratic governance in Europe, and declared the left/right divide of politics in western societies dead. The intellectual heralds of this New Social Democracy proposed that the capitalist character of western society had transformed itself into a «post-scarcity economy», so that all that remained for politics to do was to manage «societal modernisation» or «life politics» – or, to quote Giddens, «political issues which flow from processes of self-actualisation in post-traditional contexts».⁹⁶ Taking its cue from all this emphasis on «post's, the New Labour government of Tony Blair and Gordon Brown was the first and most influential European government claiming to pursue these ideas.⁹⁷ Its demise is therefore not only of significance to Britain, but equally to the beleaguered social democratic parties all across Europe. But the British left, both inside and outside Labour, will also have to adjust to the imminent consequences of this shift.

96 Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity. Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*, 1991.

97 Academics critical of «Third Way» rhetoric beg to differ: They see the political agenda, from the outset, as having been one of class interest: Stuart Hall sees the purpose of New Labour's project in the «transformation of social democracy into a particular variant of free-market liberalism», while Devine/Prior/Purdy opine that, by 1990, «[Thatcherism] had not yet wholly enlisted a new and stable historic bloc in Britain for global neo-liberal principles and policies. This was to become New Labour's historic mission. Economically, New Labour ... has set about extending the «business state» into every aspect of our lives.» *Feel-Bad Britain*, Red Pepper 2009.

Whatever the argument about the nature of New Labour in government, all political observers agree that the spectacular collapse of the Labour vote that foreshadowed and then brought on the demise of Prime Minister Gordon Brown's government went much deeper than a fleeting dislike for a fumbling party leader; rather, it reflected a crisis of legitimacy of Britain's «favourite» traditional model of capitalist economy, and of the ancient system of political representation which New Labour oversaw. The longer term question for the British left, however, is whether it can someday snatch victory from the jaws of New Labour's defeat. Currently, the European Left Party has no officially affiliated partner party in Britain, but this new start may, in the medium term, result in a new organisational setting, a reformulation of the left's position inside the British party system, and hence, too, of its hitherto rather isolated position vis-à-vis the European Left.

Who's picking up the pieces? Britain at the end of New Labour

Despite numerous occasions in which the British government has openly defied the interests of the majority of the population, the defensive shout of the New Labour establishment – «there is no alternative» – long stymied any constructive progressive reshaping of British politics. Thus, Labour's weakness was largely of its own making, caused by three simultaneous dilemmas which it was unwilling, or unable, to solve.

First and foremost was the unwillingness on the part of the government to rein in big capital in its dealings with the financial crisis, especially the budget deficit, and the bank rescue scheme. Today, it is far from certain how much or indeed whether those banks will have to repay their loans – totalling some £850 billion, or €1 trillion⁹⁸ – to the taxpayer: the government refrained from actual takeovers and instead invested in shares of these banks. Even Brown subverted efforts for stricter financial regulation; Cameron is continuing to do so in the teeth of a virtual European consensus that at least minimal steps in that direction are needed.⁹⁹ Instead of securing the repayment of the public outlays for the banks through taxing profits, Brown's government in November 2009 announced the daunting goal of halving the UK budget's annual deficit of £176 billion over the coming five years, mainly through cuts in expenditures. Conservative Prime Minister David Cameron and his Liberal side-kick Nick Clegg of course came up with a greatly enhanced version of that programme, seeking to eliminate the deficit altogether during their term, which ends in 2015. Horrific cuts have indeed reduced the deficit – to less than £120 billion

98 Figure according to AP, Dec. 4, 2009.

99 On British pressure, a declaration of G20 finance ministers calling for the introduction of a Tobin tax was turned into a recommendation to the IMF to «examine its effects on the financial services industry»- cf. Guardian Weekly, Dec. 17, 2009; by early 2012, the continuing Greek crisis had made such a move urgent, yet Britain refused to budge.

for 2011.¹⁰⁰ Where the rest is to come from, as the economy goes into recession, is anyone's guess.

Secondly, social inequality spiralled under New Labour. Despite some selective improvements in youth employment,¹⁰¹ the wealth gap in British society was not even narrowed.¹⁰² Any redistribution, occurred largely within the lower half of the population, and only by means of those crumbs that fell from the table of an erstwhile comfortable level of economic growth.; Social mobility also declined¹⁰³ and despite «boasting» the fifth lowest minimum wage in Western Europe,¹⁰⁴ the arrival of the recession in the «real economy» has made unemployment a chronic issue.¹⁰⁵ Public services, especially the National Health Service, remain underfunded: Supermarkets have started offering do-it-yourself tooth repair sets for people unable to afford the dentist. Private Finance Initiatives (PFIs) are mushrooming and give private investors influence on, for example; the curriculum of the schools they sponsor. Finally, with house prices quickly recovering again, social housing provision is getting ever more squeezed; in 2008, nearly 80,000 families in England rated as homeless and 1.8 million households were on waiting lists.¹⁰⁶ All this was «setting ... parts of the same communities at each other's throats in the fight for resources»¹⁰⁷ which were being increasingly cut back, permitting the BNP to gain a foothold, and racism to be stoked up again: In a 2009 poll, 47 % of British respondents found that immigrants did not deserve the same social benefits as Britons.¹⁰⁸ The deprived areas of the English North remained the focus of these festering developments.¹⁰⁹ All this was already true under New Labour; the explosion – in the form of riots – came in 2011 under Cameron.

The third dilemma, a function of the first two, is a collapse of trust in the democratic political process and its representatives. In the European and local elections in 2009, a mere 34.7 % of the electorate bothered to cast their vote. This mass disengagement from politics is not hard to explain: In the eyes of the British public, politics have become corrupt, with Tony Blair more or less openly «selling» seats in the House of Lords («cash for peerages»). And in the first months of 2010, the Chilcot Commission investigating the devious government tricks in the run-up to the Iraq War provided

100 Gonzalo Vina, U.K. Budget Deficit Narrows as Osborne's Squeeze Bites, Bloomberg Business Week (Online), Nov. 22, 2011, <http://www.businessweek.com/news/2011-eleven-22/u-k-budget-deficit-narrows-as-osborne-s-squeeze-bites-economy.html>, accessed Feb. 3, 2012.

101 See e.g. Hills/Sefton/Stewart: Towards a more Equal Society? Poverty, Inequality and Policy since 1997, 2009.

102 According to the Institute of Public Policy Research, a left-of-centre think-tank, for more than 30 years now, the lower 50 % of Britain's population have been stuck with only 7 % of national wealth – no change under New Labour.

103 See Paul Gregg/Stephen Machin: «Social mobility: low and falling», CentrePiece Spring 2005. London.

104 As of October 2011, it was £6.08, cf. Eurostat Data in Focus, 2011.

105 Unemployment reached a 16-year high (8.8 %), and is set to rise further in spring. cf. BBC News, Jan. 2012.

106 Figures from Shelter England: www.//england.shelter.org.uk/housing_issues/building_more_homes#3

107 Kieran Farrow in www.redpepper.org.uk/Anti-fascism-isn-t-working, in a thought-provoking article.

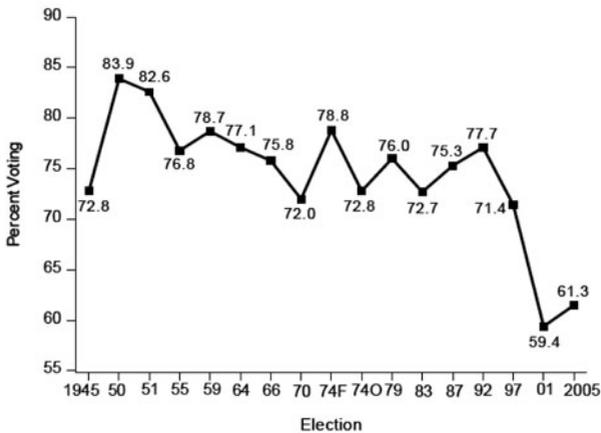
108 Guardian Weekly, December eleven, 2009.

109 Cf. Centre for Cities, Outlook 2010: <http://www.centreforcities.org/index.php?id=1054>.

the public with yet another reminder of how Blair got Britain into that expensive and deadly quagmire.¹¹⁰ The «expenses scandal», however,¹¹¹ turned this distrust of politicians into a massive loss of the legitimacy of Parliament, and of trust in the functioning of democracy in Britain, with majorities of some sectors of working or lower class people withdrawing their support for parliamentary democracy.¹¹² The state responded to this loss of legitimacy with an increasingly draconian suppression of civil rights.¹¹³

A consequence of all this has been widespread, massive political apathy is mirrored in the abrupt decline of voting in the general elections under New Labour (see Chart I). For some years now, voter abstention and Labour losses have both been concentrated precisely in the Labour heartlands of the English North-West, the North-East.¹¹⁴ It is no coincidence that these are the areas where the two first MEPs for the racist British National Party were elected.

Figure 1.1: Turnout in UK General Elections, 1945-2005



Source: UK Election Statistics 1918-2004, House of Commons Research Paper 04/61, p. 17; General Election 2005, House of Commons Research Paper 05/33, p. 1.

110 Meanwhile, 52% of the British were convinced that Tony Blair deliberately lied to them over Iraq, and a remarkable 23% wanted to see him tried for war crimes; cf. Yougov poll, Sunday Times, January 17, 2010.

111 Leading MPs were forced to admit to having claimed expenses for second homes or private personnel, knowingly tolerated by the Speaker of the House of Commons, Labour nominee Mr. Martin; he became the first Speaker since the Middle Ages to resign under allegations of corruption.

112 For example, in BBC polls last year, respondents of social grades D and E overwhelmingly found MPs who had misused their mandate should resign as a consequence – cf. e.g. Compress poll, May 15, 2009.

113 Examples are the extension of the right to detention without trial for the police under anti-terror legislation, and the planned introduction of ID cards, a plan completely at odds with British civic traditions.

114 See www.europarl.org.uk/section/european-elections/results-2009-european-elections-uk www.europarl.org.uk/section/european-elections/results-2009-european-elections-uk

At the same time however, questions of power and representation in society entered the public political debate in Britain with a new vigour, and more voters than before are consciously thinking voting for smaller parties. Even daylight programmes on popular TV channels now dare ask such fundamental questions as «Do we still trust our MPs?»¹¹⁵

These three dilemmas make clear that the Third Way analysis of Britain as a quasi-affluent «post-scarcity society» has turned out to be a myth. The «social question» is also alive and well, finally finding its expression in questions of political rights and representation. All the more, the question is, how the left can turn this opportunity into a constructive positive advance of left-wing politics, and a relevant political – and that has to also mean parliamentary – representation. What are the political-institutional nodes that could help facilitate such a new start?

Labour and the left after New Labour: Waking up to the electorate – again?

One of the strategic questions hotly discussed in the left-wing blogosphere in Britain is whether «lefties» should join/re-join the Labour Party, now that time seems to be running out for the New Labour caste. This debate alone demonstrates that Labour is still, for better or for worse, seen as the single most powerful locus for any engagement on the centre-left in the British political spectrum. However, the party exercises this pre-eminence today on a much reduced footing, especially given the shambolic state of its finances, even going into the last election.¹¹⁶ Critics within Labour point to New Labour's record in government as the principal reason for this development. They are in different camps, but their common *raison d'état* is that Labour remains the centre ground of the struggle to bring left-wing ideas and ideals into British politics, and that the party must be and can be «reclaimed» from New Labour.

Who votes New Labour? The joint criticism of the Labour left

In Labour's wilderness years, leading New Labour thinkers insisted that the party would have to «wake up to the electorate» (Phillip Gould 1996), which meant widening Labour's electoral hunting ground far into the bourgeois centre. According to the figures, this was indeed achieved – albeit, as shown above, against the backdrop of a massive drop in absolute numbers of votes cast. The «social change» argument does not sufficiently explain the choice behind this «voter swapping». Most people have not changed; rather, while new people «moved into» the Labour electorate, others

115 While the elites, board room executives as much as MPs, are seen to be acting above the law, the law comes down ever more drastically on political dissent. For example, the «national interest» was invoked in order to ban the Guardian newspaper from publishing details about the criminal involvement of British firms in Nigeria, while it took a law suit at the European Court of Human Rights to declare the stop-and-search tactics by British police partly «unlawful» (Guardian Weekly Oct. 23, 2009, and Jan. 22, 2010).

116 At the end of the Blair era, the Labour Party faced a deficit of some £40 million. The Daily Telegraph, January 28, 2007; by the time of the 2010 election, the party was facing bankruptcy, Guardian Online, Aug. 19, 2010.

moved out – and now have become firmly part of the silent near-majority of non-voters.¹¹⁷

All left-wing critics inside Labour agree that this strategy was not only an abandonment of social-democratic principle, but also a major misjudgement.¹¹⁸ As New Labour took Thatcherite ideologemes about the accommodation of capital at face value, fear of capital flight provided a glass ceiling against meaningful redistributive measures – and New Labour focussed on winning «less demanding» votes from the well-healed social groups A, B and C1. In direct contradiction however, votes from constituencies in which the low-earning groups C2, D and E are socially and culturally predominant were simply taken for granted. From 2005 on, the obvious disintegration of the Labour vote in these groups finally signalled that «New Labour's catch-all-politics was becoming the politics of «drop some»».¹¹⁹ And those «some» were, under Brown's rule, to ask what Labour stood for. By 2009, only 57% of Labour's voters from 2005 are certain they would cast their vote at all next time. As middle class voters returned to the Conservatives, Labour's core vote evaporated, with polls showing that a majority of disaffected Labour voters were planning to abstain or vote for smaller parties – one in five choosing the latter course.¹²⁰ This twofold fluctuation was the death knell for the age-old Labour majority in the North.¹²¹ In response, the party leadership put on a hefty effort to portray the party as the champion of the common man/woman. But at the 2009 Labour Conference, these developments were not an issue; even the backroom talk about Brown's leadership centred his personality, not his policies.¹²² Hence, the question arises: will critics, in the aftermath of the electoral defeat, be able to challenge the dominant block of political power within the party?

The Labour Union link and its dynamics

Potentially, the unions are the greatest source of political change in the party. Of the 4.7 million TUC union members, more than half pay the political levy, i.e., are affiliated members of the Labour Party. And the unions are the single most powerful contributors to the budget of the party. Where do they stand on the New Labour question?

Back in the early days of New Labour, General Secretary John Monks, a pro-European proponent of the «Rhenish-capitalist»¹²³ model of industrial relations, won the

117 In the latest Yougov poll, the percentage of voters of the social groups C2, D, E who said they would vote Labour at the next election, had sunk to 32%. Yougov poll, Jan. 5, 2010.

118 In 1997, «the average voter was (by then) keener on nationalisation, (even if that meant higher taxes), and on government attempts to reduce inequality», but Blair ignored the offer. www.crest.oCf.x.ac.uk/beps9297.htm.

119 Driver/Martell : New Labour. Polity 2006, p. 21.

120 Cf. Populus poll, June 23, 2009.

121 Cf. Financial Times, Sep. 23, 2009.

122 Cf. the analysis in <http://www.social-europe.eu/2009/10/the-missed-opportunities-of-the-labour-party-conference>

123 A German term popularised by Green leader and Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer, it touted a «capitalism with a human face», engendered in the «liberal» post-war Rhineland, in contrast to the old, stern Prussian military capitalism.

unions over to a corporatist mode of operation. With this consensual mind-set, union leaders condoned Blair's election to party leader, agreed to a further weakening of union votes at Labour Conferences, and «consequently, ... supported the installation of neo-liberalism in their party».¹²⁴ All the more surprising for the unions was when, after several years of New Labour government, the party leadership was unwilling to return the favours: Blair refused to repeal the Thatcherite anti-union laws.¹²⁵ This meant the long-term cementing of a virtually union-free private sector.

After Iraq, the hard-pressed New Labour leadership was prepared to compromise somewhat.¹²⁶ Still, Blair and Brown showed their contempt for the unions by their continued rejection of the Working Time Directive, an EU provision which Britain alone has refused to adopt, in violation of EU law, while promoting the Posted Workers Directive, permitting below-scale pay of foreign cheap labour, and other neo-liberal EU legislation. If the tone sweetened somewhat under Brown, the substance did not: he stood fast on anti-union legislation, and blocked the unions from tabling motions at Labour Conferences.¹²⁷ The fiscal situation added to the strain: while the then biggest British trade union, Unite, and other unions accepted the 2009 public sector pay freeze, the biggest white collar union, the Public and Commercial Services Union (PSC) under Mark Serwotka, prepared mass walk-outs and strikes in the run-up to the elections. A generation of more rebellious union activists, waiting in the wings, proposed funding individual Labour MPs, rather than the party in the 2010 election. One of them is Jerry Hicks, a prominent union activist with an SWP¹²⁸ background, who challenged the «moderate» candidate in the elections for general secretary of UNITE in 2010, and did well enough that his «Hicks for GS» campaign is still the «label» under which leftists are continuing to challenge the leadership within that union.¹²⁹

The Labour Representation Committee/Socialist Campaign Group/LEAP

As in many countries, Britain's socialist party, Labour, and the Trades Union Congress grew up together around the turn of the 20th century, with the latter helping form the Labour Representation Committee (LRC), the original core of the party, in 1900. To this day, the unions are for the most part structurally linked to the Labour Party. On July 3, 2004, a new LRC was founded, its members including a dozen or so «Constituency Labour Parties» (CLPS), the main sub-units of the Labour Party, along with local, regional and national unions, and also individual members. It is currently the most influential organisational core of the left inside the Labour Party, with some

124 McIlroy in Daniel/McIlroy, 2007, 54. He gives a comprehensive summary of union adaption to NL.

125 This means e.g. that workers who dare to take part in strike action can still be sacked just twelve weeks later.

126 With the Warwick agreement (2004), Blair agreed to the abolition of the two-tier workforce in the public sector and the introduction of works councils (only in the public sector) see McIlroy in Daniles/McIlroy, 2007, 79.

127 Cf. Gordon Brown: Extending and Renewing Party Democracy, Labour Party, 2007.

128 See below for an introduction to this small leftist group.

129 <http://jerryhicks.wordpress.com/>; accessed Feb. 3, 2012.

150 affiliates and 1000 individual members, and is linked to the Socialist Campaign Group (SCG) in parliament with six MPs, including the well-known Jeremy Corbyn. The LRC's youth group is the Socialist Youth Network; the Chair of both the LRC and the SCG is John McDonnell, who tried to stand for Labour Party leader in 2010, but failed to get the requisite number of nominations.

While six unions, including the powerful Communication Workers' Union (CWU) with over 215,000 members, and the once mighty National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), have affiliated with the LRC, only the relatively small National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers (RMT) and the Fire Brigade Union (FBU) have also disaffiliated from the Labour Party.¹³⁰ Other unions might follow – which would open up the opportunity for sufficient funds for another political party on the left. In 2009, the TUC itself published a green paper in which it invited the union grassroots to discuss the advantages of a change of the electoral system in the UK to proportional representation.¹³¹

This demonstrates again that there is no unitary union response to New Labour. Union leaders, as ever, «vacillate between co-operation and resistance».¹³²

In its Mission Statement, the LRC states as its aim «to appeal to the tens of thousands who have turned away from Labour in disillusion and despair». The recent broadening of membership and the new setting-up of regional organisations represent first steps towards organizing an alternative powerbase inside Labour.

The LRC's everyday political practice involves campaigning on topical political issues, mainly union campaigns or local strike action. Equally important however, are the advocacy of a non-interventionist foreign policy for Britain and the promotion of global justice, mainly associated with the outstanding activist work of Jeremy Corbyn. Recent campaigns have shown the LRC/SCG's will to reach beyond the traditional unionised left: LRC activists played a pivotal role in hosting the European Social Forum in London in 2004, and in 2008 participated in setting up the Convention of the Left (see below). Since the accession of the Conservative-Liberal government, the LRC has been engaged in numerous defensive actions against its measures, including support for the public workers' strike in November 2011 and the battle against the «reform» of the Welfare Bill in 2012. However, as LRC Co-Secretary Andrew Fisher points out, the group suffers from a lack of embeddedness in other cultural domains of British society: «The LRC is looking at ways to address» the relative lack of ethnic diversity among its membership.¹³³

130 Also affiliated are the Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen (ASLEF) and the Bakers, Food and Allied Workers' Union (BFAWU), as well as a dozen or so CLPs. Cf. LRC, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Labour_Representation_Committee_%282004%29; LRC Webpage: <http://www.l-r-c.org.uk/> (both accessed Feb. 3, 2012).

131 Cf. Getting it in Proportion! TUC discussion paper, 2009. Labour, comfortable in its supposedly secure working-class constituencies, still supports the existing undemocratic British electoral system; see below.

132 McIlroy in Daniels/McIlroy, 2007, p. 192.

133 Questionnaire reply for this article, Jan., 2010.

McDonnell's leadership seems to have brought a constructive turn: Traditionally, especially SCG were denounced as nay-sayers – committed to fighting New Labour's policies across the board; and indeed, they are often the only ones who raise the question of industrial actions in parliament and the media. In recent years however, they have begun to chart an alternative to New Labour, with such measures as the Left Economic Advisory Panel (LEAP). That group's policy papers have remained clearly within a social-democratic frame of reference, but have provided a number of ideas on how such policies could be implemented: In a largely Keynesian-averse environment, even within the Labour Party, they have spelled out with great clarity the advantages of an expansive fiscal policy, and the advantages of a mixed – as opposed to a finance-dependent – economy. Interestingly for a political body whose predecessors once prided themselves on their anti-EEC stance, LRC policy papers now point to EU standards, to which British standards for pensions, industrial relations or health provision under New Labour are unfavourably compared. As Fisher puts it, the LRC now sees British membership in the EU as «definitively a fact of life», although «the neo-liberal doctrines» in the EU have to be fought.¹³⁴ However, the LRC still seems to approach some issues of «new left» politics, especially green ones, with caution.¹³⁵ Despite criticisms that LRC/SCG lacks any long-term strategy,¹³⁶ the group is opening up towards non-Labour-affiliated leftists, and supports the People's Charter petition (see below). Also, a paper on proportional representation has just been discussed (but not voted on) at the LRC annual conference. However, the LRC/SCG was unwilling to break with Labour loyalty in the 2010 general elections.¹³⁷

Compass and the «Good Society» debate

Established in 2003, Compass is becoming the most influential attempt to reinvigorate the Labour Left. It was founded as a charity, and is therefore not technically part of the Labour Party, but the designation «think tank» is also misleading, as Compass is a membership organisation and can boast more than 4000 individual members, and an estimated 30,000 affiliated members and supporters. Gavin Hayes, Compass General Secretary, states that most of the activists are «people who were enthused by Blair's 1997 victory, but became disillusioned with the New Labour government». He acknowledges that Compass is about «recreating Labour's electoral coalition of 1979, which drew together left-inclined liberals, the intelligentsia, lower middle class voters, and the working class».¹³⁸ The political driving force behind Compass is Jon Cruddas,

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ An exception was the very committed campaign against a third runway at Heathrow Airport.

¹³⁶ See e.g. the critique on www.shirazsocialist.wordpress.com/2009/11/12/lrc-labour.

¹³⁷ Cf. www.l-r-c.org.uk/ge2010candidates.

¹³⁸ Interview with Gavin Hayes for this article, October 2009. This is in clear contrast to New Labour's preferred electoral coalition of 1997. Figures for members and affiliations from Compass Annual Report 2009.

whose inspired, yet unsuccessful, campaign for deputy leader of Labour made him one of the most high-profile MPs inside the Labour party.¹³⁹

The «building a good society» debate, kick-started in 2009 by the joint statement by Jon Cruddas and German SPD General Secretary Andrea Nahles, shows that Compass has identified the gaping hole in social democracy's ideology at the beginning of the 21st century. It admits that «the era of the Third Way is over, and class inequality remains the defining structure of society», and nods toward the New Left by stating that future alternatives must involve emancipatory policies and evolve with a «civic state responsive to individual citizens and small businesses», not with a new «state monopoly».¹⁴⁰ However, enduring capitalist structures of interest in present-day western societies and other structural factors are left unanalysed – such as how neo-liberalism could get such a foothold in social democratic parties? On the other hand, the think tank does publicize, and campaign for, radical and inventive policy ideas on a constructive, positive note. Noticeable throughout is a concern to link aspects of social justice with modern political issues, such as green politics, citizen rights and global justice. For example, Compass promotes a corporation tax to be earmarked for education, and levied according to the numbers of graduates a company employs, and campaigns for a heating windfall tax, levied at profits made by the fuel companies over the winter periods, with the proceeds to be used to fund house insulation and other green measures.¹⁴¹

Gavin Hayes emphasizes the open, transparent nature and the democratic principles of Compass, which is demonstrated in frequent e-mail member ballots, and a plurality of voices from all corners of the party on their meetings and conferences: «We want to reconnect with the party grassroots».¹⁴² Its campaigns are managed by a very small but dedicated team seasoned in political activity and well-connected in civil society. Compass is also very active in engaging with global justice NGOs such as War on Want and Oxfam. However, apparently this new openness does not extend to other left-wing organisations: While Hayes describes the Compass-LCR/SCG relationship rather lukewarmly as «cooperation on the issues of the day», other actors outside Labour seem to be outside scope of where Compass' needle points.¹⁴³ Its focus is Labour-inward, especially since the victory of the «moderate centre-left» Edward Miliband in the race for Labour Party leader.

139 Cruddas is outspoken on such New Labour taboo issues as social housing, the core working class vote, and the BNP rise. However, he and his predecessor as Compass chair MP Jon Trickett, have a credibility problem, the former having voted for the Iraq War, and the latter for having served as Gordon Brown' personal secretary.

140 John Cruddas/Andrea Nahles: A New Path for Europe.

141 See Compass website, <http://www.compassonline.org.uk/>.

142 Gavin Hayes interview for this article, October 2009.

143 The exception was Green then-MEP Caroline Lucas (now MP), who was invited to the Compass conference in 2009.

Outside Labour: from Trotsky to respect

Traditionally, the foremost characteristic of Britain's far left has been how fractured it is¹⁴⁴: a gaggle of small Trotskyite sects spent the 1970s and '80s «making revolution» and, sometimes, trying to infiltrate the Labour Party, two activities which many saw as being identical. The most important practitioner of the latter activity was the Militant Tendency, with several thousand members, including three MPs, which for a time controlled the Liverpool City Council; however, the Labour leadership expelled its members during the Thatcher era, and the remainder of the group ended up forming the Socialist Party of England and Wales (SPEW) in 1997. A separate Scottish Socialist Party was formed around the same time, based on a number of local groups there.

Militant's main rival the Trotskyite spectrum was the Socialist Workers' Party (SWP), which still has some 4000 members, and a long history of successful campaigns, including, in the period between the financial melt-down and the 2010 election, such efforts as the anti-G20-summit actions, and the «We-won't-pay-for-their-crisis» demonstrations. The SWP supported the formation of the Socialist Alliance as a leftist electoral alternative starting in 1999; in 2001, it was transformed from an alliance of organisations to a party with individual membership, which allowed the large, well-disciplined SWP to run it; however, the it never had an impact, and eventually dissolved.

In 2004, an alliance called Respect emerged from the movement against the Iraq War, which had done much to push leftists out of Tony Blair's Labour Party; in addition to its anti-war focus, Respect was strongly oriented toward the struggles of non-European immigrants, particularly Moslems. In its documents, Respect is called «a party of the left», and advocates such policies as an increase in the top tax rate, and a stop to privatisation. The financial crisis is seen as «the consequence of the functioning of capitalism.» It stood in the 2005 election, and elected former Labour MP George Galloway to a seat in a mostly Moslem area of London, edging out the incumbent Labour MP,¹⁴⁵ and coming in second in several other races; it was the first time in decades that a non-Labour leftist had won a parliamentary seat in England. During the next years, Respect elected six councillors in East London, one in Newham (also in London), and two in Birmingham, and did well in some non-Moslem areas. In 2007, the SWP faction split off, complaining that Galloway's politics compromised too much with the traditionalism of the Moslem immigrant communities – although the SWP also largely accepted the internal power relations and the conservatism in

144 For a politico-ideological categorisation of the British far left through the Thatcher era, see Calaghan, *The Far Left in British Politics*, 1987; a more recent book in German is: Peter Ullrich, *Die Linke, Israel und Palästina, Nahostdiskurse in Großbritannien und Deutschland* (The left, Israel and Palestine: The Middle-East discourse in Britain and Germany), Berlin 2007, which addresses the British far left in Chapter 3. Its focus on the Mideast conflict is not untypical: a web search of «far left Britain» turns up mostly material related to this issue.

145 Galloway, a white Scot, defeated Labour's Oona King, who is half African, by less than 1000 votes.

these communities, by working with their elites.¹⁴⁶ The SWP then put up its own «Left List» in upcoming local elections. This rift in Respect was healed – or at least papered over – in 2008, and the party stood in the 2010 election. In 2008, the People’s Charter was initiated by left-wing trade union activists, in an attempt to kick-start a process of political and ideological, rather than merely electoral, coalition-building.¹⁴⁷ At the same time, the Convention of the Left¹⁴⁸ was revived to provide a common platform for political exchange across a culturally heterogenic spectrum. All the important players of the far left were present at the last two conventions, but in 2009 they failed to agree on a formal electoral platform. Instead, two ad-hoc alliances evolved during that year:

The TUSC Coalition

The first was the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC), an electoral coalition initiated by SPEW (see above; est. 800 members) and the Communist Party of Britain (CPB, est. 1000 members), one of two splinters to emerge from the traditional British Communist Party; Bob Crow, General Secretary of the Transport Workers’ Union RMT, and a CPB member, was the moving force behind it. The fact that he could neither get his union to support the effort nor keep his party on board – the CPB dropped out and fielded its own mini-alliance in 2010 – did not bode well for the effort. Moreover, a late-comer to the alliance, the SWP, carried the same divisiveness into this group as it had into Respect; this time, an important group of its own cadres jumped ship, in 2010.¹⁴⁹

The TUSC’s origins were in the «No2EU» candidacy for the 2009 European elections, designed to appeal to low or semi-skilled workers supposedly victimised by EU legislation. The No2EU Election Manifesto also saw the danger of «a capitalist, militarist United States of Europe», and targeted provisions of the Posted Workers Directive, which it saw as pitting immigrant and native workers against each other.¹⁵⁰ The TUSC programme retained No2EU’s Euro-sceptical angle; moreover, in a nod towards the mining communities, it advocated the «clean coal» concept – anathema to the environmental movement. Like No2EU, which won only 153,000 votes – 1% – in the EP election, the TUSC was unlikely to make any dent in Labour’s total – and it did not. Of its 40 candidates, only two won more than 2% of the vote, and even such a high-profile candidate as former Labour MP Dave Nellist, standing in Coventry, who was expected to make a respectable showing, got less than 4%.

146 Cf. <http://libcom.org/library/croissant-roses-new-labour-muslim-britain>.

147 Cf. www.thepeoplescharter.com.

148 Cf. <http://www.conventionofthelleft.org>.

149 Led by former SWP General Secretary John Rees and his partner, Lindsey German, prominent organizers of the 2003 Stop the War Coalition, who apparently advocated a broader coalition. German had previously run for Mayor of London on the «Left List», which had split off from the Respect Party.

150 Cf. www.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/politics/8059281.stm.

Testing Green waters with respect

A more promising electoral effort seemed to be an emerging collaboration between the Greens and the Respect Party. With its membership reduced to an estimated 700 by the SWP split-off, the party was more than ever based on its Moslem and other immigrant community constituency. Their thirst for civil emancipation had borne fruit in an array of anti-racist and anti-fascist organisations, and brought thousands of second and third generation British Asians into politics. Even before the 2004 EP election, there had been tentative approaches between the then-new Respect Party and the Greens. By 2009, the contacts were good enough so that many Respect members supported the Green candidacy, which, thanks to the proportional representation prevailing in that election, was likely to win seats (it won two). As the 2010 general election approached, both parties agreed to support each other, and not to stand against each other in certain target seats. Respect hoped to elect Salma Yaqoob in Birmingham-Sparkbrook, and George Galloway in a new constituency adjacent to the one he already represented in London; in another seat in Manchester, Respect's hopes, if any, were wildly unrealistic. The Greens targeted one seat – Brighton, with their leader Caroline Lucas.

The left tendency in the Green Party has been pushed into the background in recent years, and, apart from Lucas, the leadership refused to speak of the Greens as a left-wing party. Nonetheless, they were attractive to Respect, because, with over one hundred councillors, two MEPs and a membership of about 7500, they could offer a professional political infrastructure.¹⁵¹ However, on the back of the Copenhagen failure, and with even the Tories taking environmentalism to heart, the Greens seemed to many leftists to be appealing mostly to middle class nonconformist voters, with no explicit recourse to left-wing ideas. When the votes were counted, Respect had won no seats: Yaqoob had scored a respectable second place, and Galloway a disappointing third; the Manchester seat was a bust.¹⁵² The Green Caroline Lucas was, however, elected, demonstrating that at least in this case, a plurality to the left of Labour was possible. Given this one-sided outcome of the cooperative effort, it may be difficult to sustain support for it in future. Beyond that, the left faces the task of renegotiating such values as secularism and communalism with values which could regain working class votes, or else success will be impossible under the present electoral system.

¹⁵¹ 2009 membership figure, UK Electoral Commission.

¹⁵² Galloway's old seat was contested by Abjol Miah, who like most of the other top candidates, was of Moslem heritage; only the BNP – fascist – candidate was not. Apparently, Galloway's win over Labour five years earlier had at least forced all parties to take the majority Bengali population seriously. This was Respect's third best result, despite the presence of a Green candidate.

Outlook : What chances of electoral success for the left in Britain?

Electoral Tactics – Many Ways, One Goal

Surveying the diverse scenery of the British left, with its classic Labour/left-of-Labour cleavage, it is obvious that there is more than one answer to the question of electoral success for the left, depending on where you engage. The first necessary realisation is that wherever people get involved politically, they have to work with the electoral system they have. Simply moaning about the cruelty of the first-past-the-post system, whereby parliament is elected in single-member constituencies, and the winner, even by a simple plurality, is elected, is not a politically mature attitude. How entrenched the system is, was shown in 2010: The Liberal Party, which is grossly underrepresented under the system, has traditionally promised to extract the introduction of proportional representation from whichever party agrees to form a coalition government with it, if it ever gets the chance. Its Leader Nick Clegg had repeated this promise, but he reneged as soon as he got the chance: although the election returned a theoretical – but slim – majority of Labour, Liberals, left-leaning Scottish and Welsh regionalists and the lone Green, Clegg formed a coalition with Cameron's Conservatives, without getting electoral reform.

The Labour left needs to fight to hold on to the quasi-autonomous space of the LRC/SCG, in which the Labour Party apparatus has no say, and in which left-wing CLPs can nominate left-wing parliamentary candidates. With Labour's defeat and the retirement of many SCG MPs, resources have dwindled, and the fight for quasi-autonomy will intensify. This fight must and can be won, possibly with some tacit support from within Compass.

For the left-of-Labour left, the Respect-Greens deal showed that the aim of «one unitary candidate to the left of Labour» is feasible in a time of receding ideological sectarianism. The Convention of the Left should set up a mechanism by which such unitary candidates could be «nominated», regardless of party membership – or, alternatively, declare support for left-wing Labour candidates. This would maximize left pressure on Labour, even if an alternative candidate has no chance of winning him/herself. Especially in «safe» Labour seats, «tactical voting» could then become a by-word for ousting right-leaning Labour candidates, rather than simply preventing conservative victories.

A left strategy: New social ideas of collective empowerment

However, all these tactical considerations will not be sufficient to deliver a left-wing political revival, if the British left, across party lines, cannot offer a credible alternative vision of life in Britain that addresses the grievances analysed at the outset, and succeeds in bringing together a social coalition of interested social groups that have a stake in changing them.

With the failure of New Labour, there is not only the opportunity, but also a necessity for the left to come forward with a new project. Still disillusioned with the demise

of political consciousness in the working class, and the indifference of the left-liberal modern intelligentsia, the British left is only beginning to come to terms with the new opportunities. For a start, it must rediscover the fact that any left-wing project needs to be rooted in social reservoirs of power. Rather surprisingly, as Jeremy Gilbert writes, the left can learn from the Conservatives under Thatcher and her house ownership programme – which the left condemned as a sell-off of public housing – that «political success [is] not just about the government making the right decisions, but about the mobilisation and the selective empowerment of multiple constituencies». The social power base of the left in Britain had always been in the unions and their cooperatives; why should methods of cooperative exchange for mutual advantage on a non-monetary basis, supported by the government, not become a way of self-help to address the social grievances of working class communities in the low-investment areas of the English North? Why not champion the interests of the urban intelligentsia by calling for the radical communalisation of the giant British private media sector, creating many more jobs, and a more publicly accountable media in the process? Why should the left not set standards with a new system of public accountability for MPs and councillors, which the other parties have for so long eschewed?

Such social change would be a necessary complement to a left-Keynesian social democratic government programme. The left will have to speak to, and for, these very concrete constituencies in order to be accepted by them as their representative, straddling amongst others the divide between materialist and post-materialist electorates. Whatever their politics, the Blair/Schröder paper represented such an actually existing electoral coalition, successfully packaged in «third way» ideology. Now, as New Labour's neo-liberal electoral coalition breaks apart, the left has the chance to step in with a coalition project based on ideas of equality and solidarity. The challenge is akin to that in 1994: a quest to find and forge a sufficiently powerful societal coalition for the project. New Labour, with its typical mixture of fatalism and cowardice, opted for the wrong coalition, a coalition with big capital. The challenge before the British left is to build a coalition broad enough to at least be able to rein in big capital, and sound enough to be able to reward the stakeholders in its coalition. The first steps towards this goal have already been taken.

I would like to thank Andrew Stevens, London, and Isabel Reißmann, Brussels, for their help and support in research and editing.

Cornelia Hildebrandt

THE LEFT PARTY IN GERMANY

The Left Party in Germany (DIE LINKE; no abbrev.) refuses to resign itself to a world in which «a few hundred corporations decide on the life prospects of billions of people, and whole countries are cut off from any hope in the future by brutal exploitation, wars over raw materials, markets, and imperialism». The Left Party will join with trade-union forces, social movements, other left-wing parties, and citizens of Germany, Europe and the world in the search for a social alternative, «to build a society of democratic socialism in which the freedom of each and every individual is the condition for the development of all in solidarity».¹⁵³ Thus did the Left Party formulate its strategic approach in the first draft of its Party Programme in 2011.

There were three basic ideas brought together in the programme:

- First, individual freedom and development of the potential of every person by means of a socially equal division in conditions to allow a life of self-determination through solidarity;
- Second, the subordination of the economy and ways of life to the development of solidarity and the preservation of nature; and,
- Third, the realisation of these two ideas through an emancipatory process «in which the supremacy of capital is overcome by democratic, social and ecological forces and a society based on democratic socialism comes into being».¹⁵⁴

This article is intended to show the Left Party's potential for pursuing such an ambitious path.

153 DIE LINKE Party (2011). Programme, http://www.die-linke.de/fileadmin/download/dokumente/englisch_die_linke_programm_erfurt.pdf?PHPSESSID=1ce0462ad3138d351c1e93c65d8159fe

154 Ibid

Place in the party system

The Left Party in Germany has transformed the German party system. With its stable presence since 2005, confirmed by the Bundestag elections of 2009, Germany's fluid five-party system congealed into a structure with two large mass parties, the CDU (conservatives) and the SPD (social democrats), and three medium-sized parties, the Greens, the FDP (liberals), and the Left Party. All five parties are in open competition with one another, and there is no structural asymmetry, i.e. neither the bourgeois conservative-liberal camp, nor a potential left-wing camp consisting of the SPD, the Greens and the Left Party, has a structural majority.

«The fluid character describes a tendency of open coalition options, which has changed radically due to the fact that the ability of the mass parties to keep a grip on their support has eroded over the years, and due, too, to the founding of the new Left Party. Whereas in 1998 the two mass parties, the CDU and the SPD, still represented 37.5 million voters, or 76.1 % of the votes cast, and 61.7 % of the entire electorate, by 2009 these proportions had fallen to 24.6 million votes, 56.8 % of the vote and 39.7 % of the entire electorate, meaning that they had lost one third of their votes since 1998.»¹⁵⁵

The result has been an increasing need for three-party coalitions. Attempts to form a «red-red-green» governing coalition failed in the state elections in Hesse in 2008 and in North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW) in 2010, because the SPD rejected any participation in government by the Left Party or even a government tolerated by it. In the Saarland in 2009, the possibility of a «red-red-green» coalition was torpedoed by the Greens, whose ouster from the state parliament had been seen by the Left Party as «the best guarantee of a change of government».¹⁵⁶

With the early collapse of the conservative-liberal-Green state government in 2012, the only option not open as the state moved into new elections was an SPD-Left Party coalition, now due to an SPD veto of that option. In the 2009 Bundestag elections, the Left Party became the fourth strongest party, with eleven.9 % of the vote and 76 seats in the German Bundestag. It also has eight in the European Parliament, in the GUE/NGL Group, over 200 in 13 of the 16 state parliaments, and over 6200 local council seats.

The decisive factor in the Left Party's success in the Bundestag elections was the social question. The party attracted votes as an all-German protest party against the dismantling of social systems and of democracy under the so-called Agenda 2010, and as the party which could ensure decent wages, the dignity of labour, the security of old age pensions, and good educational policy. Most Left Party voters were blue-collar workers,

155 Horst Kahrs (2009): Zwei Gewinner ein Absturz (Two winners, one crash); an intermediate assessment for the Parties and Social Movements Discussion Circle of the RLS; in: <http://www.rosalux.de/themen/parteien-demokratie/specials/parteien-und-soziale-bewegungen/deutsch/parteien-and-bewegungen/wahlanalysen/zwei-gewinner-ein-absturz.html>; accessed July 1, 2010.

156 Oskar Lafontaine: Rot-rote Mehrheit und Regierungswechsel möglich bei Scheitern der Ökopartei (Red-red majority change of government possible if Eco-Party fails), *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, August 5, 2009.

the unemployed, trade unionists and pensioners. One unemployed person in four voted for the Left Party. It is increasingly tending to become a «men's party», with 13.3% of the male vote in 2009, versus 10.6% of the female vote. However, it has been unable to reach social libertarian voter groups in equal measure. Its electoral results in its former West German bastions – e.g. the university towns – are failing to meet expectations.

The success of the Left Party was also connected with a political power option of the party as part of a possible political project to prevent a conservative-liberal government, although even the most minimal preconditions, in terms of party politics, for a red-green project at the federal level were absent. The political dilemma – as Jörg Prella pointed out in his analysis of the election results for Hesse – was that «many comrades had actually been counting on a boost from quite a different direction: a boost from the «streets» as a public reaction to the crisis».¹⁵⁷ The parliamentary strengthening of the Left Party since its founding in 2007 has so far not been accompanied by any strengthening of extra-parliamentary resistance.

One thing that distinguishes the Left Party from all the other parties is that it has to perform contradictory functions in the German party system, as a result of the persistent regional differences between the electorates in eastern and western Germany. Thus, in the 2009 Bundestag elections, the Left Party won an average of 26.4% of the vote in the six eastern states, becoming the strongest or second strongest party in all of them. In the ten western states, where the Left Party is primarily a pro-welfare state and protest party, it averaged 8.3% of the vote. There, its voters come mainly from the lower social strata, and are usually men of middle age with intermediate or low formal educational qualifications. In the East, the Left Party is a «party for all – nobody should be excluded», both in terms of its electoral support and in terms of the formulation of its political positions. Even if here too its voters come from the lower social strata, they are also to be found among white-collar workers, civil servants, farmers, critical intellectuals, apprentices and especially pensioners. In the East, Left Party voters include just as many women as men, and show a more balanced picture with regard to formal educational qualifications.

157 Jörg Prella (2009). Hessische Aspekte der Bundestagswahl 2009 (Hessian aspects of the Bundestag election) <http://www.rosalux.de/themen/parteien-demokratie/publikationen/publikation/datum/2010/01/24/der-blick-in-die-laender-1/thema/sprachen/parteien-demokratie/priorisierung-regional.html>.

Table 1: Election results of the Left Party by occupation, education and age, in per cent

	Total (eleven.9 % Left Party voters)	West (8.3 % Left Party voters)	East (26.4 % Left Party voters)
Blue-collar workers	17	12	31
White-collar workers	12	8	29
Civil servants	8	6	26
Self-employed	8	6	21
Middle school	12	9	28
O-level certificate	14	9	30
A-level certificate	1	6	28
Under 30		10	23
30–44		9	26
45–59		10	33

The differences between East and West in voter attitudes toward the party have given rise to different perspectives on the party even amongst its own leadership: Regional leaders in the West see it as a protest party; those in the East, as a mass party. On one side, the view prevails that the concept of a mass party dilutes its focus on the socially disadvantaged, is ill-defined, and contradicts the party's self-image as a class party of the working people and the unemployed. The contrary view is that the approach of being a protest party of the socially disadvantaged excludes important voter groups in the middle of society from the Left Party, nailing the party to its oppositional role, and thus abandoning any chance for parliamentary policy formulation as a governing party. Yet this is exactly what the voters of the Left Party in the eastern states expect, as is expressed in election results of over 20 %. The Left Party was in coalition governments in Mecklenburg-Hither Pomerania, and in Berlin for ten years prior to 2011; it is currently in the government of Brandenburg, in all cases together with the SPD. In the East, and also in the Saarland, it wins 20 % or more, and is seen as «the party that cares». In the West, it is still not in all state parliaments, has no prospect for entering state governments, and less than 23 % of its council seats have been won in these states.

After the 2009 Bundestag election, the position of the Left Party in the party system changed, for with the formation of a conservative-liberal coalition, it now shares its opposition role with the Social Democrats and the Greens. The arithmetical majority for the three left-of-centre parties, which had existed in 2005, was lost¹⁵⁸ – due not so much to the strength of the centre-right parties as to the collapse of the

158 Cf. Kahrs (2009), op cit.

SPD, which saw its support drop to half its 1998 level – 23 %, its worst showing since 1890.¹⁵⁹ It lost 1.49 million voters to the Left and Green Parties, and only 1.05 million to the CDU and FDP, while 1.6 million SPD voters stayed home. It lost voters in all age groups, but particularly amongst the young: minus 20 %, and even more, 21 %, among young women. It also suffered above average losses in its traditional constituencies: blue- and white-collar workers and trade unionists. Although the SPD has recovered somewhat in both the polls and in state elections, it seems to be stuck at the 30 % level nationwide, with both the Left Party and the Greens having been strengthened in the long term, partially at its expense. In any case, the Left Party can no longer define itself with reference to the weakness of the SPD.

If, however, there are going to be social and political majorities for a political change of course, the Left Party must define its relationship to the SPD more clearly. At present, the Left Party, the SPD and the Greens act in opposition independently of one another, with no discernible joint political or social project. The relationship of the Left Party to the SPD is unclear. Gesine Lötzsch, one of the two co-chairs of the Left Party, sees the SPD not as the enemy, but rather as a party with which she could imagine cooperating.¹⁶⁰ By contrast, her colleague, Klaus Ernst has declared that while the SPD's partial backing off from the labour market reform programme known as Hartz IV since the Bundestag elections is indeed a first step, it is still not enough. For them to be capable of governing, he believes, and to receive the support of the Left Party for that purpose, they would have to undergo a change of personnel, and take such steps as support for a tax on wealth and, in foreign policy, the withdrawal of the Bundeswehr from Afghanistan.

In the new Programme of the Left Party's, published in October 2011, the only references to the Social Democrats were historical, for the Left Party sees the SPD's founding concepts as part of its own historical heritage; the Greens, on the other hand, were referred to largely by criticisms of the red-green government of 1998 – 2005. The Preamble states somewhat vaguely that the Left Party differs from all those parties which devoutly submit to the wishes of the powers of economy and precisely therefore are hardly distinguishable from one another. The Left Party sees itself in fundamental social and political opposition to neo-liberalism and capitalist rule, imperialist policy and war.

It describes as one of its core tasks a change in the balance of the societal relationship of power in order to implement a solidarity-based transformation of society and left-wing democratic, social, ecological and peaceful policies by changing the relationship of power and property. This would include a democratic economic order «for a different, democratic economic order that subjects the market regulation of production and

159 Leaving aside the elections just prior to and after the Nazi seizure of power.

160 Gesine Lötzsch: Die SPD ist nicht mein Feind (The SPD is not my enemy), in: <http://www.welt.de/politik/deutschland/article6292554/Gesine-Loetzsch-Die-SPD-ist-nicht-mein-Feind.html>; accessed July 1, 2010.

distribution to democratic, social and ecological framing and controls. It has to be based on the public and democratically controlled ownership in services of general interest, of the social infrastructure, in the power industry and the finance sector. We want the democratic socialisation of further structurally relevant areas on the basis of state, municipal, co-operative or workforce ownership.»¹⁶¹

In order to be able to realize this, a broad societal left alliance would be needed. The political alliances necessary for this, the authors believe, should only be entered into if they advance a political change of direction in government and society, and if the core demands of the Left Party, such as the withdrawal of the Bundeswehr from Afghanistan, the repeal of the neo-liberal labour market Hartz IV laws, the introduction of a legal minimum wage, and the abandonment of the plan to raise the retirement age to 67, are agreed to and seriously implemented.

The Left Party after the elections of 2011

The Berlin elections of September 2011 were the last in that year's election cycle of seven state and two state-wide municipal elections. The Left Party had been able to assert itself as a political force for social justice. However, in all these elections it dropped significantly behind its results in the Bundestag elections of 2009, in which it had won 11.9 per cent nationwide.

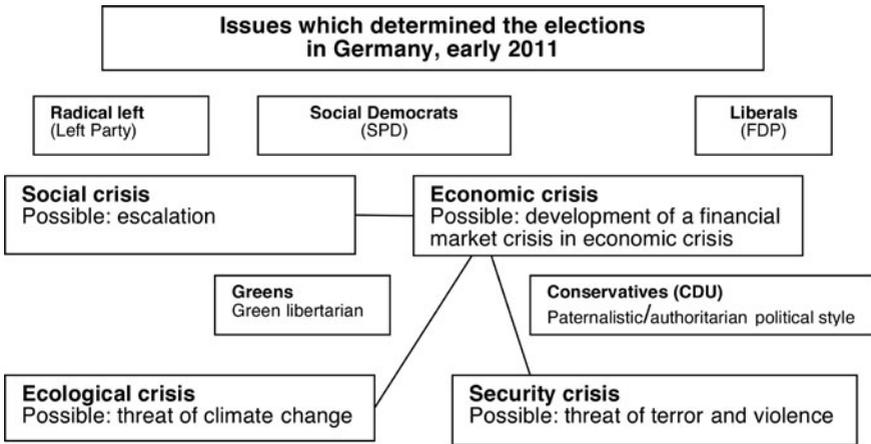
Although the bourgeois camp has no uniform strategy for the current economic and financial crisis, the Left Party has not succeeded in becoming part of an alternative social and political alliance. On the contrary, SPD-Green options not including the Left Party are being discussed as feasible political alternatives. The increasing social acceptability of the Greens in 2011 made possible Germany's first Green state premier, in Baden-Württemberg, the large, prosperous state in the Southwest. Given real developments towards a restoration of neo-liberalism by authoritarian means, and a deep neo-liberal integration of the European Union, their idea of a «Green New Deal» seems the only politically acceptable alternative capable of winning support from major segments of society. This development towards a green capitalism found its first politically visible expression in the nuclear phase-out declared by the Federal Government in March 2011, in the wake of the nuclear catastrophe in Fukushima, Japan. As a result, energy and the climate became the decisive issues in such elections as those for the state parliaments of Baden-Württemberg and neighbouring Rhineland-Palatinate, where the Greens also entered government as the SPD's junior partners. In both states, the Left Party failed to win seats.

Thus the changed constellations of social conflict have also altered the perception of and emphasis on the financial and economic crisis, of the environmental and energy crisis as well as of the alleged crisis of security (terrorism, migration waves etc.).

161 DIE LINKE. Programme http://www.die-linke.de/fileadmin/download/dokumente/englisch_die_linke_programm_erfurt.pdf?PHPSESSID=1cc0462ad3138d351c1c93c65d8159fe p. 5 (Preamble).

By introducing short-time work regulations, economic stimulus packages and the «cash-for-clunkers» bonus scheme, the economic slump was in fact staved off in 2009 for the majority of the people by means of structurally conservative measures. The conditions were thus preserved for quickly re-expanding production and reducing unemployment, as soon as demand reignited. In this context, the social question lost importance, particularly in Stuttgart, the corporate headquarters and main production site of Mercedes-Benz – and the capital of Baden-Württemberg. The CDU developed a conservative, export-oriented economic strategy, combined with an increased anti-terror and authoritarian security policy. The Greens countered with their «Green New Deal», designed to combine economic policy with a change in energy policy while also emphasising a need for increased social inclusion and democratisation. The demands of the Left Party for a socially just distribution of the burdens of the crisis thus failed to resonate with the public.

Figure 1: Conflicts which decided the elections, spring 2011



In Baden-Württemberg, this constellation led to the defeat of the CDU-FDP state government by Germany's first «green-red» coalition – a Green state premier ruling with SPD support, instead of the other way round. The Left Party hardly played any role in the public debate dominated not only by a focus on energy and climate issues, but also by a contrast in political style: of authoritarian vs. libertarian ideals.

In the Bremen state election in May, the energy/ecological issue was still important, but no longer decisive; the social question had again moved to the top of the political agenda. Nonetheless, the Left Party again fell short of both the results it achieved in the previous state election in 2007 and in the 2009 Bundestag election. The same

was true in the ensuing elections held in September 2011 in the eastern states of Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania and Berlin. The Left Party could assert itself as a party demanding social justice, but was confronted (particularly in Berlin, where it was a party in government) with increasing processes of fragmentation as a result of neo-liberal measures imposed at the federal and European levels which it had to implement locally. Its own successful social projects, especially in the areas of labour market and social policy, were seen by voters as less important.

However by the end of the election year of 2011, the Left Party remains credible as a party of social justice and a party that is still able to secure the loyalties of workers and unemployed people. It achieves above average results among voters between 45 and 59 years of age, and in eastern Germany appeals to voters over 60. However, its attractiveness to younger voters is below average, and it is increasingly losing strength in the age group between 34 and 45, the generation whose social and political experience is dominated by the development of post-Fordist working and living conditions, and by new communications and information technologies.

Table 2: Social structure of members and voters of the Left Party

	Members 2009	Bundestag elections 2009 (11.9)	Saxony-Anhalt (East) 2011 (23.7)	Baden-Würt- temberg (West) 2011 (2.8)	Berlin (formerly split) 2011 (eleven.7)
Blue-collar workers	18 %	eleven %	25 %	5 %	14 %
White-collar workers	32 %	5 %	22 %	3 %	10 %
Self-employed	12 %	4 %	15 %	1 %	11 %
Pensioners	53 %	4 %	26 %	2 %	15 %
Students	4 %	6 %	n.k.	n.k.	n.k.
Unemployed	8 %	15 %	35 %	12 %	16 %

Thus, the results in the election cycle of 2010 and 2011 reflect the social impact of the Left Party, the current practical value the public attributes to it, the attractiveness of its political proposals and also of its leadership. What became visible was the party's strength as a partner on questions of social justice, but also its deficits in the development of its programme, strategy and organisation, and most of all, its lack of social rooting beyond representation in states parliament and municipalities in the biggest states. Therefore the Left Party must use its increased presence in such states as Lower Saxony in the Northwest, where it holds a large number of seats and hence has access to more resources, as a «motor» for rooting itself in broader society, this should be based on the knowledge that parliamentary presence is no surrogate for the development of local grassroots organisations.

Today, the Left Party is still a party whose results in current opinion polls remain below the 5 % threshold in five out of ten western states, and exceed the 20 % mark in only three eastern states. It is also losing support in its former urban strongholds, including Berlin. In 2011, the party failed to meet its own goal of continuing or establishing new «red-red» coalition projects with the SPD: It lost ground in Berlin, so that the ten-year-old government there has ended, and, in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania it fell back to third place behind the Conservatives, who are now the junior partners of the SPD there. The Left Party now lacks the societal tailwind which between 2007 and 2009 helped it to establish itself as a successful political force in 13 states and at the national level. Its new social concept proclaimed in 2009 for a model of the social welfare state of the 21st century linking the social and ecological questions is lacking in drive, as there is no attractive counter-plan leading towards a social and ecological transformation. Until now, the Left Party has been the one that «tells it like it is», that has asked the right questions, but it has failed to demonstrate its competence with regard to solutions for the future. It has also found that it has no monopoly on the privilege of raising issues or questioning the prevailing conditions. In Berlin at the state level, this role has recently been assumed by a completely new political force, the Pirates, who also see themselves as on the left.

Membership and social composition of the Left Party

The Left Party has more than 78,400 members. Some 37 % of them are women; their proportion in the eastern state parties is between 44 and 46 %; in the western state parties, it averages 24 %. The same is true for the party's new members.¹⁶² Only very vague statements can be made regarding their social structure, due to a lack of data; these are based on publications about the Left Party,¹⁶³ statements by party functionaries and – to the extent where they are available – on databases and reports of the Credential Verification Commissions at Party Congresses. The membership of the Left Party closely corresponds with its respective regional voter support, i.e. most members in the western states tend to belong to disadvantaged groups, including a considerable portion of unemployed. The membership in the eastern states still has a disproportionate number of pensioners, although that is not true of the active membership. This is exemplified by the delegates to Party Congresses, over 90 % of whom are active in base organisations or had functions in the district or state party structure.¹⁶⁴ In 2010, the proportion of blue and white-collar workers among them

162 Data on membership trends from the Executive Committee of the Left Party, May 2010.

163 Cf. Sören Messinger/Jonas Rugenstein: Der Erfolg der Partei die Linke. Sammlung im programmatischen Nebel (The success of the Left Party. Coming together in a programmatic fog), in: Felix Butzlaff/Stine Harm/Franz Walter (eds.): Patt oder Gezeitenwechsel? Deutschland 2009 (Stalemate or sea-change? Germany 2009) Wiesbaden 2009.

164 A comparison of delegate verification reports from the Party Congresses in 2004, 2006 and 2010 shows that the proportion of delegates active in local base organisations increased slightly from 22 % in 2006 to almost 26 % in

was 33.8 % (2008: 32.6); of self-employed 19.5 % (2008: 17.3); of students 2.8 % (2008: 2.7); of school pupils 0.7 % (2008: 2.0); of unemployed 2.3 % (2008: 3.4); and of pensioners 6.0 % (2008: 5.2).¹⁶⁵ If we compare these data with those of the delegate profiles of the mostly East German PDS in 1999, 2002 and 2004, we find that the proportion of blue and white-collar workers dropped from 60 % in 1999 to 41 % in 2006; since 2007, they have made up about a third of the delegates. The proportion of self-employed is relatively constant at about 20 %, while the proportion of unemployed among the delegates to party congresses has fallen. In 1999 it was 6.9 % and since 2007 it has vacillated between 2 and 3 %. Since 2008, pensioners have accounted for about 5 % of delegates.

Among new members, the ratio of employed to unemployed persons underwent a shift between 2004 and 2007. While in 2004, 48 % were employed and 52 % unemployed, by 2007 the proportion of employed was 56 % and the proportion of unemployed 44 %. The motives of the new members for joining the party are mainly connected with issues of social justice. These include the growth of social inequality, jobs providing a living wage, welfare benefits and pensions that permit lives in dignity, and equal rights for all, of lesser importance are peace, ecological and educational issues.¹⁶⁶

A close correlation between members and electoral supporters is to be found in the age structure. The Left Party has its greatest voter potential in the 46–60 age group – and some 50 % of the members of the western state organisations are aged between 41 and 60, about 25 % are 35 or under, and over 3 % are over 70. That is different in the eastern state organisations, where the proportion of members 35 or under makes up only 7 %, while about 24 % are aged between 41 and 60, and over 50 % are over 70. However, the age structure of the active membership, as shown, for example, by the social composition of delegates to Party Congresses, is very different.

First, this age structure remained more or less constant between 1999 and 2010. The proportion of delegates aged 25 or less remained between 6 and 7 %, and of those aged between 25 and 45, between 13 and 17 %. About 30 % of the delegates were between 45 and 55. The share of those between 55 and 65 rose slightly, from 18 in 2006 to 23 % in 2010. Since 1999, the share of those aged over 65 has stayed between 5 and 7 %.

As the proportion of West German members has grown, the Left Party has been changing its language and shedding its image as an eastern party. In 2006, almost 80 %

2010. The share of delegates in district and state functions remained more or less constant, at 45 %. The problem of dual functions – those holding both a party and an electoral office – is shown in the reports: the sum of all data since 2006 always yields totals in excess of 100 %. Notable is the change in the proportion of delegates who are members of a union, which rose from 44 % in 2006 to almost 60 % in 2010.

165 DIE LINKE (2010): Bericht der Mandatsprüfungskommission an den 2. Parteitag vom 15./16. Mai in Rostock. (Report of the Second Party Congress Delegate Verification Commission).

166 Kajo Tetzlaff/Alexander Reetz (2009): Statistische Untersuchung der Parteieintritte DIE LINKE 2004/2007 (Mai-August), (Statistical investigation of new members of the Left Party, 2004/2007) PowerPoint presentation.

of its members came from the eastern states, but by 2009 this figure had dropped to 63%. Since 2006, the eastern state parties have lost a total of about 5000 members, while the western state parties managed to recruit 13,000 new members. The East-West weighting in the party's structure was established in the cooperation agreements reached during the merger process of the two original parties, the East German Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS) and the Electoral Alternative for Labour and Social Justice (WASG), mostly composed of West German former SPD members. Under this agreement, which also applied to the formula for the selection of delegates to Party Congresses, each former party was to be equally represented in all bodies. Thus, the average delegate from an eastern state represented about three times as many members as one from a western state.

Various contradictory or mutually exclusive expectations are made of the party, including the provision of assistance for people's lives. For many, the party is a place for jointly seeking justice and/or social alternatives, while for others it is a sanctuary for a shared history, or for exchanging views and engaging in social activities. Yet others see in it a career opportunity, a chance to wield power and influence, or to find solutions to private problems. Not everyone wants to be active; some are content to pay their dues, while others have not yet found the right circumstances for becoming active. It is not clear whether the Left Party wants to organize itself at the grassroots level with the participation of local and citizens' initiatives where there is plenty of scope for local self-organisation, or whether it wants to concentrate on building competence centres, so as to expand its competencies and its parliamentary base. Both will be necessary, and will have to be taken into account when considering the goals and the on-going work of building the party –both in concrete requirements and the party's overall responsibilities.

The question of organisation and intra-party democracy

The Left Party has its roots in the history of the international working class movement and the peace movement, and is committed to anti-fascism. It is close to the trade unions and social movements, and draws strength from feminism and the ecological movement. It sees itself as pluralist and open «for everyone who wants to achieve the same goals by democratic means».¹⁶⁷ The party is divided into state organisations, with each member belonging to a district organisation, usually in his/her place of residence. The Left Party grants members extensive rights, including the right to form associations with others within the party, and the right to propose motions in all organs of the party; individual members can even propose motions at the National Party Congress. The opportunity to take part in party work may be extended to guest members, to whom nearly all membership rights may be conferred, with the exception

167 DIE LINKE (2007): Bundessatzung der Partei DIE LINKE. 1. Auftrag und Name der Partei (National Statute of the Left Party, 1. Party goal and name), p. 5.

of the right to take part in membership ballots, vote on statute-related issues, stand for election to executive bodies, and vote to nominate candidates for parliamentary and municipal bodies. Members are free to form intra-party associations, which are recognised at the national level if they have been recognised as state-wide associations by at least eight state parties. These associations operate independently, receive party funding, and are allowed to elect delegates to party congresses. At present there are 22 associations at the national level, including political tendencies such as the Communist Platform, the Socialist Left and the Forum for Democratic Socialism, and working/interest associations which focus on specific issues. Examples are the Ecological Platform, the Workplace and Trade Union Working Group, and the Peace and Security Policy Working Group.

Membership ballots may be held on all political issues. They may be called upon application by state or district organisations representing at least a quarter of the membership. The applications may be submitted by eight state organisations, 5000 party members, or by a resolution of the party congress or the National Committee. Both non-discriminatory equality¹⁶⁸ and gender democracy are enshrined in the National Statutes. Half of all office holders in party bodies must be women. Of the members of the national or state party executive committees, the holders of seats in European, federal or state parliaments must be less than half of the total.

The development of the party

The parity in the leading bodies of the party coupled with the high degree of autonomy of the regional and state organisations have not only shaped the merger process, but have remained to this day the way in which political and socio-cultural heterogeneity in the party are maintained. The leadership of the National Executive elected at the last National Party Congress in 2010 in Rostock is, with the exception of the treasurer, based on a duality of East-West, PDS-WASG parity. This applies to the chair, the deputy chairs, the party manager and those in charge of party development. This settlement of the leadership question with the involvement of the regional chairs was seen as a solution to the outbreak of tensions at the beginning of 2010, after the resignations of the co-chairs Oskar Lafontaine (ex-WASG) and Lothar Bisky (ex-PDS) had created a power vacuum. At stake was the interpretation and orientation of the party, its role in the party system, its function and its practical value. Inside the party, which is still a party project of two mutually dependent sub-parties, these issues are still a subject of controversy, aggravated by different ideas regarding

168 Non-discriminatory equality is specified in the executive bodies of the party and the territorial organisations. (Statute, Paragraph 9, where prevention of any kind of discrimination is stated as a basic principle of the party). Section 2 states: «The rights of social, ethnic and cultural minorities in the membership, especially the right to self-determination, enjoy the special protection of the national and territorial executive committees. Their representation and involvement in the decision-making process of the party shall be supported.» Ibid, p. 10.

party politics, political biographies, socialisations and divergent political cultures. The election of the new leadership brought this to the surface. The necessary extension of transitional regulations had to be confirmed by an amendment to the statutes of the party congress. In order to ensure the necessary majority for this at the party congress – a two-thirds majority is required to amend the statutes – the party congress held a membership ballot, in which about 48 % of the members took part, of whom over 80 % gave their assent, while 94 % declared themselves in favour of putting the new Party Programme to the vote in another membership ballot by the end of 2011.

The basic conditions for the merger process

The PDS emerged from the SED, the communist ruling party of East Germany. It is the only such party to have transformed itself into a radical, left-democratic party; the others, as described elsewhere in this book, either moved into the social-democratic camp, or, in a few cases, remained true to the authoritarian «Marxist-Leninist» tradition. After its defeat in the 2002 elections, the PDS had only two representatives in the Bundestag.¹⁶⁹

The WASG emerged in 2004 as an association of mostly West German SPD and trade union activists disillusioned with the course of the SPD-led government; it was founded as a party in January 2005. Many of its members were long-time leftist radicals; in British terms, they were «entrists» within the SPD.

In the May 2005 elections in North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany's biggest state, the WASG and the PDS failed to clear the 5 % hurdle needed for seats in Germany, gaining 2.2 % and less than 1 %, respectively. The project of creating a successful party with both societal and parliamentary influence as an alternative to the neo-liberal policies of the SPD, and with a view of achieving a more solidarity-based society, was clearly beyond the power of the WASG on its own. Its resources were relatively meagre, while its influence in the eastern states, with the exception of Berlin, was still marginal. Although the PDS had been able to recover from its defeat of 2002 and stabilize its position in the European elections of 2004, it too faced uncertain prospects, as its potential for internal organisational and political renewal had been largely exhausted. Its attempt to establish itself in the West was making hardly any progress.

The erosion of SPD support, while not resulting in any seats for the WASG, did cause the fall of this traditional SPD stronghold to the CDU-FDP alliance, and, indirectly, the fall of the red-green federal government that summer. With the early Bundestag elections, the two left parties were now «condemned» to cooperate» and tried to agree on procedures enabling a joint ticket in the elections. Their common focus was on their rejection of the government's Agenda 2010, which was seen as the

¹⁶⁹ The PDS got less than 5 % of the vote nationwide, and would thus normally have got no seats. However, two candidates won single-member seats in East Berlin, and were thus seated. Had there been three such winners, the party would have qualified for an exemption from the 5 % rule (see the Appendix on electoral systems).

core of the neo-liberal project of social and democratic cutbacks. Their entry into the Bundestag, and the refusal of the SPD to cooperate with them, led to the formation of Angela Merkel's first government, a CDU-SPD coalition. In 2006, the PDS and the WASG merged to form the party DIE LINKE – «The Left».

The necessary organisational issues involved in building the new party, in particular the strategic decisions concerning a new Programme, were postponed till after the election campaigns of 2008 and 2009. The questions to be clarified remained unresolved, which encouraged the divergent political group, which were only being kept together by the top leadership, to organize within a party. These groupings drew in part on the concerns of their original parties, whose internal conflicts they reflected, causing the differences between the old parties to be carried over into the new project. Under the umbrella of the united Left Party, they provided scope for various discourses, projects and concrete activities. On the one hand, they could be brought together in the election campaigns for joint actions, such as those against Hartz IV, for a minimum wage, for the defence of democratic rights and liberties, for a policy of peace, or for cooperation with social movements in such instances as opposition to the G8 Summit in Heiligendamm in 2008. On the other, they facilitated the coexistence of divergent political and organisational perspectives, diverse political styles, a multitude of political cultures, and cultural codes which had emerged in the course of concrete political experience and theoretical discourses. Specifically, this meant the coexistence of authoritarian, welfare-state-oriented, communist, Trotskyite, left-wing socialist and reformist-libertarian groupings. They describe their party as anti-capitalist or critical of capitalism, as a party opposed to capitalism, neo-liberalism or a neo-liberal-oriented social democracy; as a party defending the welfare state; or as a party that is critical of the system and wishes to draw on the emancipatory potential of bourgeois society.

Since 2006, these groupings have developed into formal tendencies with their own statutes, founding documents, websites, events, conferences and summer schools, all of which has caused their view of themselves to change. They have become organised actors exerting power and influence on the development of the party and its political orientation. They have been concerned with securing and expanding their own political weight within the party, with putting their own candidates into office and, ultimately, with forcing through their own political line. Different positions on matters of substance have confronted each other. At its EU Party Congress in 2009, the Left Party presented itself culturally as an alliance of divergent tendencies. However, at the Berlin Party Congress held that same year in preparation for the Bundestag elections, things were very different. Now, under the pressure of the election campaigns, the Left Party succeeded in pulling itself together and presenting itself as the party of social justice, backing this up with the four main demands mentioned above.

Today, the Left Party cultivates the image of a consistent force for social justice and peace. Since the 2009 election, it has given this image concrete form in its ten-point

Immediate Programme, which, however, falls short of its stated claim to call the system in question. To do so it, would have to link its current demands to its «new social idea». There is agreement on the rejection of neo-liberalism, but not in the assessment of capitalism. The critique of capitalism and the possibilities of developing social alternatives to it are defined variously or controversially. The differences produce divergent self-images and expectations of the party and its strategic partners, and on the effectiveness of political strategies, programmes and projects. They are reflected in the documents of the various political tendencies in the party: anti-capitalist or critical of capitalism, radical and/or reformist.

What are the differences between the various left-wing positions?¹⁷⁰

We will attempt here to illustrate them by way of the examples of four central and at the same time contentious left-wing issues: the analysis of capitalism; the description of social fault lines; the property question; and the question of left-wing participation in government. All are at present the subject of controversy, especially in connection with the programmatic debates.

First: The analysis of capitalism and social perspectives

Although the question as to capitalism's capacity to develop and innovate may appear simple, very divergent positions do indeed exist within the Left Party in this respect. Is this capacity simply due to the exploitation of people and nature, and the oppression of nations, or does capitalism, by developing new types of production, new technologies and new products, also give rise to a new quality of modes of production and living that point the way forward beyond capitalism? Are such achievements –as the welfare state –hence departures from the norm of capitalism, or are they an intrinsic, constitutive element of the capitalist system not focused exclusively on profit, which is itself constantly fought over, and represents a field of social conflict? Must the Left Party aim at a complete break, or should it concentrate its strategy and programmes on pushing back the dominant role of profit in capitalism?

For those supporting a strict anti-capitalist position, the destructive potential of «casino» or «predatory» capitalism and its inability to respond to the challenges of the current crises are central to the analysis. In their view, the capacity to reform only serves the purpose of adaptation to changing existential conditions, or is the result of class struggles. They emphasize the crisis-prone development of flexible, financial-market-driven capitalism. Those supporting a more reform-oriented position tend to describe the contradiction between capitalism's productive possibilities and the concrete reality of social conditions. Others in turn assume that despite the prevailing dominance of capital, at the heart of which lies profit maximisation, realms may

170 The positions presented here are to be found in the programmatic documents of the relevant tendencies.

emerge which are not subject to the logic of profit, and could hence promote alternative developments, under changed hegemonic conditions. Consequently, the latter support the concept of a transformational process which can only be realised in practice by a dialectic interweaving of reformist and revolutionary changes.

Interpretations of socialism as a social alternative also differ. For some, it is still the goal, the path and the set of values, as described in the PDS Party Programme of 2003, in which socialism is seen as a society in which each and every individual has equal access to the basic goods of a free life in solidarity. While the goal is primary, the specific means must be determined on democratically. Freedom is the point of reference of socialist policies, and equality the measure of participation in the benefits of freedom, which permits all members of society equal access to the elementary basic conditions of a self-determined life worthy of human beings. These include social and legal security, health, work, education, culture, clean air, clean water, and much more.¹⁷¹ On the level of concrete parliamentary politics, especially at the state level, the dialectical link between goals and practice, between day-to-day politics and social alternatives, has so far been lacking, although parliamentary representatives have repeatedly referred to the «strategic triangle» of the Left Party:

First, drafting an alternative vision of social development (democratic socialism); *second*, resistance to social cutbacks, restriction of democracy, environmental pollution and war; and *third*, the political shaping of society inside and outside the parliaments.

The art of left political strategy is to combine all this with the development of projects that create the conditions for an alternative path of social development, and to win societal majorities for them.

Second: The property question

The Left Party differs from the other parties in that it poses the systemic question in terms of the relationship of ownership and production. The rule of capitalist private property must be overcome by genuine socialisation. The abolition of the capitalist system of property means the transfer to public ownership of all important corporations in the key sectors, i.e. of all structurally vital enterprises. There is agreement in the Left Party that this refers to the areas of key public utilities, infrastructure, the energy grids, information networks, and the financial system. There are differences of opinion with regard to the expansion of public ownership. Should all corporations be nationalised, for example? Or do we also need a societally relevant private-enterprise sector organised on a decentralised basis, which would allow the existence of competing, efficiently producing economic units acting on their own responsibility and producing on their «own account»? Does the socialist system of property mean the

171 Cf. the PDS Party Programme of 2003.

transfer of all important means of production to public ownership, or does it mean a multi-sector economy with a strong public sector under democratic control?

Third: The question of interests and social fault lines in society

Whose interests should the Left Party represent? Should it represent the interests of the working people and the unemployed, i.e. should it be the representative of specific interests, or does it see itself as the representative of the overall interests of the majority of the people? What is clear is that left-wing hegemony can only be realised by articulating and bringing together various interests. It is also clear that it will be necessary to reconcile contradictory interests that face one another across lines of societal conflict, such as that between wage-earners and the unemployed, and especially the conflict between capital and labour. The predominance of this conflict, from which others – such as that between the sexes and that between humankind and its natural environment – are derived, tends to be stressed by those with anti-capitalist views. The key task of the Left Party is therefore seen as being a societal organisation seeking the just distribution of paid jobs and other socially necessary types of work. Equality of the sexes means equal access to jobs, equal pay, and the reconcilability of family and career. In this sense, Left Party policy must be class-oriented. Different positions are represented in the party by those who make the claim to being emancipatory, and therefore also see the value of freedom as including freedom from alienated labour under capitalism. Consequently, they demand the right to an unconditional basic income. This approach emphasises the range of various forms of exploitation and oppression, against which a range of solidarity-based emancipatory struggles will have to be developed, which are all equally important for the Left Party. Only in this way will it be possible to create an alternative centre-left alliance, to which emancipatory, solidarity-minded groups of the social and cultural centre belong, such as threatened middle strata, core groups of the wage-earning population, the unemployed or the precariously employed, the marginalised, and migrants and refugees.

However the goals of social change and concrete demands are formulated, the claims they contain – such to be «realistic and radical, and get to the root of things», to be a force for political protest and resistance in the German party system, or the claim to be a creative left-wing force that links parliamentary politics with socialist perspectives so as to create the prerequisites for an alternative course of development – have so far only been met rudimentarily by the Left Party as a whole, whether in conceptual or in practical terms. There is no coherent concept for a socio-ecological transformation of the whole of society on the basis of changed modes of production and living, individual self-determination and solidarity. At present, the agenda of the Left Party mainly amounts to the defence of social and democratic rights, which are being restricted by growing social inequality, the danger of a dismantling of democracy by referring decisions to the executive level – as in the bail-outs and stimulus packages at the national and state levels – and the passing of the burdens of the crisis

onto the shoulders of the disadvantaged, especially the recipients of social transfer payments under the Hartz IV and other systems. The party acts as a societal force against the spreading precarity of labour and mass unemployment, and in defence of a well-functioning welfare state. It combines demands for the democratisation of the economy with demands for expanded democratic co-determination for employees and trade-union co-determination, and for workforce ownership.

Fourth: The question of the Left Party's place in the party system, strategic partners, and Left Party participation in government

For the newly founded Left Party the question of left-wing participation in government was a contentious one right from the start. Indeed, the Berlin branch of the WASG initially refused to join, and ran its own ticket in the state's 2006 election, in opposition to the policy of the state government, in which the Left Party then participated. But this reflected neither an East-West conflict (although the Berlin WASG was largely a West Berlin group), nor a conflict between allegedly radical and reformist tendencies within the Left Party. No political tendency within the Left Party rejects participation in government, or the toleration of red-green governments in principle. Neither in Hesse in 2008, nor in the Saarland or Thuringia in 2009, nor in North Rhine-Westphalia in 2010, was a red-red-green coalition at the state level ruled out in principle; rather, it was generally the attitude of the SPD which prevented such an option.

This is also true of the national level. At issue are the conditions under the Left Party would be prepared to join a government – as has always been the case, including in Berlin in 2006. There, the party formulated the essentials of left policy before entering the government: no university tuition fees, no privatisation of public utilities, creation of a public employment sector (ÖBS) and comprehensive schools, and a state-supported programme against right-wing extremism. There are various views in the Left Party as to whether and how «red lines» – marking the limits of compromise – should be drawn, and who should decide what they are. For example, Oskar Lafontaine stated in 2010 that «We are prepared to take part if the social cutbacks in Germany are definitely stopped in the Bundesrat.»¹⁷² In the draft programme of the Left Party the conditions for left-wing governments were formulated as follows: «The Left Party will only aspire to participate in government if by so doing we can bring about an improvement in people's living conditions. It will not join any government that carries out privatisations, nor one that cuts welfare and/or jobs. In addition, the Left will not join a Federal government that wages wars and permits

¹⁷² Oskar Lafontaine: Speech on the first day of the 2nd Party Congress of the Left Party on May 15, 2010 in Rostock. The Bundesrat, the upper house of the German Parliament, consists of representatives of the state governments, so that these can in fact influence national policy.

foreign combat missions by the Bundeswehr, or that engages in arms build-ups or militarisation.»¹⁷³

There is disagreement within the Left Party – mainly between those who see it as an extra-parliamentary force, and those who want to implement left-wing policies as a ruling party at the state level – over the ruling out of job cuts in the public services. This is difficult, especially from the viewpoint of the eastern states, since it ignores the different circumstances prevailing in the West and the East, particularly the levels of mass emigration from the eastern states, amounting to about 50,000 people a year, mostly by young women. The unemployment rate is still twice as high in the East as in the West, earnings in the East are only 70 % of what they are in the West, and the unions are much weaker in the East. The poverty risk in Baden-Württemberg is 10 %; in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, it is almost 30 %. That demand also ignores the different relation of political forces in these states. Such western states as Baden-Württemberg are bastions of the unions – especially the mighty IG Metall; there, the Left Party got 7.2 % of the vote in the Bundestag election, as opposed to 32.4 % in Saxony-Anhalt, an eastern state with weak unions. Thus the Left Party finds itself in a dilemma when it ties its aspirations for entering a coalition government to strong trade unions and strong extra-parliamentary social movements, especially in places like Saxony-Anhalt, where they don't exist. It may have emerged from the elections as the strongest party, but its organised social base is weak. Thus, the demand for a uniform nationwide approach is problematical.

Left-wing governments need both social and political acceptance. So far – especially after the collapse of the coalition negotiations in North Rhine-Westphalia in 2010 – this has only happened in some eastern states. The beginning of 2010 saw the emergence of new crossover projects launched with enthusiasm by Leftists, Social Democrats, Greens, trade unionists and social movements. Although they quickly met with societal acceptance, their dynamism and political significance soon faded. Nevertheless the left ought to hold on to those projects with a view to clarifying both their own and jointly held positions for developing a social alternative – something that leftists call socialism.

173 DIE LINKE (2010): 1. Entwurf für ein Programm der Partei DIE LINKE, p. 24.

Table 3: Comparison of divergent positions within the Left Party

Position A	Subject	Position B
Society is capitalist, i.e. all its areas are capitalist; changes arise out of adjustment processes intrinsic to the system, or are the result of class struggles, which alleviate certain evils for a time.	View of the world as it is	Capitalist society develops as a struggle between two tendencies: a dominant logic of capital and a social logic that develops as a result of social and democratic struggles; capital-dominated society has emancipatory potential which the left must tap.
The crisis of over-accumulation leads to constantly intensifying competition between the major capitalist countries. A radical redistribution of national income is forced through at the expense of those dependent on employment, while cuts in and privatisation of social systems and utilities are carried out. ¹⁷⁴	Interpretation of crises	The crisis of financial-market capitalism is tied to a comprehensive crisis of civilisation, in which financial-market, economic, climatic and food crises coincide. Various scenarios are possible: authoritarian capitalism with democracy and welfare cuts, a Green New Deal, a socio-ecological transformation
Capitalism has entered a new expansive and aggressive phase.	Current balance of forces	An organic crisis of neo-liberal financial-market capitalism has occurred.
Primacy of the contradiction between capital and labour, from which other contradictions are derived	Main fault lines	Plurality of conflicts – capital-labour, racism, sexism, the North-South conflict
Transformation of society is rejected as illusory, all that is needed being resistance to the ruling bloc, against mass unemployment, and the struggle to preserve and expand the welfare state.	Social perspectives	Socialism as the medium-term, essential orientation for the left democratic socialism as a transformational process; a society based on solidarity
A social order in which private ownership of the means of production is superseded by real socialisation/nationalisation.	View of socialism	Goals, path and values as in the PDS Party Programme of 2003
Economic democracy, especially democratic regulation of financial markets Alternative economic policy with strengthening of domestic demand	Ways and means	Socio-ecological transformation, strengthening of public control and comprehensive democratisation of the economy and society
All forms of ownership of the means of production to be brought under public control, with co-determination by employees; transfer of key areas of the economy, including utilities, to public ownership,	Property question	Pluralist, solidarity-based property order; participation of various forces in the disposal (workforces, representatives of regions, ecological interests), without abolishing entrepreneurial independence in the process

174 Cf.:<http://www.antikapitalistische-linke.de/article/149.sondernewsletter-zur-finanzmarktkrise.html>; accessed July 1, 2010.

Position A	Subject	Position B
Wage-earners (whether employed, unemployed, or drawing pensions) of those who own nothing or little in capitalist society	Whose interests should be mainly represented (target groups)?	Centre-left alliance, view of Left Party in East as mass party, i.e. policies for all, building of political centre-left alliances
Improvement of people's concrete circumstances, participation in government is to be linked to conditions: no welfare cuts, no privatisation of public utilities, no cuts in the public services; at the national level, withdrawal of Bundeswehr from Afghanistan.	Participation in government	Improvement of people's concrete circumstances Participation in government serves to shape policy for forcing through transformational projects; ways of changing internal and external balances of power: A strategic triangle – combination of protest, resistance and alternative projects.
No Bundeswehr missions abroad (with or without a UN mandate).	Peace policy	Rejection of combat missions not mandated by the UN
Key demand: equal pay for equal work, equal access to paid employment and hence the key goal of the reconcilability of family and career. Historically, women's movements have their political roots on the left.	Gender-relations	Gender relations are not a »secondary contradiction«, but just as important as other social contradictions; dissolution of traditional gender roles; gender justice, too, in paid employment; reconcilability of family and career
No privatisation of public property, seen as «internal enclosure», instead social, state and municipal responsibility for education, health, water and energy; expansion of the public services	Differences in key demands	No privatisation of public utilities; exploring public forms of ownership: the public character alone is not enough; restructuring of the public services
Access to and a fairer distribution of jobs, a minimum wage, jobs that pay a living wage; shorter working hours without loss of pay	Work	Access to work in dignity from which one can live, but also addressing alienated paid employment under capitalist conditions; no compulsory employment
Primacy of collective values like solidarity both in everyday life and everyday consciousness; individual values secondary Freedom through socialism	Values	Freedom, equality, solidarity, emancipation, justice, preservation of nature; emphasis on individual freedom Socialism through freedom

Stéphane Sahuc

LEFT PARTIES IN FRANCE

Introduction

Whether fair or not, French political life revolves around a single election, the presidential election. Ironically, it was the left government of Lionel Jospin that made that election even more important, for after the presidential term was reduced to five years to synchronize it with the parliamentary terms, the then Premier Jospin had the electoral calendar reversed by referendum, so that the presidential elections are now held just before the parliamentary elections, except in the unlikely event of an early dissolution of parliament. In 2002, Jospin's goal was to unseat President Jacques Chirac; however, since he was pushed into third place by the extreme rightist Jean-Marie Le Pen, Chirac was the only alternative, and was re-elected with 82 % of the vote.

In the wake of that presidential election, the conservative camp also won a majority in parliament. However, political revenge seemed pre-programmed for 2007, for the French Socialists were convinced that what had been true since 1981, that no governing parliamentary majority was never re-elected, would work again. Moreover, all political observers agreed in June 2006 that the bourgeois right was destined to lose the next presidential election, after laying down a string of three defeats, in the regional elections and in the elections for the European Parliament in 2004, and in the referendum on the European Constitution in 2005. The government had denied outright victory by two things a broad – and successful – mobilisation of French youth against the planned First Employment Contract (CPE), a cheap-labour scheme, and was rent by quarrels between the supporters of Chirac and those of Nicolas Sarkozy. The French «no» in the referendum had additionally shown growing antipathy toward an «ultraliberal» system that, many saw as the destruction of social security, and the political surrender to an economy under the dogma of «free and unhampered competition». The way seemed clear for the left and the Socialists.

However, after a thorough analysis of the situation, Sarkozy and his friends on the bourgeois right softened their political rhetoric. Their assertion: «The political realm, the state, can do some things», was the diametrical opposite of Jospin's famous statement that «the state cannot do everything».

By placing political voluntarism and a strong state at the centre of his electoral campaign speeches, Sarkozy told the French people that he would protect them. In place of social insecurity, he put brought out a dusted-off version of «upward social mobility», which drew on the «achievement society» (to achieve something all you have to do is «to work hard») and the «value of work». The ideological machinery aimed at devaluing collective solidarity and promoting individual effort as the only way to go. Conversely, the left did not succeed in reacting credibly to the population's fears of continuing social precarisation of work, and the desire for protection and security. Symptomatic of this «strategic superiority» of the bourgeois right was talk of «the value of work», as opposed to the creation of value through labour. Sarkozy thus spread the illusion that he was taking up a position which had traditionally belonged to the left, and especially the communist segment of the spectrum. For him, «work» was devoid of any concept of production, creation of wealth and its appropriation by capital. Instead, it was removed from the dimension of exploitation, becoming simply a moral element of the existing social order. Sarkozy's populist discourse differentiated between those who worked and «got up early» the next day, and those who did not.

«Morality», moreover, is one of the pillars of the ideological offensive of the bourgeois right under Sarkozy. The Marxist philosopher Jean Zin, on the other hand, believes that we «ought to move away from morality, toward politics»; for him, «morality is dangerous, because it opposes good to evil and acts as if the reasons [for injustice, etc.] are subjective and not material». And the French President underscores this – as for example when he says that «financial capitalism has to become moral». A great part of the left thus finds itself in a trap: «capitalism with a human face», controlled and limited to a certain extent, in order to avoid excesses – isn't this also a concept of left liberalism?

Finally, in 2009, the lack of any left alternatives led to an electoral victory of the bourgeois right in the European Parliamentary elections – not only in France, but throughout Europe. The governing Union for a Popular Movement (Union pour un mouvement populaire/UMP)¹⁷⁵ won in all French electoral districts. The recent European elections, however, was a watershed for left forces in France: It marked the emergence of the Green Alliance Europe Écologie and of the liberal Democratic Movement (Mouvement démocrate/MODEM); on the left, it saw the defeat of the New Anti-Capitalist Party (Nouveau Parti anticapitaliste/NPA, successor to the Trotskyist Revolutionary Communist League/LCR), and, on the other hand, respectable

175 Usually known as the «Gaullists», of which this party is the third incarnation.

electoral results for the Left Front (Front de Gauche), an electoral alliance consisting of the French Communist Party (PCF), the Left Party (Parti de Gauche/PG) of former Socialist Jean-Luc Mélenchon, and the United Left (Gauche Unitaire), which had split off from the NPA.

The Greens and Europe Ecologie

Can political ecology represent a reform-political alternative to a Socialist Party (PS) in difficulty? Can it become the linchpin for a newly defined anti-Sarkozy centre-left majority? At any rate, after the 2009 European Parliamentary election, this was the ambition, for the joint list of the Greens and various famous personalities as globalisation critic José Bové, anti-corruption Judge Eva Joly and supporters of environmental activist Nicolas Hulot, garnered more than 16% of the vote, putting them hot on the heels of the Socialists. Was this relative electoral success due to the kind of elections these are, and to the PS's weakness, and will it be repeatable? And what will become of the French Green Party within this «new organisational force», in view of the strategy of Green MEP Daniel Cohn-Bendit of coming together around the centre?

In the reconstitution of the French left, the political ecology movement would naturally like to play a leading role, both in terms of the electoral base and of the activists: Due to the crisis, it can call upon heightened ecological consciousness; since it raises questions not only on urgent issues, but also on contemporary civilisation and society, where it can claim to be the only force with answers to questions of necessary changes in our lives. Moreover, it has ideas for «a different way of engaging in politics», and finally it is appealing to voters from across the political spectrum, beyond the traditional left camp. In view, or rather because, of the relatively unclear strategies of this alliance, the ecological movement wants to play a «central» role – in the truest sense of the word, since it is moving to the political centre, while re-affirming its left roots.

An analysis of the membership figures of the Greens shows that their potential is not comparable to that of the «big parties». Still, they can rely on influential networks in various movements, which during the 1970s laid the foundation for the emergence of the ecological movement: the anti-nuclear power movement, the movement for the defence of the undocumented, the farmers' union, various initiatives of globalisation critics and supporters of a more just kind of development cooperation. Even if their activists and sympathizers often hold an apolitical «neither right nor left» attitude, the Greens have unambiguously positioned themselves within the left camp. Thus, between 1997 and 2002, they participated in the governments of the Plural Left (Gauche plurielle). The election of the left camp thus mostly rests on political conviction, but at the same time also on a certain realism, due to the French direct election system, for the Green deputies depend on electoral alliances. Thus, with 4.4% of the votes in the 2007 parliamentary elections, the Greens won only three deputies in the French National Assembly by piggy-backing on the PS ticket, although they are also represented in regional parliaments.

The Greens avow their European identity more than their national affiliation. Nevertheless, the party was not united on the 2005 referendum: The majority of its activists declared themselves against the European Constitution, and thus signalled their affiliation with the left camp. José Bové, one of the best-known supporters of the «No to a liberal Europe» movement, nevertheless campaigned together with Cohn-Bendit, a constitution supporter, in the 2009 elections.

The decisive challenge for the French Greens in the struggle for a consolidation of the changing relationship of forces on the left is in forging long-term links with their voters. Under the leadership of Daniel Cohn-Bendit, the Europe Ecologie movement set this as one of its goals. Nevertheless, it is still unthinkable for the leaders and members of the Greens to dissolve the party and completely assimilate in the new movement. In order for the French Greens to be able to represent a long-term and indispensable political force within a left majority, it is much more important for them to make capital out of their success in the European elections and pull centre-left voters into the Green camp as well as those Socialists who are looking for innovation. However, the battle has not yet been won. The danger of dissolution within the larger whole, with unclear contours, is great and real. The Green activists, who have been building their party since 1984, are thus facing a challenge that should not be underestimated.

The Socialist Party

What does it mean today to be a Socialist in Europe? The big crisis which the French Socialists are now undergoing, bears many of the marks of the general crisis of European social democracy: an identity crisis, people turning away from the party and the effect that has in various elections, the divergence between realpolitik and established expectations, the weakness of proposals vis-à-vis the needs to sharpen them in the crisis, and the lack of self-modification and of solutions. The crisis nevertheless also shows specific characteristics of French social democracy. Internal debates have been aggravated by repeated electoral defeats since the lost presidential election of 1995. Historically, the French left is, certainly, against the presidentialisation of the political system; yet it too cannot escape the effect of that process on political life. Under François Mitterand, the PS itself used all the mechanisms of the French presidential system in an attempt to permanently root left hegemony in society and push a polarisation into two opposing political camps. The currently most urgent strategic question for the PS is the return to power in 2012, for which end it must win back the lost working class vote, and re-establish certain alliances, in addition to formulating a project for change.

The Socialists face these problems within a shifting power constellation and a political ambience gripped by change, marked by both the volatility of the electorate and by the change in traditional points of reference within the population, especially amongst the lower stratum. The French left thus finds itself at a turning point: the

long-past era of joint left government programmes, starting with the Congress of Épinay in 1971, which established the strategy of left unity, has yielded to a new era brought on by the electoral defeat of the Plural Left in 2002. At the same time, the PS faces increased left competition and a Green movement that wants to secure its place within the left party landscape.

In public opinion, the PS is now seen as being divided by internal quarrels based on personalities and power politics, and at the same time as lacking any recognizable mobilisation concept. Nevertheless, the PS is still clearly the dominant force on the French left. The Socialists still hold important power positions the regions and the municipalities: They govern such large cities as Paris and Lyon, and hold the presidency in 21 of France's 22 regions – often in coalition with Communists and Greens. Like all other left forces in France, the Socialists – both members and voters – are traumatised, by the defeat of 2002, when their candidate was shoved out of second place by Le Pen. The 2007 victory of Nicolas Sarkozy over Ségolène Royal further aggravated this dismay, and has hardly been obviated by the Socialist victories in municipal and regional elections. In any case, the historically poor results – 16.48% – in the last elections to the European Parliament in June 2009 underscored the party's difficulties in regaining its influence in national elections, and revived the internal debates and tensions. After all, the victory of the «no» in the 2005 referendum meant a separation of the average voter – who voted no – from the party, which had supported the Constitution.

During the 1990s, the loss of the PS's influence within the working-class and the lower-stratum electorate was clearly visible. In 2007, only 25% of workers – as against 41% in 1988 – voted for the PS. Even among white-collar workers, the PS vote dropped from 37% to 24%; among officials and employees in the public services, it fell from 40% to 29%, and only 24% of the top employees and intellectuals voted for the PS, down from 29% in the previous election. Even the composition of the various party organs and the social background of the deputies shifted to the upper-middle stratum.

The disruption of the party leadership, the struggle for the chair, and the selection of the top candidates for the 2002 presidential elections symbolised the far-reaching discussions within the PS on the programme, the concept of the party, its possible left coalition partners, and its relationship to the political centre, to the French liberals.

When the November 2008 congress elected Martine Aubry, Jacques Delors's daughter, as new party chair and thus disavowed Ségolène Royal, the Socialists positioned themselves in the left social-democratic camp, and in favour of left alliances. Aubry spoke in favour of a «strong left-anchored socialism of government». After this, the PS achieved a very good result, with 19% of the vote. One party observer has confirmed that «the PS – each time it lives through an identity crisis – always relies on its left-wing and reinforces its criticism of capitalism». It was impossible for the party to ignore the increasing rejection of liberalism and the mood for change. Moreover, it was a

matter of emphasizing the existence of a strong party, a party of members and activists, as opposed to the «modernist» option favoured by Royale: a US «Democratic Party» model, designed mainly to serve the purpose of supporting a candidate in an election. The new orientation in the left camp became clearly visible in the first half of 2009, when the PS actively took part in social movements and supported political action in defence of public services and against the privatisation of the postal service. Finally, there was the issue of the re-foundation of the party, which is inevitably tied to the debates around the composition of the whole French left, as well as the development of a shared programme. What path could this party take, which was founded in 1971 by François Mitterrand with the goal of taking power? Basing itself on the unification of all left forces, the PS in the end exercised a dominance which weakened its partners.

With the beginning of the crisis, many tendencies emerged within the population: rejection of economic liberalism by a broad mass, including the questioning of capitalism itself, great fear of the future – even within the middle stratum, which had up to then felt secure – and growing resistance to Sarkozy's policies. The PS leadership, however, is in a quandary. On the one hand, the people expect real changes and the PS's return to its roots in the left camp; on the other hand, there are attempts to shift its political orientation to that of a centre party, in order to increase its chances of electoral victory. The PS is confronting the contradiction between its possible political re-orientation as regards more *realpolitik* on the one hand, and the new questions posed by the crisis and the failure of liberalism on the other: Is it only a matter of the dissolution of the bourgeois right – or of a possible and necessary structural reform that questions capitalism itself? The political answer is to be found in the selection of possible coalition partners. This choice, however, places the party and its voters before great challenges, for despite the reinforcement of its rooting in the left camp, feelings run high over this issue, and supporters are divided. Fully 68 % of PS voters and sympathizers prefer left and even extreme left alliances, 89 % are for a rapprochement with ecological movements, and 56 % are for an opening toward the political centre. Every option has a majority.

Important choices need to be made; for French Socialists therefore, shaken as they are by a deep crisis, a fundamental political decision is now inevitable. They have the choice of either simply taking over power from the bourgeois right, or of far-reaching cooperation with other left forces, without staking claim to leadership, in the struggle for a truly progressive alternative. The latter would also mean a break with liberal policies, and an acceptance of the imperative of a fundamental renewal of European thinking, including in the direction of social and democratic reconstruction.

The French Communist Party

The results of a poll of PCF members which the party conducted in November 2009 in to help it decide on an electoral strategy for the March 2010 elections for the French regions, provide a very accurate picture of the current situation and the in-

ternal contradictions of the French Communists. Some 63 % of regular, dues-paying members, approx. 44,000 people in all, participated in the poll. According to information from the PCF leadership,¹⁷⁶ «At the end of 2009, the Communist Party counts 134,000 members. This figure shows a relative stability of membership figures since 2005. ... Since 2005, the number of people joining the party annually has varied between 5000 and 6000», the party leadership states. Although it has no exact details on these new members, «at present, we assume that half of these new members are under 20 years of age».

In comparison to other French political parties, the number and distribution of PCF members is nationally significant: the NPA has more than 5000 members, the Greens 8000, and the PS 203,000; however, in August 2009, only 64,000 were paid up on their membership dues. This shows that the PCF is a significant factor in the party landscape, and, considering its large number of activists, should not be underestimated. Contrary to conventional opinion and the media's repeated announcements regarding the death of the PCF, it has a large number of members, an enormous sphere of action, and a power of impact which is not to be sneered at.

Nevertheless, the influence of the Communists has been shrinking with every election, and even the PCF's voters seem in danger of dying out: Since 1983, the share of voters between 18 and 25 has stayed constant, under 3.5 %. The greater proportion is 65 or older, although there is a hard core of PCF voters in the 45 to 55 age bracket. In 1997, the number of electoral districts in which the Communists got more than 5 % of votes was 473; just ten years later, this had dropped to 145. And the number of districts in which the PCF got more than 20 % of the vote and could thus go to the second ballot dropped from 60 in 1997 to 32 in 2002 and finally to 23 in 2007.

The historian Roger Martelli, in an article commissioned by the Gabriel Péri Foundation, analysed the electoral results of Communist candidates in the 2007 parliamentary elections.

«By comparison with the 2002 elections, the PCF lost votes in 284 electoral districts, but could at the same time stabilize or improve its results in another 204 districts. In 2002, in about 60 electoral districts, there were no Communist candidates. In 2007: The PCF lost more than 10 % of the votes cast in twelve electoral districts and could get more than 10 % in only one electoral district; in eight electoral districts it increased by more than 5 %, but in 25 districts, it lost more than 5 % of its votes».

Since 1997, the French Communists have lost at least a half their electoral potential in 400 electoral districts; only in 13 electoral districts did the number of PCF voters remain the same or increase. The general tendency of loss was stemmed in the 2007 parliamentary elections, but not stopped. At any rate, the gap between the few districts with a high share of PCF voters and the overwhelming majority of French

176 In *Communistes*, the weekly exchange and communication supplement of the daily *Humanité*.

electoral districts where the Communist vote is marginal, is increasing. The falling vote for the PCF at the national level was also confirmed by the 2007 elections. And Martelli adds that: «The share of the votes cast in 1978 was not below 5 % in a single department,¹⁷⁷ but this is the case today in 69 of them. Furthermore, in no department in 1997 did the PCF get more than 15 %, although the party had still been able in 1978 to exceed this level in 72 of them. In 25 departments the PCF indeed captured more than 20 % of the votes. ... Since 1997, the PCF has lost about half of its electoral potential. In 62 departments, the loss was above average, in 27 of them it was even above average by two-thirds».

The reduction of PCF influence at the national level addressed by Martelli, and the corresponding loss of votes, is true, too, for other elections, although with certain discrepancies.¹⁷⁸ The PCF is certainly not the only French party subject to electorally conditioned differences and changing electoral behaviour; however, these deviations are not as sharp in other parties. Paradoxically, despite these national losses, the PCF still has a large number of elected officials – from members of municipal and regional parliaments to national deputies and senators, they total eleven,000 all over France.

The territorial rooting of the Communists in France allows them to preserve a certain political influence. An important and constant component of the PCF's strategy has always been to have deputies, in order to have a share in power and be represented in institutional entities. Since its foundation, the question of power and government participation has occupied people's attention, as it has inside the socialist movement, which already addressed this question in the late 19th century. Moreover, the PCF can look back on the experience of several government participations between 1945 and 2002, which sets it apart from other West European communist parties. For example, in 1945 the Communists came in first in the elections, with 26 % of the votes, and got several cabinet posts; after the 1981 and 1997 elections, their influence within each of the governments was more limited. Moreover, the PCF was at times very strongly represented in organisations of social security and worker representation of large state enterprises, through the delegates and officials of the left trade union, the CGT. The electoral defeat of the Plural Left in 2002 led to a renewed discussion of government participation within the PCF. The disappointment also spelled the end of the attempt begun in the 1990s by then First Secretary Robert Hue for a far-reaching transformation of his party – the project «Change».

177 The 101 departments were the main subdivisions of the country; they have now been grouped into 22 regions, but still exist for administrative purposes.

178 Example The development of the PCF vote in Calais, a town in the far north with a historically large Communist vote, which has recently fluctuated wildly: 2001 municipal election, first ballot, Henin: 47.23 %; 2002 presidential election, first ballot, Hue: 8.62 %; 2004 regional election, Bocquet: 19.54 %; 2004 EP election: Henin: 40 % ; 2007 presidential election, first ballot, Buffet: 4.5 %; 2007 parliamentary elections, 6th district, Gisèle Cocquerelle: 15.66 %; 7th district, Marcel Leailant: 14.35 %; «no» votes in the European Constitutional referendum: 74.36 %. And a shock: in the last municipal election. first ballot, PCF: 37.7 %, but with a victory for the ruling UMP on the second ballot.

The desire of the PCF for participation in local, regional and national government is understood and justified by the hope for a «rapid improvement of people's conditions of life»; however, many questions and contradictions related to the idea of a «left union» have long determined the strategic debates within the PCF. Thus, the question of alliances with other parties has often sprung from tactical considerations and has grown into general strategic discussions. The historic Popular Front coalition forged in the mid-1930s with the SFIO (French Section of the Workers' International, the PS's predecessor) and the Radical Party was justified within the communist movement by the influence which these partners wielded within the working class and the peasantry. During the 1960s and 1970s, the majority-based electoral system was established in all elections in France. At that time, increased cooperation with the PS, which then espoused opposition to capitalism, was justified by the argument that it was necessary to work together first at the local and then at the national level, to push back the bourgeois right.

The situation today is more complex than ever, even if it seems simple after the overwhelming «no» vote on the European Constitution of May 29, 2005. These «no» voters came overwhelmingly from the left political camp, from the working class, and they were young. Their vote was based on their anti-neo-liberal attitude. Theoretically, therefore, a joint candidate from the left organisations and the personalities in the «no» campaign of the referendum should have been able to concentrate all left votes for the 2007 presidential elections. This fusion ought to have made possible a left alternative to the PS, yet this «strategy» ended in defeat.

The overestimation of the presidential elections in France's political life led political parties and individuals to perceive this election as the central political event. Accordingly, the Left Union of the «no» campaign disintegrated due to internal rivalries. Before the 2007 election, there had never been so many presidential candidates to the left of the PS – and never had they had such poor showings. With 1.93% of the votes, the Communist candidate, Marie-George Buffet, scored the worst result in her party's history in a presidential election. In the 2009 European Parliament elections, with a new attempt to establish a Left Front, the French Communists benefited from the founding of the PG (Left Party) by former Socialist Jean-Luc Mélenchon, freeing itself from its age-old dilemma: «Either coalesce with the PS or go under!»

The membership survey of November 2009 revealed that 78.7% of PCF members were for establishing joint electoral lists within the Left Front; 16.4% were for joint lists with the PS, even after the first ballot; and 4.5% of members were felt that the PCF should present its own candidates on the first ballot. After a detailed analysis and taking into account the next elections in France, the Communists decided to run on joint lists with the Socialists in only five regions; in another 17 regions, the PCF and the PG would present joint lists, together with the United Left and other small left formations. By contrast, in 2004, the PCF had run together with the Socialists in 14 regions, even on the first ballot.

The strategy of the Left Front, however, has to confront internal party opponents. Some PCF members believe that the Left Front would be competing with the rest of the left movement, and they don't want to strengthen these feuds any further. In any case, what is at issue here is not a conjunctural phenomenon, but rather a consciously chosen political strategy. Marie-George Buffet defines her goal as follows: «To show that there is an alternative for the first ballot, and to move the cursor to the left. In the second ballot, the whole left should then unite in order to win a majority».

With its hypothesis of being able to win back political influence in all of France by way of the Left Front, the Communists are taking a big risk. They are hoping in this way to be able «to re-nationalize» their electoral results, and to save themselves from extinction. In the midst of debates on future alliances and their own transformation, the PCF still finds itself in a search for itself, its societal function, and its future.

The Left Party (PG)

The PG, founded by former Senator Jean-Luc Mélenchon, once champion of left tendencies within the PS, is the new star in France's left galaxy. Mélenchon founded the party on the model of Germany's Left Party, in order to assemble «the other left». For years he had spoken of emancipation from the PS, which in his opinion was meandering down the neo-liberal path. As one of the people chiefly responsible for the campaign against the European Constitution, he believed it was possible to revive the enthusiasm and relative equality of all «the left forces of «no» which prevailed during the campaign. During the November 2008 PS Party Congress, Mélenchon plunged into the cold water: On the day after the passage of the political motions chiefly presented by Ségolène Royal, he left the PS to form his own political party. His model was Oskar Lafontaine, the former chair of the German Social Democrats and co-founder of the German Left Party, whose electoral successes in Germany had inspired Mélenchon. However, the PG has so far not succeeded in persuading any significant number of members of left tendencies within the PS to switch parties – nor ex-Communists in search of a political alternative, nor leftist Greens, with the exception of ex-Green deputy Martine Billard.

At present, the PG has several thousand members, and mainly exists on the basis of the great media presence of its party chief. Mélenchon's principal goal is to build a party which can compete on par with the PS, and thus win hegemony within the French left. It is also his goal to win the presidential elections in 2012. According to its chair, the PG's tactics rests on «the creation of a left counter-weight and simultaneously on assuming leadership within the left camp. Our means to this end has been fusion with other left movements, and the development of a clear alternative programme, in order to inspire the greatest possible number of left voters».

In his opinion, the turn to the centre and the concomitant pursuit by the PS of the US Democratic Party model has already been completed. Be that as it may, some deeds and facts demonstrate that Mélenchon's conceptions are controversial, both

within and outside the left – for example, for a party alliance with Europe Écologie and its chair Daniel Cohn-Bendit, although he supported a «yes» to the European Constitution in 2005, and is one of the most centrist-oriented Green politicians; moreover, Cohn-Bendit is known for occasionally moving to the right-most fringe of the French ecological movement.

Mélenchon's appeal to Cohn-Bendit thus brings up the question of the place the PG would like to, and will, assume within the French left. Where, in this context, is the coherence in Mélenchon's wish to present a presidential candidate «for the left, of the left»? The manifest aim of the PG is to be a left party modelled on Germany's Left Party, and to fill this with life, together with socialists, communists and activists of the radical left spectrum. In any case, considering the uncertainties within the whole left and the political context, which is different from that of Germany, it still has a lot of work ahead of it.

The New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA)

The NPA comes out of a strong basis in communism and revolution. At the beginning of 2009, the Revolutionary Communist League (LCR) dissolved itself, only to immediately rise from its own ashes as the NPA. Like the *Lutte Ouvrière* (LO) and its charismatic chair Arlette Laguiller, the LCR had acquired the reputation of merely gathering the remains of French Trotskyism. Under the leadership of the equally powerful personality of charismatic postal worker Olivier Besancenot, the LCR-turned-NPA has committed itself to consolidation. In the last presidential election in 2007, Besancenot won 4.25 % of the vote under the LCR banner, beating the Communists under Marie-George Buffet for the first time, and finishing second only to the Socialists. Since then, Besancenot was for a time seen by the media as the best and most hopeful of the candidates running against President Nicolas Sarkozy, with various polls giving him between 45 and 60 %, although he was then eclipsed again by PS candidate François Hollande. Encouraged by his popularity, and in view of the new orientation of France's left party landscape, the NPA Chair is trying to consolidate his lead within the «radical left».

Whether in response to the crisis of political representation, the questioning of the achievements (or lack thereof) of the Plural-Left government, the poor electoral showing of the Communists, the economic crisis, ideological feuding among the Socialists, the personalisation of Sarkozy's power, or the appearance of new forms of citizen's involvement – the leadership of the LCR certainly seized the right moment to call a new party to life which invoked the political values of anti-globalisation and anti-capitalism, but with an image that carried less historic baggage and could succeed where others had failed. Moreover, it is trying to establish a new party culture within the NPA. In terms of substance, however, it is continuing to defend traditional positions, especially with in reference to questions of cooperation with other political forces, and of the relationship to power and to the rulers.

As regards the strategy of collecting political forces, the NPA from the outset declared itself in favour of «long-term conciliation» with «all political forces» with anti-capitalist ideas –conditioned upon total independence from the PS. This argument was incidentally used by Besancenot a few months after the NPA's founding, to justify his rejection of the Left Front party alliance, which was positioning itself for the European elections. However, Besancenot's strategy is showing cracks. His party only achieved 4.8% of the vote, behind the Left Front. He now appears to many, even within his own ranks, as a «splitter» of a left movement that needs to strive for unity. It is estimated that in the space of one year, the NPA has already lost half of its 9000 new members, due in part to the NPA's election-campaign strategy and its refusal to act within a broad left alliance with the participation of the PS, although many new NPA activists see left unity as a positive goal.

Before the French regional elections, the NPA was repeatedly asked to participate in the Left Front, which it rejected in favour of enhancing its strategy of the irreconcilable «two lefts», although the worsening economic crisis made the calls for left unity ever louder. Moreover, Besancenot and other NPS leaders never use the word «deputy» in official speeches, for Besancenot would like to «continue to carry out struggles and resistance in the framework of an electoral campaign». And his campaign manager has said: «We are more interested in an electoral result, surpassing the 5% mark, than in deputies». In view of the present political situation of economic crisis, and considering the party landscape on the left, it seems perfectly possible that the «radical left» initiated by Besancenot will in fact unite around a common concept and programme. However, all participants would have to manage to work together without at every instance drawing «limits» against one another, and building road-blocks to unity and commonality.

The 2010 regional elections

The March 2010 regional elections revealed a new political landscape on the left. Sarkozy and his camp suffered a major defeat, while in the second ballot, those left forces which ran on a joint ticket won in 21 of the 22 regions. The right camp paid a high price for the disillusionment felt by a large number of its voters the lower and middle strata, while Le Pen's National Front gained ground.

With 29% of votes on the first ballot and a left orientation approved by members and voters, the PS was able to reassert its position as the leading force of the left. With Europe Ecologie, the ecological movement defended its position, winning 13% of the vote and a substantial increase of voters in the wake of the European elections, as the second strongest left force, even if it did not achieve its goal of overtaking the SP, as it had done in the European elections. The environmentalists profited from the ambiguity of their positioning, garnering the support of a moderate, centre-left oriented electorate. Olivier Besancenot's NPA failed to obtain the hoped for breakthrough: With less than 3% of the vote, it was handed the bill for its constant sectarianism

and refusal to participate in left alliances that could get majority support, an attitude which ran counter to the need for unity, as expressed by the social movements. This result was also the price paid for breaking with these social movement, for the «radicality of their appearance on the scene» could not convince voters who were waiting for immediate concrete solutions to the crisis. The Left Front represented the positions of the 2004 PCF electoral lists, and won 7%. For its initiators – above all the PCF and Jean-Luc Mélenchon's PG – the strategy paid off, for they could establish themselves as the third strongest force in the political landscape, even if the PCF is now less strongly represented at the regional level. The confrontation between the partners within the Left Front and within the PCF, which held a party congress in June 2010, has now begun. The issues are the relationship to the PS and to the other left forces, as well as preparation for the 2012 presidential elections, for which Jean-Luc Mélenchon is standing.

With the PS/Europe Ecologie axis, a new political force has emerged which no longer has anything in common with the traditional left alliances of Socialists and Communists. If this new configuration can maintain itself, which is by no means certain, future majorities may come from the centre rather than from the left. From now on, the focus of the discussion is the decisive 2012 date and the question of how better conditions can be created to beat Sarkozy and win a left majority in the elections for the National Assembly. While a majority of the environmentalists, with Daniel Cohn-Bendit at their head, are striving for an agreement with the Socialists in order to nominate a common candidate – in exchange for parliamentary seats – there is a tendency among partners to the left of the PS to prefer to send an independent candidate into the race.

On the left, the confrontations will, among other things, be about a way out of the crisis, the «room for manoeuvre» and how to deal with the debt. These questions are already being raised in France and Europe in the various social movements; they form the background for the «refusal to pay for their crisis». The majority of the population does not at present see how the left could react to the crisis in any way fundamentally different from how the right has been. On the left, various ideas are colliding with each other; on the right, there is a broad consensus based on various analyses and proposals for a unified perspective for the gradual overcoming of the crisis.

Conclusions

In France's overseas departments, a new concept for social and political movements has recently been developed. In early 2009, an accord between trade unions, left political parties and associations was reached in Martinique, Guadeloupe and La Réunion, in order to lend greater weight to their very concrete common demands, which could throw the existing economic order into confusion. This movement has chosen a term from the Creole language to describe itself: «lyannaj», meaning more than an accord or association; it seeks to tie together things «that have no longer been linked through

solidarity, to tie them together, tie them to each other, and bring them together». That is how the first nine signatories of the «Manifesto for urgently needed products» explained it and stressed that «the strength of this movement lie in its capacity to have created a broad basis for things and demands, around which people had previously been disunited or which were considered in an isolated way». Could such a «lyannaj», this pivotal point, represent a possible answer, too, to current social and political questions and problems in France?

Bernard Thibaut, the General Secretary of France's largest trade union confederation. The CGT, stresses that in France, one cannot «copy simply on principle» events that have occurred in the overseas departments. However, one can learn from them that «we doubtless have to construct new relations to the political parties. It's easy to call for social, trade-union mobilisation, or to advocate certain projects – yet in so doing, we often cross the boundaries of what trade unions have been created to do». He thus assures «that [the CGT] as a trade union would see it as useful to establish an exchange with interested parties on our analysis, in order to mutually inspire each other in our reflections. In any case, we are not convinced that in the present context, our needs and approaches justify going over to more structured forms of cooperation».

These statements underscore the complexity of the relations between social movements and the left; at the same time new problem areas are emerging: the meaning of trade-union unity, the construction of new relations to reality and to political intervention, but also to political parties in general. The social movements have a critical and cautious attitude toward these relationships, and are afraid of being used by them. However, their legitimate worry about maintaining their independence tends to lead them into the arms of the trade unions, for both sides are searching for certain popular dynamics and for a victory.

Still, although 2009 was characterised by intensive unified trade-union and civil-society struggles against the crisis, no significant victories have been achieved to date. On the one hand, there has been a strong and unified mobilisation of the unions; on the other, the left parties and organisations – twelve in all, including the Communists, Socialists, PG and NPA – act and react in common. They sign common declarations in which the behaviour and policies of the government are denounced as «intolerable, economically inefficient and politically unacceptable from a social point of view». They announce that they «want, despite, or precisely because of, their political diversity, to contribute to supporting and reinforcing the discussions within the social movements and activism,» and that «It is also a question of new directions of political decisions, which have to represent an alternative to the presently the prevailing societal logic, in order to lead the social movements to success».

Finally, the «call of calls», coming from civil society, makes clear that its signatories see themselves as a «National Coordination of all those who reject this fatalism» and as «the opponent of the ideology of economic man». They propose to draw up «general

and generally valid considerations, on the basis of which future-oriented proposals for concrete actions can arise, which are capable of consensus».

Can a new collective construct grow out of this on-going relative confusion? And could such an entity help to revive or cement the left's credibility in public opinion? The strong mobilisation that has lasted since September against the privatisation of the French Postal Service has showed some incipient inroads which look promising. Some 2.5 million inhabitants of France took part in the «citizens' election», held on the basis of a unique cooperation between trade unions, left parties and their deputies, associations and users' collectives. Despite this outstanding citizens' engagement, the bourgeois right was able to push through the law on privatisation, hoping that the left alternative would lack credibility. Yet despite the left victory in the March 2010 regional elections and even Sarkozy's poor poll results, two-thirds of the French population have for eight years now believed that if the left were in power, its policies would be no better than those of the bourgeois right. The worldwide crisis is shuffling the deck anew. The de-legitimisation of neo-liberalism and the consciousness of its incipient defeat have led to a shift in the debate: from a social anti-capitalism to a general questioning of capitalism's right to exist. If the whole left and every left-oriented party were to attend to the needs of the population, how would they react to the desire – which is becoming constantly stronger – for far-reaching changes in the face of the crisis? What lessons would each political movement draw from the history of electoral defeats and disintegrating coalitions? To what extent should political concepts be re-worked and modified? The answers to these questions will considerably influence the way the left party landscape can be politically renewed, and also how possible alternative perspectives can be designed.

Sascha Wagener

THE LEFT IN LUXEMBURG

The Left Party of Luxemburg¹⁷⁹, which holds one seat in the nation's parliament, the Chamber, celebrated its tenth anniversary in 2009. Founded on 30th January, 1999, it can already look back upon a history with a number of ups and downs. The biggest break was the withdrawal of the members of the Communist Party of Luxemburg (CPL) in 2003, which resulted in an electoral defeat and the loss of all parliamentary seats. That was followed by a success in June 2009, when a youthful team, a new party emblem and a new campaign style carried the party back into the Chamber.

Social structure and base of support

In February 2010, the Left Party had 280 members, 35–40% of which were women. The members are concentrated in the industrialised south of the country, and in the centre around the capital; a few live in the agricultural North. The eastern part of the country, dominated by viticulture and conservative politics, is home to virtually no Left Party members. There is currently no detailed information on the membership structure. However, for the national and European parliamentary elections, which in Luxemburg are traditionally held on the same day, the Party has had to nominate 60 and six candidates, respectively, a fairly high share of its membership. In spite of possible discrepancies between members and candidates, the data on the latter may be useful to provide some orientation regarding age and social structure. In June 2009, the average age of the 60 candidates for the national election was 46.27 years, and 46.17 years for the six candidates for the European election. A study from 2004 on the social and professional background of the candidates of the Left Party found the following information.¹⁸⁰

179 Lux.: Déi Lénk, Ger.: Die Linke, Fr.: la Gauche. Like the German party, it is called the «Left Party» here, to avoid confusion with «the left» as such; its character as a party was originally not certain.

180 Patrick Dumont et al. (2006): Les élections législatives et européennes de 2004 au Grand-Duché de Luxembourg. Summary of a Report to the Luxemburg Chamber of Deputies, Luxemburg, p. 14.

Figure 1: The professional backgrounds of the Left Party candidates in June 2004 (%)

Functionaries/government officials	20
Teachers/educators	20
Students	8.3
Pensioners	8.3
Unemployed/housewives	8.3
White-collar employees	5
Drivers/workers	5
Legal professionals	5
Other professionals	5
Medical professionals	3.3
Trade union officials	3.3

Thus, 43.3% of the candidates are public servants, working as teachers, educators, or as postal or railway employees. Students, pensioners and the unemployed account for 24.9%. One fifth are engaged in liberal or social professions in the private sector. Only a little over 5% are workers, retail clerks or drivers in the private sector. There are no entrepreneurs, middle or top level managers, bank employees, engineers or farmers among the candidates. The Left Party is thus distinguished from the competing parties only through its somewhat higher proportion of functionaries, public officials and students, which together account for 28.3% of the Left Party members two a half times the average for all parties, which is 12.6%.

Position in society and in the political system – electoral Results, 1999 to 2009

Since its founding in 1999, the Left Party has participated in three Chamber elections, three European elections, two nationwide municipal elections and one single municipal election. Luxemburg's electoral system at all levels permits cumulative and split ticket voting.¹⁸¹

In the Chamber and European elections in June 1999, the Left Party won 4.98% of the vote in the southern district, and hence one seat in the Luxembourgian Parliament. In October of that same year, municipal elections were held in which the Left Party attained 16 Council seats in five different urban councils, including seats in the

¹⁸¹ That means that citizens can either simply vote for one list, and thus distribute their votes equally amongst all the candidates on that list, or they can give multiple votes to particular candidates on that list. Moreover, they can also vote for individual candidates on different lists, i.e. from different parties.

three largest cities in the country, Luxemburg city, Esch on the Alzette and Differdingen. In snap elections held in Esch on April 30, 2000, the Left Party achieved 12.8 %, its best result so far in any city, and joined the city government.

These electoral successes were achieved by an alliance consisting of the Left Party, the Revolutionary Socialist Party and the Communist Party of Luxemburg. However, after the election conflicts within the alliance which had been papered over by the common campaign effort, broke out in full force. The CPL put up separate candidacies in all elections in 2004, and lost its parliamentary representation. In the succeeding local elections on October 9, 2005, the two competing leftist lists suffered a loss of five of their six local seats. In Luxemburg city, with 31,873 voters, the Left Party only got 3.1 %, down from 3.6% six years earlier. The CPL achieved 2.7%, and both the seats that had previously been held were lost. In the former communist strongholds of Rümelingen and Differdingen, the CPL was unable to retain its last seats, even though the Left Party refrained from putting up a competitive candidate. Only in Esch, with 13,729, voters was the Left Party part of the ruling coalition. It was able to retain one of its two seats, in spite of its drop from 12.8 to 8 %. Here, the CPL won only 4 %, and no seats.¹⁸²

As a result of these defeats, the dispute between the Left Party and the CPL worsened; they went their separate ways, and the programmatic gap between them deepened. The Left Party consolidated, and passed its big test in the Chamber and European elections of 2009, achieving the same results it had in 1999 despite competition from the CPL, and regained a seat in the Chamber.

Figure 2: Electoral results of the Left Party and the CPL in the Chamber elections and in the European elections (%):

	1999	2004	2009	1999	2004	2009
	Chamber elections					
Left Party	3.30	1.90	3.29	2.77	1.69	3.41
CPL		0.92	1.47		1.17	1.54

The geography and sociology of the electorate

The Left Party achieves its best results in the populous cities and municipalities in the southern part of the country, which are characterised by high unemployment.

Between 1999 and 2009, there was a certain geographical shift in voter support for the Left Party. The results of 1999 were strongly dominated by the former commu-

¹⁸² All electoral results are shown on the government website: <http://www.elections.public.lu/fr/index.html>. Cf. CRP-Gabriel Lippmann: *Projet Elections. Etude sur les élections législatives de juin 1999*, 21.eleven.2000, p. 81; at: <http://www.chd.lu/fr/organisation/documentation/espTele.jsp>, accessed on January 20, 2010.

nist strongholds along the southern border. Here, in the Minette industrial belt, the CPL had a mass base for decades. Even today, the effects of this workers' culture are palpable, and, due to the social problems of the area, have a big effect on political and cultural life. As a result, it was in these cities and municipalities of the South, along with Luxemburg City, that the party was able to win local council seats in 1999.

A comparison of the electoral results in the strongholds over the past ten years shows that they contributed less to the successful re-entry into the Chamber in 2009 than they did in 1999. In towns such as Esch, Differdingen and Rümelingen, where the CPL still has its old structures, competition with the CPL cost the Left Party votes. At the same time, the electoral results in Luxemburg city and in other parts of the country improved considerably. Hence, unlike the CPL, the Left Party is able to reach out to electoral strata outside of the former industrial belt.

Figure 4: Electoral results for the Left Party and the CPL and municipal strongholds (%)

	Chamber 1999	EP 1999	Mun. 1999	Mun. 2000	Chamber 2004	EP 2004	Mun. 2005	Nat. 2009	EP 2009
Luxemburg city									
Left Party	3.26	2.86	3.58		2.48	2.25	3.10	4.40	4.01
CPL					1.08	1.09	1.14	1.34	1.35
Esch									
Left Party	7.87	6.87	10.78	12.78	4.07	3.57	7.96	7.31	7.34
CPL					2.92	2.94	3.96	3.55	3.73
Sanem									
Left Party	6.61	6.16	8.22		2.44	2.02	5.02	4.03	4.24
CPL					2.02	2.08	2.69	2.49	2.62
Differdingen									
Left Party	6.13	4.92	6.67		2.12	1.89		3.37	3.59
CPL					2.73	3.03	4.01	3.41	3.77
Rümelingen									
Left Party	5.49	4.71	8.15		1.87	1.58		3.71	4.42
CPL					3.86	3.44	6.25	4.81	4.60

To study the social composition of the electorate of the Left Party, we are dependent on surveys conducted after the 2004 election, since those after the 2009 election have not yet been processed. This provides an incomplete and in some cases even distorted picture, since the Left Party was able to almost double its vote in 2009.

The structure of the electorate of the Left Party is very young. The age group 18 to 24 accounts for some 20 % of supporters, and more than 90 % are less than fifty years of age. Men and women are approx. equally represented. The educational level is above average. The voters are distributed equally among the sectors private industry, private services, and the public sector. Almost entirely absent agricultural workers. Broken down by professional status, private sector employees account for the largest share with 46.6 %, closely followed by functionaries and public employees with 40 %. Among white-collar employees, 26.6 % are office clerks and 13.3 % management. A little over 10 % of the voters of the Left Party are manual workers. There are virtually no self-employed among them.¹⁸³

Value orientation of the electorate

An analysis of the value orientation of the electorate is again based on an analysis of the figures from 2004. Interest in politics is very high in Luxembourg. In a survey, 23.7 % of respondents stated that they were very interested, and 54.9 % somewhat interested in politics. This also corresponds approx. to the attitudes of the electorate of the Left Party. A large majority of the electorate is satisfied with the democratic institutions of the country and of the European Union; however, the share of the dissatisfied with the functioning of democracy at the European level is higher among Left Party voters, where it reaches 42.1 %. Some 35 % of Left Party voters are critical of the «Tripartite» model, Luxembourg's social partnership system based on consultation between representatives of the government, the employers' associations and the unions – an especially high figure. Of Left Party supporters, one tenth has no confidence in the government, four tenths have a neutral position towards it, and just under half have confidence in the government. This small share of critical attitude towards the existing democracy, its institutions at the national and European levels and the government itself may seem astonishing at first glance. However, it can be explained by the overall mood in Luxembourg, which, at the time of the survey 2004, was characterised even more than today by great satisfaction and confidence in ever greater prosperity. For instance, only one person in 20 nationwide claimed to have no confidence in the government, while 70 % did.

The Left Party is the only party in Luxembourg whose voters identify themselves as «left», with a share of 70 %; the other 30 % identify themselves as «centrist». With regard to electoral motivation, 40 % of voters who support the Left Party stated that they voted for that party on the basis of their fundamental convictions; 25 % did so because of the electoral programme; and 15 % did so to protest against the government or one of the ruling parties. Thus, fundamental convictions and the electoral programme were far more decisive in terms of electoral behaviour for voters of the

183 Dumont, *op cit.*, pp. 51–53.

Left Party than they were for the average Luxembourgian voter. When questioned in relation to the organisation of the economy, half the voters of the Left Party were neutral, while almost half favour more state control. While such positions more or less correspond to the majority opinion in Luxembourg, Left Party voters differ regarding the question of the asserted contradiction between the protection of the environment and securing jobs. While 84.3 % of the population prefer the latter, or would be neutral, 40 % of Left Party voters give priority to environmental protection, a share even larger than that among Green Party voters, and clearly different from supporters of the CPL. The number of Left Party voters who perceive a deterioration of the economic situation of Luxembourg is 42 %, which is above average.¹⁸⁴ Also, with regard to the question of national priorities in employment policy, Left Party voters showed clear distinction from those of all other parties, they are the only ones who display a majority rejecting a «jobs for Luxemburgers first» policy.¹⁸⁵

Areas of competence

The standing of a party does not derive directly from its electoral results, but rather from the general confidence that citizens have in it. In Luxembourg, data for the period November 2003 to April 2004 are available. According to those figures, the Left Party stands at 30 % in its popularity, and hence only at sixth place among the parties.¹⁸⁶

In the areas of confidence, too, the party scores no better values. According to the breakdown into fifteen policy areas, it is able to edge out the right-wing populist Alternative Democratic Reform Party and thus to take fifth place, behind the Conservatives, Liberals, Social Democrats and Greens, in only four areas: unemployment/employment, dual citizenship, involvement of foreigners in political life, and political asylum policy. Such a ranking, in which the party generally scores low values, albeit slightly better in the areas of unemployment and immigrant policy, certainly reflects the political emphases placed by the Left Party in recent years.¹⁸⁷

Allies, unions and cultural organisations

The Left Party has no mass organisations. The only directly associated organisation is the youth group, the Young Left. In addition, the leaders of several organisations have clear sympathies for the Left Party. One of them is *Liberté de Conscience*, which calls for the separation of church and state. There are approx. 150,000 trade union members in Luxembourg, which accounts for approx. 46 % of all employed persons. The largest trade union associations are the social democratic OGB-L, with 58,000 members, and the Christian Democratic LCGB, with 40,000 members; these two as-

184 Ibid, pp. 55–58.

185 Ibid.

186 Ibid., p. 13.

187 Ibid., p. 23.

sociations dominate the private sector. Other unions are associated with the OGB-L and the LCGB, particularly in the transport sector; the most prominent of which is the left-wing railway workers' union FNCTTFEL which, like the OGB-L, is a member of the CGT-L, which represents the interests of trade unionists in international organisations such as the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) and the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC).¹⁸⁸ Left Party members are active in the OGB-L and the FNCTTFEL. Prior to the Chamber elections in 2009, there were rumours that long-time railway union leader Nico Wennmacher was considering standing on the Left Party list, but he then declined to do so out of consideration for his personal friends who were Social Democrats.

Relative to the moderate size of the Left Party, members from the cultural scene are fairly numerous, including actor and director Marc Baum (who, as a member of the Esch City Council is the only Left Party member to hold a municipal seat) and the cartoonist Guy W. Stoos. However, the influence of artists is not reflected in the party's programme, although it may indeed be reflected in the visual face-lifting that the party has undergone in recent years.

Programme and strategy

The Basic Programme of the Left Party was adopted at the Founding Congress on January 30, 1999, and ratified with minor changes on March 29 of that year. The leadership of the CPL was involved in the drafting process. In light of the approaching Chamber and European elections in June 1999, it also served as an electoral programme. In this programme, the Left Party does not refer to «capitalism», but rather to the «capitalist system». It is not certain whether this indicates a concentration on the capitalist economy, or whether some other linguistic differentiation is intended here. According to Wolfgang Fritz Hauf, Lenin referred to the capitalist system as synonymous with the terms «mode of production» or «relations of production».¹⁸⁹ Immanuel Wallerstein, too, defined the «capitalist world system» not as a political, but rather as an economic phenomenon.¹⁹⁰

The Left Party leaves the question as to whether the «system» refers to all societal conditions beyond economic relationships open. The susceptibility of this «capitalist system» is, it states, reflected in regional financial, economic and social crises. The Programme says the most important problems of our time, cannot be solved within its own context. Rather, wages, social security and public services are under severe attack, as expressions of the welfare state. The Left Party challenges the existence of the

188 Cf. <http://de.worker-participation.eu/Nationale-Arbeitsbeziehungen/Laender/Luxemburg/Syndicats>, accessed February 10, 2010.

189 Wolfgang Fritz Haug (2008): Kapitalistische Produktionsweise, in: Haug (ed.): Historisch-Kritisches Wörterbuch des Marxismus, vol. 7,1, Hamburg, p. 305.

190 Immanuel Maurice Wallerstein (1986): The Modern World-System, vol. I: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World Economy in the Sixteenth Century. New York/London: Academic Press. S. 27.

«capitalist system» in order to break through this logic. This, in their view, will only succeed if the «working people», the unions, the associations, and the autonomous young people, commit themselves actively and impose change upon the social power structures. Activating these groups is the indispensable precondition for the success of leftist politics.¹⁹¹

In the first section of the Party's Statute, on the other hand, there is indeed a reference to «capitalism», which is defined as a social relationship which degrades human beings to commodities, and which must be pushed back. In that way, free space for abolishing it entirely could become possible. The political activity of the Party is seen as an expression of the movement which, unlike previous experiences, does not represent a complete concept, but rather seeks to support people's everyday efforts to obtain equality and freedom: «Worldwide resistance to developments which degrade everything, including people themselves, to commodities, and use them for private profit, is today taking on new forms, and gaining in intensity. The Left Party (Die Linken – La Gauche) supports social equality and individual realisation at all levels of society. Forcing back and overcoming capitalism is for it not a goal in and of itself, but rather a means to an end: an active democracy, including at the workplace and in the economy; the development of social relations based on equality and cooperation; individual realisation and freedom of people beyond material needs, economic exploitation, social, gender or ethnic discrimination, political suppression, cultural domination, and super-exploitation of the natural environment. There is no complete socialist project; the society of tomorrow will emerge from the reality of today, and from the needs and demands of people who live in today's society.»¹⁹²

Capital and labour

The focus of the basic programme, in the best Marxist tradition, is a description of the contradiction between labour and capital, a critique of the political economy and the role of the state. Seven of the fourteen chapters address economic policy issues; they are the redistribution of wealth, the right to a job, securing jobs, workplace democracy, public services, social security and social policy. The following basic ideas are expressed:

- Expansion of social security systems by means of tax policies which place a greater burden on the rich.
- Jobs for all through the gradual reduction of the work week to thirty hours.
- Increasing purchase power through state investment programmes.

191 Déi Lénk (1999a): Programm. Adopted at the Founding Congress on January 30, 1999 in Luxemburg city, amended at the Europe Congress of March 29, 1999, p. 4.

192 Déi Lénk (1999b): Statute. Adopted at the founding Congress, January 30, 1999, in Luxemburg, amended at the National Congress on May 28, 2000 in Tetingen, p. 1.

- Reforming labour law, more monitoring rights for staff representative bodies and unions, and the introduction of a uniform statute for all workers, blue and white collar.
- Retention of the linkage between the social security system and labour.
- Assumption of unemployment insurance by the employer, on the basis of the causality principle.
- Expansion of the public sector and public services, especially in the area of housing, health, transport and education.
- The importance, which Left Party assigns to the concept of work can be seen from an Extraordinary Party Congress, held on the issue on December 13, 2009. Which adopted the «Theses on Employment», demanding a strengthening of the position of labour against capital. Here, the Left Party maintains its rejection of an unconditional base income. It views labour, despite alienation, as still the basis of the production of societal goods. Thus, labour provides a strong legitimation of societal rights. Proposals to basically decouple income from labour should therefore be handled very gingerly.¹⁹³

The economic and financial crisis

Even in the preamble of the basic programme of 1999, it is stated that «unbridled international financial speculation unhampered by any limits, is, thanks to the deregulation and the free circulation of capital, currently plunging the real economy into a greater crisis.» With its demand for a «rejection of the decades long niche policy in the area of taxation and finance», (i.e. Luxemburg's status as a tax haven), and also of the «social partnership policy and the political strategy of «social peace»», the Left Party flies in the face of the social consensus in the Grand Duchy of Luxemburg.¹⁹⁴

Additional expressions can be found in the political resolution «A different world is possible» of the 3rd Congress of March 1, 2003, which expands. The critique of capitalism to a general critique of globalisation, describing its economic and military policy dimensions. This poses an «internationalist view» to «capitalist globalisation».¹⁹⁵

193 Déi Lénk (2009a): Extraordinary Congress of December 13, 2009 in Luxemburg, Eis Aarbecht, eis Rechter: Thesen zur Arbeit (Our jobs, our rights: Theses on Employment), p. 2.

194 Cf. Jean-Lou Siweck: Pensée unique, in: d'Land, June eleven, 1999: «The only true alternative in political economy is ultimately proposed by the Left Party. It is the only party, in the best traditions of Marxist materialism, to open its programme to issues of economics ... Nonetheless, the Left Party prefers to address the misfortunes of the world rather than the situation of Luxemburg alone. For instance, by calling for an end to the niche policy in the area of the financial sector, the Left Party is attacking not so much an economic policy as a social model. The same is true of its rejection of the dialogue between social partners and of social peace as a political strategy.»

195 Déi Lénk (2003): 3rd Congress of March 1, 2003 in Luxemburg city, Political Resolution: «A different world is possible.»

At the 6th Congress on December 14, 2008, the Left Party addressed the world financial and economic crisis as the major item on the agenda. In an initial declaration, it demanded some fundamental answers to the crisis:

- Increased purchasing power by introducing a minimum wage and reintroducing automatic indexing for all loans, pensions and social benefits
- A just distribution of surplus value and productivity gains through wage increases and work time reductions, and a just tax policy, to be realised especially by increasing taxes on profits, assets and high incomes.
- The expansion of public services, and the reversal of privatisation, equal access to services, and the expansion of the social security system.
- Legislation against layoffs by enterprises which are making a profit.¹⁹⁶

The electoral programme of the Extraordinary Congress of March 29, 2009 starts with a statement on the economic and financial crisis. The concept of crisis runs through the entire programme, and is mentioned 41 times; 38 of them with reference to the crises which the Left Party emphasizes most strongly, that of the economy and climate. Their causes, according to the Left Party, lies in growing inequality. Instead of reinvesting profits, they were used for speculation, until the bubble burst. Here, the Luxembourgian government bore a great responsibility, since it has unilaterally oriented the country toward financial services and the support of tax evasion and speculative financial transactions. The Left Party therefore demands the abolition of bank secrecy and the taxation of all financial products. Instead of exploiting its position as a niche, the economy should be placed on a broader basis.

The crisis policies of the government and its bailout package of €2.8 billion are criticised for their lopsided orientation toward saving the banks Dexia and Fortis-BGL; no other anti-cyclical measures were adopted. Although the Left Party does not come out in opposition to bank bailouts as such, it would like to tie state financial involvement to real state control, and to instituting monitoring functions by staff. In the electoral programme, the demands for overcoming economic and financial crisis are stated much more specifically than they are in the declaration of December 2008. In addition to the basic «anti-capitalist structural reforms», what is now at issue are more controls over banks and access of staff representatives to accounts and order books, a reversal of privatisation in the postal and railway sectors, and control of the European Central Bank by elected representatives, as well as a tax on financial flows in order to pay back the debt of the nations of the South.

196 Déi Lénk (2008): 6th Congress of December 14, 2008 in Esch, Resolution on the financial crisis.

Eco-socialism

In the Basic Programme of 1999, the section on the ecology does not go beyond a critique of government and business. The electoral programme of 2009 was no different; here, in which the concept of socialism suddenly appeared in the form of an «eco-socialist alternative», with eco-socialism defined as a combination of «the fulfilment of their needs of people, the abolition of inequality, the preservation of the planet, and the critique of capitalism». Capitalism is accused of exploiting not only people, but also nature, but nowhere is there reference to any contradiction between ecological sustainability and economic growth, in view of the finality of the ecosystem. The eco-socialist alternative, for the Left Party, involves combining the critique of capitalism with environmental protection. The holistic approach of the eco-socialist idea as a theory of the collapse of capitalism is not mentioned, nor is it reflected at any other part of the Programme.

Climate policy to date is criticised, especially for its built-in market mechanisms. Emissions trading is seen as a neo-liberal monster, and the Kyoto Accords as insufficient, since they do not address the mode of production. The Left Party demands the worldwide nationalisation of production and distribution of energy. Renewable energies, which account for only 1 % in Luxemburg, must urgently be expanded. The CO₂ emissions of the country should be reduced by 30 % by 2020. The party rejects energy crop fuels.¹⁹⁷

Society and the state

Social policy issues are placed after those of economic policy, and are all characterised by the fact that the state is assigned an important role. Cultural policy is largely reduced to the necessity of state subsidies. In gender policy, the woman is viewed as a victim to be liberated, rather than the gender relationship being assessed as including the alienation of both women and men. In educational policy equal opportunity is demanded, as are common schools for all children for the first three years of secondary school. Higher education policy, science and research are hardly issues for the Left Party at all.¹⁹⁸

The Left Party defines democracy in a separate chapter of its Basic Programme as «maximum collective and individual self-determination and self-administration». At issue is the «common participation of all members of society in formulating their conditions of life». Democracy is seen more as a collective asset as opposed to the libertarian left, who see it as an individual right to withdrawal from societal valuation processes. The same is true of the indivisibility and universality of «individual and social human rights». This must be realised for all groups of people and minorities liv-

197 Déi Lénk (2009b): Electoral Congress of March 29, 2009 in Esch: Et gett héich Zäit! (It's high time!) Programme for the national and EP elections of June 7, 2009, pp. 34–36.

198 Déi Lénk (1999a).

ing in Luxemburg, for women, the disabled, gays, lesbians and asylum-seekers. Here too, the party seems to be more oriented toward collective liberation of these groups through state action than toward their emancipatory potential for self liberation.

Position on European policy

The Left Party sees the necessity for common European policy in such fields as democracy, social affairs, peace, the right to asylum and Europe's role in the world; all areas, which it sees as important. It also sees its own particular potential contribution in the development of the substance of migration and integration policy, and as a cultural bridge between French and German left forces. The Party's concept of Europe has been deepened and changed since the adoption of the Basic Programme in 1999. The Left Party characterizes European integration as being trapped in the logic of the Maastricht and Amsterdam treaties. An «all-powerful financial oligarchy» with the aid of the central banks was seen as imposing the free movement of capital and goods, while the convergence criteria is seen as the imposition of a policy of social dismantling and social dumping. The Left Party's vision, in opposition to that, is a social, democratic and peaceful Europe based on solidarity, to be implemented through the general reduction of the work week to 35 hours, new democratic institutions, the cancellation of the foreign trade debt of Third World countries, and a ban on the trade in arms. European countries should withdraw from NATO. The Schengen Agreement should be cancelled and replaced by the free movement of people and the general right to asylum.¹⁹⁹ In its political resolution of 2003, the Left Party stressed that the EU in its existing form was following the same neo-liberal logic as the United States government, and that it was therefore not a desirable counterweight to American world domination. At the same time, it stated that «withdrawal into the «sovereignty» of the nation-state ... is unthinkable today, and the construction of a different Europe is a must.»²⁰⁰

On July 10, 2005, Luxemburgers voted in a referendum on the European Constitution. As in France and the Netherlands, the degree of rejection coincided with the geographic and socio-cultural strength of the left. For the Left Party and the CPL, this was the moment to leave the electoral defeat of 2004 behind them, and to jointly call for a «no» vote. They did so with such success that a parliamentary report on the «left of the left» credited them with having dominated the campaign with their issues were a long time. Even if their influence should not be overestimated, they won majorities in all the cities of the South where both parties had gained seats in municipal councils in 1999, and where traditional working-class communities existed. Nationwide however, the «ayes» had it.²⁰¹

199 Déi Lénk (1999a), pp. 27–8.

200 Déi Lénk (2003), p. 10.

201 Cf. Dumont, et al., 2007: Le référendum sur le Traité établissant une Constitution pour l'Europe. Report to the Luxemburg Chamber of Deputies, pp. 87–8.

In the campaign itself, the Left Party avoided calling too clearly for a different European constitution. The Election Programme for 2009 had left a number of matters fuzzy. The demand was that a new treaty be drafted, and that it only be permitted to take effect as a constitutional treaty once it had been ratified on the same day in a referendum in all European member countries. Such a treaty would have to expand the powers of the European Parliament and stipulate the democratic election of the European Commission.²⁰² In the 2009 Election Programme, five critiques and five demands were stated under the heading of «A New Justification for the European Union». As in 1999, the dismantling of the social state, expanded armaments and the militarisation of the EU, the democratic deficit, and «Fortress Europe» were criticised. In addition moreover, the EU was blamed for a lack of political will in searching for «global answers to global crises». The five demands involved social justice, peace policy, the democratisation of institutions, the environmental issue, and immigration law.²⁰³

While in 1999, the abolition of the Maastricht, Amsterdam and Schengen Treaties were key demands, by 2009, the further development of the existing situation was more central. Now, the demand is for a European policy, albeit a different one. That includes the demand for European tax policy, which must be connected to the recognition of a European statehood.²⁰⁴ This new perception after the constitutional referendum of 2005 led the Party to join the European Left Party, a move that reinforced its break with the CPL. At the same time, the Left Party participates in the post-Trotskyist-leaning network, the European Anti-Capitalist Left.

One peculiarity of the Luxemburg situation is the so-called Sar-Lor-Lux Euroregion, a cross-border region formed around the economic powerhouse of Luxemburg. The Left Party sees the necessity of cooperating with allied parties and neighbouring regions, and of drafting a counter-model based on solidarity at the level of this Euroregion. There are sporadic joint activities, such as the struggle surrounding the move abroad of the Villeroy & Boch factory. However, it has not yet been possible to raise this cooperation with the German Left Party in Trier and the Saarland, with the French Communist Party's Federation in the Moselle Department of Lorraine, and with the Communist Party of Wallonia in Belgium to a new level. The Luxemburg Left Party also has a special relationship with the New Anti-Capitalist Party in France. The Statute adopted on January 30, 1999, attempts to characterize the organisation as a movement of diverse forces rather than as a party or a loose alliance. The Left Party expressly allows its members «to be active in other left political organisations». This sign of openness reflects the history of the formation of the Left Party, in which the two parties New Left and Revolutionary Socialist Party were dissolved, but the

202 Déi Lénk (2009b), p. 53.

203 *ibid.*, pp. 52–3.

204 Déi Lénk (2009b), p. eleven.

Communist Party remained in existence. The Programme stated, in the direction of the CPL, that members of Parliament and of municipal councils were to represent «solely the Left Party». The statute of the Left Party thus represented a clear break with the tradition of democratic centralism, which dominated the CPL for so long. It states: «All members of the Left Party retain their freedom of opinion, both within the movement and in public.» Practical examples for this include the fact that members can choose between joining a local chapter or an issue-specific working group, and the fact that expulsions require a very tedious process. The highest decision-making organ of the party is Congress. Here, all members present have the right to vote. The statute states that the Left Party should attempt as much as possible to move away from the principle of delegation at all levels. The Congress elects the National Coordination Committee. Due to the Party's history and the fear founding partners have of being marginalised by each other, the number of members of this body is unlimited; any member can stand for election to it, and is elected if s/he receives at least one quarter of the votes cast. The National Coordination elects a nine to eleven member Coordination Bureau. All these bodies are to be occupied according to gender parity if possible; however, there is no fixed quota.²⁰⁵

The Internet is an important tool for the party's public presentation and intra-party communications. In addition to the website www.dei-lenk.lu, the Left Party has since April 2009 had a monthly electronic newsletter distributed through the associated weekly electronic and postal newsletter website www.goesch.lu. Both carry articles about the party and about politics, although the weekly newsletter accepts letters to the editor and less highly qualified statements, while the monthly newsletter is more a party produced and professionally designed publication. The Internet page www.dei-lenk.lu was in 2004 acknowledged as fourth-best among the Luxemburg party websites, a respectable result.²⁰⁶ Especially after the withdrawal of the LCP in 2003, the search for new relationships to; the movements, the institutions, the nation, the state and the economy became more important. The party own self-identification as a substantive and formal new foundation of the left became more pronounced than it had been in the context of the alliance with the LCP. The Left Party is attempting to find a new left political culture for itself. In so doing, it is increasingly assuming the character of a party, but at the same time emphasizes an experimental approach to new forms of politics. The Left Party sees its shift toward social movements as a delimitation against other forms of political expression. Neither government participation nor «propaganda activity for a better world» promise to open up perspectives.²⁰⁷ The unions are assessed as being the numerically most important social movement in the

205 Déi Lénk (1999b).

206 Dumont (2006), p. 25.

207 Serge Urbany: Eine neue linke Politikkultur [a new political culture], in: Forum für Politik, Gesellschaft und Kultur, Nov. 2003, pp. 23–25.

country. At the same time, new social movements, which did not originate from the sphere of production, are seen as increasing in importance. The involvement of Left Party members in such movements is viewed as decisive, and is even stated in the Party Statute. In spite of the emphasis on movement orientation and extra-parliamentary work, the Left Party has high demands on the idea of work in Parliament. It should be planned in a responsible manner and oriented toward strengthening the Chamber in relation to the government. In the current legislative term, the Left Party Deputy André Hoffmann introduced a bill «against improper termination of employment for economic reasons» into Parliament.²⁰⁸

Perspectives

The re-entry into the Chamber in 2009, including for the first time, eligibility for public party financing, has strengthened the Left Party's chances of establishing itself as a permanent part of the political landscape in Luxemburg. What was originally a combined movement is thus increasingly taking on the form of a party. Clear decision-making procedures, bodies capable of implementing decisions, and a programmatic profile determined by the majority are proof of this emergence. Programmatically, the Left Party is trying to bring social and ecological issues to a head, and to take a stronger position on socio-political issues.²⁰⁹ The membership of the party in the European Left Party is of particularly great importance. Finally, members of the Luxemburg Left Party were also involved in the foundation of the association «Transform! Luxembourg», which is oriented toward the European network of left foundations, «Transform!Europe», where questions of distribution in the context of ecological and social issues are discussed in working groups.²¹⁰

208 For the text of the bill, see: http://www.dei-lenk.lu/sites/default/files/userfiles/file/Textes/PK_Licenciements-Zusammenfassung_definitif.pdf, accessed on February 10, 2010.

209 Tageblatt, Zeitung für Lëtzebuerg, January 23, 2009.

210 Transform!Luxembourg, in: Forum für Politik, Gesellschaft und Kultur (282), Dec. 2008, p. 8.

Clemens Wirries

A PARTY FOR THE «SIMPLE PEOPLE»: THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF THE NETHERLANDS

The Dutch Socialist Party (Socialistische Partij/SP) is in many respects clearly distinct from its western European sister parties. Unlike them ((Azmanova 2004; Azmanova 2009; Spier/Wirries 2007), it did not emerge from the left social democrats or from communists previously loyal to Moscow, but is rather the successor of a small Maoist cadre party from the late '60s. The SP has long since tossed its old ideology overboard, and after a «long march through the institutions»²¹¹ been able to establish itself within the extremely fluid Dutch party landscape.

Its long-time chair, political leader and parliamentary group leader in the Second Chamber²¹² of Parliament, Jan Marijnissen, provided personal contiguity at the head of the party for more than two decades.

Under his aegis, the SP at an early stage concentrated on approaching citizens addressing issues close to their lives, and highlighting urgent social problems. The SP addressed environmental pollution, transport policy, falling pensions and poor health-care. It used a multiplicity of forms of action and front organisations established for particular purposes laying foundations for a solid base in local government and a large number of active party members. In the parliamentary elections of 2006, the SP reaped the electoral yield of its long years of assiduous grassroots organisation, far from the ossified power structures of party politics. With 16.6% of the vote and 25 of the 150 seats in the Second Chamber, the Socialists became the third strongest political force in the Netherlands. The party in that year had 50,000 members; in addition, it assumed positions in the administrations of many municipalities for the first time.

By contrast, the most recent elections in June 2010 brought a severe setback, for the first time in the party's history. However, even with only 9.9% of the vote and a

211 A concept coined Rudi Dutschke, a leader of the 1968 student uprising in West Germany (cf. Mao).

212 I.e., the more important lower house of the Estates General.

parliamentary group in the Chamber which has shrunk to 15 members, it remains a political factor to be reckoned with. The extreme right-wing populism of the anti-Islamic Party for Freedom (PVV) headed by Geert Wilders has tapped a major protest potential in many quarters, even among those who would have hitherto supported the Socialists; moreover, the SP also lost support to the social democratic Labour Party (Partij van de Arbeid/PvdA) and to the Green Left (GroenLinks). The drop in support for the SP had long been predicted, and was due not only to the overall competitive situation, but also to the resignation of then Party Chair Agnes Kant following local elections in March. Like her predecessor Marijnissen, she retired from politics altogether. The new chair, Emile Roemer therefore faced the daunting task not only of placing himself in the public limelight, but also of leading the party back there as well.

The developments to date of the Dutch Socialists permit some general conclusions, particularly with regard to successful agenda setting in various policy areas, and the permanent establishment of a rapidly growing party organisation within the political system of the Netherlands. Before we address its currently organisation and programme, the party leadership, voter and membership structures and party image) let us first take an introductory look at the fundamentals of the Dutch party system in recent history and of the history of the SP, so as to elucidate the establishment of a party which originated in ideological sectarianism, and is today universally respected as a non-dogmatic left socialist force.

From political sect to established party: An overview of the history of the SP

In 1970, a large number of small Maoist circles which had broken away or been expelled from the then pro-Moscow Communist Party of the Netherlands (CPN) formed the Communist Unity Movement of the Netherlands/Marxist-Leninist (KEN/ML). Like the West German Maoist groups of that era, they had a certain level of support among students, and much less in those proletarian strata of the population which they were actually trying to reach (Voerman, 1987). In August 1970, the KEN/ML helped initiate a wildcat strike in the port of Rotterdam. While it attracted some media attention it did not succeed in rooting the party among the workers, as it had hoped. Within the party, the views of the activists regarding the correct exegesis of Mao's «mass line» mass line»²¹³ moved ever further apart, which ultimately led to a split in the organisation. The cultural and social divide between academics and workers was a major factor in the dissociation.

Unlike the rump KEN/ML, which saw itself as the intellectual revolutionary vanguard in the Leninist sense, the new Communist Party of the Netherlands/Marxist-Leninist (KPN/ML) relied on populist ideas in order to attract the «working masses» to its side. A year later, in October 1972, the party adopted the more popularly con-

213 Mao Tse-Tung 1967, pp. 140–158

genial name «Socialist Party» (SP). Its members were no longer to brood over revolutionary theories in their student digs, but rather to arrive at socialist consciousness in the individual experience of daily work. In 1974, at its 2nd Congress, the party adopted its first programme, in which it continued to explicitly base itself on the ideological foundations of Marxism-Leninism and Maoist thought. For the SP in its early years, parliamentary democracy was nothing but a façade for the dictatorship of capital. The other established left parties were not seen as possible allies, but rather as reactionary props of the system. The long-term goal of the party was clearly outlined: a proletarian world revolution. However, the participation of SP cadres in normal everyday work in the larger Dutch industrial enterprises was to enable making the practical possibilities for improving the quality of life of workers the main priority. Not direct agitation with revolutionary theory, but rather the quiet infiltration of the «masses» was the goal of the SP cadres.

In accordance with this line, the SP in its first party programme of 1974 formulated the claim of being a party of the «simple people». Despite all the heavy ideological ballast which has been tossed overboard over the past 30 years, that principle remains valid in the party to this day. The KEN/ML had already formed «mass organisations», which were legally separate, but in reality were part of the party, so as to attract supporters whom they could not have impressed very much with their revolutionary propaganda. The Association of Renters and Housing Seekers (BHW), an interest group for renters, and their own splinter union called Workers' Power (Arbeidersmacht) were taken over by the SP. Later, an environmentalist organisation called the Environmental Action Centre of the Netherlands was added, as were a protest group against the Vietnam War and an organisation which wanted to implement annual free health check ups for all Dutch people, called «Prevention is Better». Health policy has a particularly high priority for the SP to this day. In the city of Oss, party members in 1975 founded an alternative physicians' centre, which provided medical preventive consultation and treatment for very reasonable fees. It still exists today, and there are now other projects of this type. The SP thus rapidly developed into a party that cared, which was to be there for the «simple people» when they had to deal with normal everyday problems. The wide range of the party's actions included an information service which provided legal aid for citizens, and a free telephone «alarm line» to which both the grassroots organisations nationwide, and all citizens could turn.

In the spring of 1974, the SP which at that time still saw itself as an anti-system party, stood in local elections for the first time, in twelve municipalities nationwide, and were able to gain seats in two of them, one being the above-mentioned town of Oss in the province of North Brabant, where the party won 10.2% of the vote and was able to send three representatives to the town council (Slager, 2005: 133–153); until that time Oss had been considered a Catholic stronghold, only a few years earlier the Catholic People's Party still held a three quarters majority on the Council. The SP succeeded in this breakthrough because it was the only party which publicly attacked

the poor conditions in the large industrial enterprises in the city. Over the years, the SP developed into an established force in local politics in the town. Today, even if the former «mass organisations» have long since disappeared, the SP's activities have not; merely the organisational forms have changed considerably. Today, the party runs its own café in Oss, and organizes an annual city run. Nowhere else in the country does the party have more members and such stable electoral results. In 1995, for the first time it nominated commissioners to the city administration.

Oss was also where the career of Jan Marijnissen (who in large measure placed his stamp on the party over the past two decades) began his career. In 1975, he entered the city council at the age of 23, making him the youngest local councillor in the Netherlands. There, the popular, eloquent and hard-working local politician was so successful that the party leadership in Rotterdam took note of the young man. In 1987, he was the first SP member elected to the provincial parliament of North Brabant, and in January 1988, was elected chair of the SP. That year, in its second party programme titled «Handvest 2000» (sturdy or tangible), the party abandoned Marxism-Leninism. Organisationally, the reins were tightened, and the previously loose alliance of local groups was rapidly transformed into a nationwide party with transparent organisational structures that had to be taken seriously. The foundation for entry into the Second Chamber had been laid.

After five failed attempts during the '70s and '80s, the organisation succeeded for the first time in 1994. Marijnissen and environmental activist Remi Poppe entered the parliament in The Hague with 1.3% share of the national vote. Without drawing much attention internationally, the Socialist Party was able to expand its electoral support step-by-step thereafter. In 1998, it took 3.5%, in 2002, 5.9%, and in the snap elections in 2003, 6.3% (see Table 1). With these increased election results and a growth in membership and parliamentary seats came an enormous increase in financial resources, which permitted the expansion of the professional party apparatus, both at the top and at the grassroots. The programmatic work led once again to a new slogan, the core vision of the party «Heel de mens» («All human beings»), which is still valid. The membership increased within 14 years from approx. 15,000 in 1992 to more than 50,000 in the election year 2006, which made the SP the third strongest membership party in the Netherlands, after the Social Democrats and the Christian Democrats (Table 2). The results of the parliamentary elections in November 2006 were sensational. The electoral campaign entirely oriented towards the lead candidate and party chair Marijnissen enabled the SP to triple its results to 16.6%; it entered the Second Chamber with 25 seats, as the third largest parliamentary group, just behind the PvdA. Four years later, it suffered its worst setback, dropping to only 15 seats, but is now scoring a record 20% in polls.

Table 1: Results in Second Chamber Elections

SP Results in Second Chamber Elections				
Year	Lead candidate	Votes (absolute)	Votes (percent)	Seats
1977	Poppe	24,420	0.2	-
1981	Van Hooft sr.	30,380	0.3	-
1982	"	44,959	0.5	-
1986	"	32,144	0.3	-
1989	Marijnissen	38,829	0.4	-
1994	"	eleven8,768	1.3	2
1998	"	303,703	3.5	5
2002	"	560,447	5.9	9
2003	"	609,723	6.3	9
2006	"	1,630,803	16.6	25

Source: Results from the Electoral Authority of the SP

From «pillarisation» to «fluidification»: The party landscape of the Netherlands

In the Netherlands, a proportional representation system with no major restrictions is used for all types of elections. Whether for municipal councils, provincial parliaments or the Second Chamber of the Estates General, it is simply necessary to achieve the full divisor sufficient for a single seat. For the Second Chamber with its 150 seats, 0.67% of the valid vote cast is thus enough to gain parliamentary representation for a party list (Lepszy/Wilp, 2009: 417–18).

Since proportional representation was introduced in 1918, the extreme left has managed to elect numerous small parties to the Second Chamber, most of which have however led a somewhat shadowy existence. What rather marked the Dutch party system during the first half of the 20th century was largely a segmentation of the socio-moral realm, a phenomenon which in this especially extreme example is known as the «verzuiling», or the «pillarisation» of society (Wielenga, 2008: 96–7). Here, the subcultures of the various Protestant denominations, of the Catholics and of the workers' movement were held together by an extremely dense organisational web which made them largely independent of state institutions. Each «pillar» had its own system of schools, kindergartens, sports clubs, housing and consumer collectives and also political parties, which served to integrate its members internally, and shield them off externally. Electoral behavior was accordingly marked by the ties of the voters to their respective pillars, and they rarely displayed disloyalty at the polls.

Prior to the first post-war election in 1946, the old Social Democratic Workers' Party (SDAP) had merged with the Liberal Democrats (VDP) to form the Labour Party

(PvdA) with the goal of achieving a social «breakthrough», but with no lasting success. The PvdA remained the largely pillarised party of organised labour, primarily for the non-churchgoing or Protestant working class, while the Catholic People's Party (KVP) provided a bulwark for loyal Catholics, and the various Protestant denominations rallied their faithful behind the Antirevolutionary Party (ARP), the Christian Historical Union (CHU) and several smaller orthodox parties. The right wing liberal People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD), which largely represented the prosperous urban bourgeoisie, saw itself as outside the pillarisation structure; nonetheless, it too was able to depend on a solid base of support.

Likewise outside the pillarisation structure was the Communist Party of the Netherlands (CPN), which, in the immediate post-war years, had a fairly broad base of support, largely due to its forceful resistance to the German occupation during the war. However, of the 10.6% of the electorate who had voted CPN in 1946, only 2.4% remained by 1959, three years after the Hungarian Uprising, which massively discredited the then still pro-Moscow party. In 1959, the Pacifist Socialist Party stood for election for the first time, and won two seats in the Second Chamber. It had grown out of the Ban-the-Bomb movement against the nuclear arms race of the two superpowers, and had its supporters in left-wing intellectual neutralist circles.

During the '60s, the pillars finally began to crumble with increasing rapidity as the mass consumer society emerged, the welfare state institutions expanded, and the mobility of the citizens increased. Many young people flocked to the universities, there were new recreational possibilities, and the rapid expansion of television created an open society (Wielenga, 2008: 305–6.). This process of opening was reflected in the party system. In 1966, a left-liberal party called Democrats 66 (D-66) emerged; it called for more pragmatism, transparency and an expansion of popular participation in legislation. In 1967, D-66 won 14.5% of the vote for the Second Chamber, the same proportion achieved by the right-wing populist Farmers' Party. The KVP and the PvdA both suffered major losses in this election for the first time in decades, the reward for their years of participation in cabinets. The PvdA heard the message, and in the ensuing years reoriented itself strongly toward the left again, a strategy which brought electoral gains. However the attempt to found a large left mass party, a new attempt at a «breakthrough», failed. In spite of common electoral programmes and shadow cabinets with a few small left parties and joint lists in municipal elections, the left never won an absolute majority. By contrast, the large religious parties merged permanently in 1977 into a new broad mass party, the Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA).

On the left side of the political spectrum, several other competitors emerged around 1970, which helped undermine the traditional pillarisation structure. Progressive tendencies in the ARP split off in 1968 to form the Radical Political Party (PPR), which very early addressed Third World and environmental issues. Finally, in 1980, the Protestant People's Party (EVP) was founded, which took a similar political course, but

remained largely without significance. The multiplicity of extreme left groupings in the Dutch party system did not exactly strengthen these competing parties. Since the '70s, the CPN has developed into a party strongly inspired by the women's movement, and a specifically Dutch variety of Euro-communism. In 1989 it merged with the Christian left parties PPR and EBP and with the PSP to form the «Green Left».

In view of this competitive situation, the success of the SP can certainly be seen as an achievement. Also, since the 2002 Chamber election, another initially a marginal factor, right-wing populism, has emerged to mix up the political landscape even more. At a single stroke, the list of the media-savvy sociology professor and writer Pim Fortuyn won 17.1 % of the vote. His murder by a radical animal rights activist a few days before the election had an absolutely traumatic effect on the entire Dutch political scene. A second murder, that of film director Theo van Gogh, and the public debate around the MP Ayaan Hirsi Ali²¹⁴ have certainly fuelled anti-Islamism, upon which the political provocateur Geert Wilders is currently feeding non-stop. The «simple people» – sociologically, the lower and middle social strata – are not only the main target groups of the Socialists, and to an extent also the «old established» parties PvdA and CDA, but they are also particularly strongly present in the clientele of the right-wing populists. In a mood driven democracy, in which telegenic qualities and the best-placed one-liners of prominent party leaders determine the picture, future electoral movements will be very hard to predict (Wielenga, 2008: 364). This also explains the rooting of the SP in modern media society, due to its firm organisational foundation and in spite of all of its internal contradictions, the party provides a counter-pole to all these developments.

A small mass party: The membership and organisational structure of the SP

During the first 15 years of its existence, the SP was a small cadre party with an authoritarian chair who would regularly surprise the other members of the Central Committee and other party functionaries with willful actions. At that time, it was not yet possible to attain party membership simply by a declaration and dues payment; rather, an interested person first had to undergo a test period as a candidate, and acquire the necessary basic ideological background. However, a closer look reveals that the principle of democratic centralism never really worked. Grassroots organisations, many of which were very successful, and the central office in Rotterdam often operated more in parallel than in unison. One of the last controversial major actions of the first party chair Daan Monjé, who had sole power of disposal over the party's assets, was a collection of donations for the striking mineworkers in Great Britain in 1984; the other Central Committee members were not particularly happy about the fact that he was once again taking such action on his own (Kagie, 2004: 38). After

214 A right-liberal of Somali origin who has abandoned Islam and attacks repressive practices associated with it.

Monjé's death in October 1986, and a brief *intermezzo* under Hans van Hooft sr., the most successful SP local politician to date, Jan Marijnissen, who had joined the Central Committee the previous year, was elected party chair. The new party leadership rapidly and vigorously worked to professionalize and programmatically renew the party organisation. Activism, the concentration on local «hot» issues, and permanent visibility on the streets continue to be the core of the political strategy. During such actions, membership recruitment too was carried out vigorously. The growing membership figures also made it possible to expand the political education of the party membership and the ability of the SP to conduct campaigns grew.

Another special feature which encourages the growth of the party was its unusual financing system, which made it one of the richest parties in the Netherlands. From council members to MPs, all SP elected officials had to donate their entire expense allowance to the party. In return for giving up their parliamentary salaries, the MPs in both chambers receive payment from the party oriented toward the average salary paid in the Netherlands. Repeated willful violation of this rule will lead to expulsion from the SP, unless the member resigned from the party first. In a number of municipalities, the SP has lost council members as a result of this rule, and in some cases it has not recovered from this loss. One member of the Second Chamber was also forced to leave the party and the parliamentary group for violating this rule. The party's assets have been invested in assets such as real estate, which gives the organisation a firm base wherever this seems worthwhile. It secures the SP's presence everywhere so that the organisational possibilities for carrying out spontaneous local actions, (e.g. if a local hospital or a youth centre is to be closed), is of course improved. Today, the party's autarky nationwide is demonstrated not only with leaflets, spontaneous demonstrations, or its own neighbourhood newspapers, but also by increased activity on the internet, by means of which completely new target groups are being organised. The SP leadership recognised the importance of the new media very early, and has a clearly structured party website, with all associated and grassroots organisations are linked at the user interface. It is considered a model of political communications for all Dutch parties.

In spite of all efforts to strengthen the grassroots the party leadership (much in the style of the old cadre party) has never abandoned its efforts to maintain control and an overview of the party. Members have regularly been asked to fill out a form to permit an analysis of the social structure of the party. The last two available surveys of the entire membership date from the years 2001 and 2005, in which 43 % and 33 % respectively of the membership participated (Homepages SP/Archipol). The relatively high rates of participation in these surveys allows them to be considered fairly representative. Just in the four years between the two surveys, the SP's membership rose by one third, from approx. 27,000 to approx. 44,000 members (Table 2).

Table 2: Membership of the SP

Membership of the SP									
2000	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
26,553	27,291	36,406	43,389	44,299	44,853	50,740	50,238	50,444	46,507

Note: until 2000, the parties reported their membership figures to the Dutch Political Parties Documentation Centre (DNPP) on December 31; thereafter on January 1 (hence, formally there is no figure for 2001)²¹⁵.

Judging from its gender structure, the SP is a male party, albeit to a lesser degree than other parties in the Netherlands. In fact, only 40% of all members who participated in the 2005 survey were female. In terms of age structure, the mid-level cohorts dominate; one member in five stated that he or she was 60 years old or over. Four years earlier it had been one in four. At the time of the first survey, the average socialist had an educational level approx. equal to the national mean. By 2005 however, the educational level of SP activists had risen considerably. Now, 40% had a university or college degree, compared with 25% of the Dutch working population as a whole. On the other hand, the structure of professions changed considerably between the two surveys. In 2005, 49% were regularly employed, 17% were unemployed or on early retirement, and 14% received General Old Age Insurance (AOW), 5% less than four years previously. It is notable that there is a stronghold in the health sector, where one in five of the members surveyed was employed in 2005, while 12% work in the educational sector.

Clearly, during the period of its rapid growth, the SP became considerably younger, better educated and more female. Moreover, SP members are often also active in civil society organisations, with 20% reporting activity in sports clubs, 23% of respondents stating they regularly support Greenpeace, 70% that they made donations to Amnesty International, and no less than 10% made contributions to Doctors Without Borders, which is an additional indication of the support the party enjoys in the healthcare sectors. One Socialist in three is a union member, which is probably also more than for any other party. Only 9% stated they were members of a church, which is perhaps surprising in view of the effort the party has made to maintain good relations with the churches.

In both surveys, members were also supposed to answer eleven questions to identify the most important social issues; multiple answers were possible. More than 50% identified the dismantlement of social rights and achievements, and the growing gap between incomes, education and power as primary. Only 15% of those surveyed consider the integration of immigrants an urgent problem. The SP is thus clearly dis-

215 Cf. DNPP homepage, April 17, 2010.

tinguished from the other leftist parties, for whom issues of integration have a much higher priority of place. A question regarding the previous electoral behaviour of SP activists revealed that one quarter had previously been loyal Social Democratic voters, and no less than 12% had previously voted for Green Left. One Socialist in two had voted for the SP even prior to joining.

Even if the membership of the party dropped by approx. 8% during 2009, the SP can still be considered to have an extraordinarily strong organisational base. With some 46,000 dues-paying members, the party is still the third strongest in the country, far ahead of the right Liberal VVD. In the membership survey of 2005, 42% of those questioned stated that they regularly took part in party activities. The extent to which the two electoral campaigns of 2010 had a motivating effect, despite or perhaps precisely because of the drop in electoral support, can unfortunately not be assessed at present.

The organisational structure

The organisational structure of the party is complicated. The Congress, officially the highest organ, which adopts party programmes and sets up candidate lists, consists of 1038 delegates from the 145 local chapters, and the 39 members of the party Executive Committee. However, only 15 members, of the Executive Committee are elected by the Congress; the other 21 are regional chairs elected by regional conferences, and the heads of the parliamentary groups in the two chambers of the Estates General and of the SP delegation to the European Parliament. Another leadership body is the Party Council, on which the Executive Committee members also sit, together with the 145 chapter chairs. The fact that the majority of the Executive Committee is not elected by the Party Congress has repeatedly been the subject of severe criticism, as has the fact that the Party Council is not authorised to exert any controlling influence on the Executive Committee, as is generally the case with other Dutch parties (Voerman, 2007b). Of concern are not so much the convoluted internal structures of the SP, but the rights of the highest bodies to change established resolutions and even voter decisions. At the last election for the First Chamber in 2007, the members of which are elected directly by the provincial parliaments, Düzgün Yildirim was sent to the upper house with the aid of preferential votes. However, since on the basis of the ranking on the list, he had not been designated by the Executive Committee for parliamentary membership, he was called upon to resign his seat, which he steadfastly refused to do, and was then expelled from the party. The SP argues that other parties reserve the possibility of similar sanctions (van Raak/Ivens, 2007).

There are no longer any single-issue associated organisations, as there were during the early years. The senior citizens' organisation, the SP Elders' Platform, and the party youth group Rood («red») have no autonomy within the party hierarchy, but are subject to the instructions of the party bodies. Nor is it possible for instance to become a Rood member without at the same time joining the SP. As stated above,

the party has succeeded in building a not inconsiderable base of support in the trade union movement, especially in the Federation of Dutch Trade Unions (FNB), which is close to the PvdA (Jorritsma/Valk 2007). It is also notable that many doctors have joined the party because of its concentration on health issues. The former chair of the National Association of General Practitioners (LHV), Tineke Slagter, even won a seat for the SP in the First Chamber of the Estates General.

The public face of the SP: Programmes, campaigns, leading personalities

Programmatic issues probably do not have the priority in electoral campaigns that they should. Skillfully placed key words and images are what the parties use to succeed in the brutally competitive electoral market. In the case of the SP however, the entire structure of political communication strategies is clearly distinct from those of its competitors. Even its electoral programmes are relatively short and to the point. In each issue-based chapter, the demands are listed bullet-like, after a brief introduction. There is also an associated booklet, in which the SP's financial promises are clearly calculated on the basis of statistics. This was done four years ago, when the SP successfully tested its completely new iconography, and the recent electoral programme was similarly structured.

«A Better Netherlands for Less Money» the slogan of the 2010 manifesto had originally been «for the same money». The devastating effects of the global banking crisis were a programmatic affirmation for the Socialists. As a result, there is a long section on that in the introduction of the electoral programme. The section on democracy is right at the start of the programme, as it was in the previous programme. The gap which the SP notes between the citizen and the state is to be reduced by the introduction of corrective referenda and initiatives. Mayors of municipalities are no longer to be appointed by the Queen, but rather elected by the municipal councils. This would require a change in the Constitution; until the necessary majority for that can be marshaled; the SP demands that the councils at least be able to submit recommendations for the appointments to these positions to the Ministry of the Interior. The SP, which is otherwise opposed to multiple office-holding, is however in favour of letting national officeholders run for the European Parliament, so as to better inform the public about European issues, by giving them the possibility of voting for candidates familiar to them. It is especially important to the SP that the state support the self-organisation of citizens, and that the subsidiarity principle be promoted. Neighbourhood and village councils should be democratically elected everywhere if possible, and should receive greater responsibilities. The parties should once again become active organs for citizens' decision-making. The SP therefore rejects any expansion of state party financing; small wonder, considering its own solid financial base.

In social and health policy, traditionally important pillars for the party, the SP is in favour of a halt to further privatisation; cost sharing in health insurance is to be abolished, and the retirement age be kept at 65. Student funding is to be retained. On

the other hand, the SP is in favour of cuts in «middle-class subsidies». High earners could no longer be allowed tax deductions on their mortgage payments, nor should they get child payments. However, the party has moved away from its demands for an income tax rate of 72 % for top earners, for although this was still the law during the 1970s, it was communicated in such a radical manner during the 2003 election that the party lost ground again in the polls.

It is remarkable that the section on integration policy has moved near the front of the programme. In 1984, the party had once published a pamphlet called «guest workers and capital», which its opponents in the political left labeled as racist. It stated that every migrant worker should receive a payment to leave the Netherlands. Without going into the details of this 25-year-old paper, the chapter in the current programme does contain the introductory remarks that the SP was after all the first leftist party in the Netherlands to address the problem of integration. The SP voices strong opposition to the formation of ghettos on the outskirts of large cities, and wants to promote stronger ethnic integration, especially in the schools, which in the Netherlands are often labeled either «black» or «white». Language classes and naturalisation tests are to apply to immigrants from the EU also.

Given that the SP sees the EU Commission as the promoter of a «super-state» which wants to undermine national prerogatives, and hence also Dutch democracy. This is a further point in which the other parties of the political left differ strongly from the SP. The SP generally rejects any further transfer of national rights to Brussels. The vote on the European Constitution in June 2005, which was rejected in the Netherlands in the referendum by a 61.6 % no vote, was largely the result of a campaign by the SP. There is no sign of any revision of the SP's European policy. Another important SP foreign-policy demand is for the rapid withdrawal of Dutch troops from Afghanistan. Thankfully the current programme bears little resemblance to those of the early years, when the party went into electoral campaigns with ideologically overloaded and barely readable pamphlets. Groningen political scientist Gerrit Voerman has called the party's programmatic moderation process of the 1980s de-Maoisation and de-Leninisation (Voerman, 2009). Marijnissen and his supporters knew that there would have to be several controversial issues which affected all citizens to make his party (which most voters viewed as a sect) attractive to potential supporters. This sometimes populist and simplistic language has continued to this day.

In 1994, the SP for the first time succeeded in winning seats in the Second Chamber with a creative campaign for the «social reconstruction» of the Netherlands. It was conceived by the PR consultant Niko Koffeman, who took part in the public relations process of the party until 2005. In the 2006 election, he went to work for the small Party of the Animals (PvdD), which he joined, and which he also succeeded in entering the Second Chamber. In 1994, it was the Social Democrats (in particular due to the market affinity of their position in PvdA Prime Minister Wim Kok's so-called Purple Coalition) who became the targets of Koffeman's SP campaign. And this time, a

new logo was also created which showed on a blue background a shining red tomato, which was being thrown. Moreover, the parties posters all featured the slogan «vote against it, vote SP!». This negative connotation of protest determined the image of the party until 2002, when the party slogan was changed to «vote for it!» The Dutch tomato is still the symbol of the party, although it was given an all-round refurbishing for the 2006 elections by the company Thonik. It is now no longer being thrown at anything; instead, it has a leaf stylised to a white star, and its white background provides it with a more distinctive contrast. The slogan on posters in this election was once again short and to the point: «SP now!», in big letters. Other designs included the slogan with no further text at all. In street electoral campaigning, the SP activists with their red jackets and the tomato symbol were particularly visible. In large actions and events of the lead candidates, tomato soup was passed out, with soup bowls showing the party logo. Another thing SP distinction from is very conscious work with musical support. For instance, the well-known singer Bob Fosko has for some years been writing rousing campaign songs for the SP.

The lead candidate Marijnissen, who comes from the Catholic southern part of the country, also attempted to add a Christian touch to the campaign. The last place on the list, which by tradition goes to a prominent person, was in 2006 given to Huub Oosterhuis. A theologian who was many years ago expelled from the Catholic Church, participated actively in SP electoral events all across the country, and brought a bit of transcendence and contemplation into the raucous electoral campaign (van Dijk, 2006). Certainly however, the support of former Social Democratic Under-Secretary Marcel van Dam was also of great symbolic value. Van Dam, a sharp observer of the left political scene, announced in his column in the daily newspaper *Volkskrant* that he could no longer vote for the PvdA, due to its neo-liberal policies, and now planned to vote for the SP.

The image of the SP was in recent years personified almost exclusively by Jan Marijnissen, who headed the party for almost three decades. Born in 1952, he is an affable man with a good sense of humor who can also appear in a statesmanlike manner if necessary. He likes to show off his provincial origins and his down-home lifestyle. During the late '60s, like so many of his generation, he broke with the constricting Catholic lifestyle of his surroundings. His school leaving certificate was obtained only after an odyssey through numerous schools. Later, he earned his living as a labourer in the sausage plants and metal workshops of his hometown, Oss. As a result of diligent self-study of Marxist texts, he had by this time developed a coherent leftist worldview. As a result, he launched upon a «revolutionary» career, which was at the same time reflected by a series of successful milestones in the party's history: first in Oss, then at the provincial level in North Brabant, and finally nationwide. He likes to be interviewed by TV reporters in his living room in Oss, where he still lives with his family; he is a true pop star of his party. He is proud of the fact that he holds the Dutch record for calls to order in Parliament, and used one of the thus reprimanded epithets

as the title for a book with a collection of his columns. However, it is well known that Marijnissen is not just a good chap, but keeps the SP in an iron grip (Pegtel, 2007).

His retirement by stages – from the leadership of the parliamentary group and from the informal status as «political leader» in June 2008, and his later refusal to run for Parliament in 2010 – was a serious watershed for the party, even if this step was foreseeable, due to his health problems. However, he still formally retains the title of party chair.

His successor, Agnes Kant, was only in office for a year and a half. A doctor of epidemiology, she could also look back on a successful career in municipal politics in Doesburg, but her style was completely different from what one was accustomed to from the Socialists. Kant was especially popular among the numerous female supporters of the SP; nonetheless, she was not uncontroversial. For example, the media have reported of stubbornness and even hysteria in Kant's leadership and style of argumentation. Nonetheless, as an outstanding professional expert in the healthcare area, she commands great respect among doctors and pharmacists. Her sudden resignation the day after the municipal election was surprising, and her complete withdrawal from politics even more so. In her last TV debate (prior to the election of March 2010) she had called right-wing populist Geert Wilders a «threat to Dutch society», which brought her public reprimands from leading male colleagues in the Chamber. Such public intraparty criticism of the political leader of the SP had been very unusual up to that time, so a rapid switch to Emile Roemer, who emerged just hours later as the sole candidate for the leadership of the parliamentary group and shortly thereafter also as the lead candidate for the parliamentary elections in June, smelled somewhat fishy. On the other hand, the generally smooth transition gives an indication of the professional discipline of the party and the recognition for Roemer's leadership qualities.

Like Marijnissen, Roemer hails from North Brabant; he was a member of the administration of his hometown of Boxmeer, and prior to his entry into the Second Chamber in 2006, he had worked as a teacher in a reform oriented primary school. Roemer, (who is widely respected in the Chamber), proved himself as a meticulously knowledgeable transport expert. He is not dissimilar from his predecessor Marijnissen: he too comes from a provincial Catholic town, acts folksy and speaks with a trace of dialect. In only three months, Roemer has managed to increase his level of recognition considerably. In numerous TV debates during the election campaign he was able to coolly ward off the attacks of his political opponents, and to score points especially against Geert Wilders.

The voters of the SP

The strongly volatile behaviour of the electorate in recent years makes it difficult to make statements about the support base of the Socialist Party. Only a few basic constants can be given here.

Geographically, the party has its strongholds in the southern Dutch provinces of Limburg and North Brabant, which are still strongly Catholic, the latter includes the cities of Oss, home of party chair Marijnissen, which for many years provided a high vote for the SP in all elections, and Boxmeer, Roemer's hometown, where the SP scored even better than in Oss in the June election of 2010, polling 33.7%. These are also the two provinces in which the party has the most council members, and serves in the administration of many of towns. In the country's core, the thickly populated of Amsterdam/The Hague/Rotterdam/Utrecht metropolitan area – the so-called Randstad²¹⁶ – the party also has significant support, and receives higher than average electoral results. The Randstad was once the stronghold of the social democratic PvdA, while the KVP and later the CDA dominated in the Catholic southern provinces. The SP also has many supporters in the rural, thinly settled municipalities in eastern Groningen and in Frisia, where it has managed to gain ground in old social democratic and communist strongholds. The Socialists got their worst results in the so-called Bible Belt, a string of communities dominated by various orthodox Dutch Reformed denominations. In terms of social structure, the party's stronghold is among younger and middle-aged voters. According to the data of the national electoral analysis organisation NKO, the SP achieved average results in 2006 among young voters, and poor results only amongst voters over 65. It got its strongest support, 25% of the vote, in the 25 to 34-year-old age group and also 22% in the 45 to 54-year-old cohort, i.e. those voters who had been socialised during the «red decade» of the '70s (CBS, 2007). There was hardly any gender gap, albeit with a slightly above average share of female voters. Like the median age cohort, medium level educational levels also predominated. Voters with only a primary school certificate were, like those with higher education, underrepresented, at 14% each. Furthermore, for the 2006 parliamentary election, it was shown that the SP was the strongest party among voters with less than the Dutch average wage, ahead of the PvdA and the CDA. Religious persuasion is no longer important in the Netherlands, where only one person in five indicates a religious preference. In 2006, 16% of Catholics voted for the SP, a fact which can primarily be explained geographically. On the other hand the Protestant faithful rarely voted socialist. Notably moreover, the party wins extremely strong support among migrants, especially among those from non-western countries (22%). The assumption is that many migrants vote socialist because they feel an affinity to the SP's social policies, and appreciate the fact that the party does not expressly support of a multicultural society, a position which they often see as paternalistic. Finally it should be stated that the SP owed the seats it gained in 2006 primarily to former Social Democratic voters, for a full quarter of those who voted SP that year had marked their ballots for the PvdA three years earlier.

216 «Edge City» – so called because the cities form an urban circle around a largely rural central area.

Figures of the polling Institute Synovate after the devastating 2010 parliamentary election, in which the SP lost some 40 % of its support, largely confirm this picture of the average SP voter.

The SP lost somewhat more voters in the Randstad than it did in the south. These losses benefited the Social Democrats and Green Left, but also Wilders' PVV. Overall, the polls found that there was no major difference between those voters who stuck with the SP and those who abandoned it. The most marked characteristics are still low education, low wages and older age cohorts.

Conclusion

During the 38 years of its existence, the SP has been able to steadily expand its position in the Dutch party system, albeit with a setback in the last election, which now appears to have been temporary. This is surprising, at least at first glance, considering its original ideological roots, for only very few parties with Maoist origins have ever been able to succeed in entering a national parliament.

The long drawn-out societal de-pillarisation processes in the Netherlands cut the traditional ties of the majority of the voters, and made them homeless in terms of party politics. The market appropriate policies of the social democratic PvdA especially have opened a representation gap in which the SP has been able to successfully establish itself. Also, many former members and voters of the CPN and the PSP feel that their political positions are no longer represented by the left libertarian and ecological course of Green Left, and even some former Christian Democrats especially in the Catholic south of the country, now tend toward the SP. It is clear that Dutch society, especially the disadvantaged strata, harbours a deep yearning for a revival of the ideals of community, solidarity and sticking together, and also for authority and clarity. The electoral result of 2006 was to a considerable degree due to the winning personality of lead candidate Marijnissen and a creative electoral campaign. However, such factors as personality, and the particular iconography of the party, could only lead to such a landslide success thanks the years of grassroots work of motivated party activists. One uniting element, which further distinguishes the SP from its competitors in the party spectrum, is the continuity of its language and programme. Like other parties, the SP has often revised its position papers and its basic documents, and adapted to societal changes. The «social reconstruction of the Netherlands» is however more than just a slogan for the party, its members and voters.

The Dutch social system was badly undermined during the «purple coalition» period at the turn of the millennium, a process which continued under the Balkenende cabinets during the ensuing decade. With the significant participation of the Social Democrats, major areas of the health system were privatised. In process, the state withdrew from its overall responsibility to society. The large public utilities were also released from the control of the state, and were now able to operate as largely independent companies, according to the principle of profit maximisation. The ideologi-

cal invasion of nearly all political fields by neo-liberalism, and hence of all areas of the daily lives of the citizens, necessarily caused many people to feel left behind and abandoned. The SP continually resisted these trends over the years, and vigorously articulated the people's malaise. It also bucked the political mainstream in its use of language, refusing to use the non-expressive plastic words that its political competitors tend to mouth. Critical observers of the party, be they politicians of other parties, journalists or even academics, often assess the positions of the socialists on issues as populist. The SP has from the outset noted an ever greater gap between the political elite of the country and the «simple people»; it often calls people in government «pocket liners». The SP's language often simplifies and exaggerates matters, and sometimes tends to polemicise. The SP also opposes NATO's aggressive wars, just as it does the neo-liberal policies of the EU. It often points out that the policies of transnational coalitions would seldom be supported by a majority of the people, and uses this claim as an argument in favour of facilitating popular initiatives and referendums. The argumentative logic of the SP necessarily leads those academics who know them best to place them in a category labelled «populist», together with right wing extremists. At the same time, those professional observers recognize that the SP has recently toned down its rhetoric on many issues (Lucardie, 2003; Voerman, 2009). Demands for the withdrawal from NATO or abolition of the monarchy were no longer programmatic goals, Marijnissen announced during that 2006 elections. Such statements show the long familiar and often apparently contradictory balancing act between long-term basic documents and electoral platforms, which are to contribute to short-term campaign successes and ultimately to maximizing electoral results. In summary, the readability of programmes and the party's focus on issues which really interest the «simple people» show that the SP is a party which is firmly rooted in day-to-day life.

For the first time in their party history, the Socialists have now experienced severe losses in votes and seats in the Second Chamber, beset on the left by parties who went into the race with popular lead candidates, and on the right by the rabid anti-Islamist Wilders. And yet the programmatic personnel and grassroots organisational continuities which characterize the party have led to its firm rooting in the Dutch political landscape. Considerably more than 40,000 members, more than 250 members of local councils, and participation in more than two dozen local administrations are proof that the foundations of the party's future are secure.

Bibliography

Monographs, Essays in Journals

- Aarts, Kees/van der Kolk, Henk/Rosema, Martin: Een verdeeld electoraat [A divided electorate], Utrecht 2007.
- Azmanova, Albena: The mobilisation of the European Left in the Early 20-First Century, in: *European Journal of Sociology*, 2004, 45.
- Becker, Frans/Cuperus, René: Die Wahlen am 22. November 2006 und die Unruhe in der niederländischen Wählerschaft [The elections of November 22, 2006 and the disquiet in the Dutch electorate], in: *Jahrbuch für Niederlande-Studien*, Münster 2007, pp. 83–101.
- Het Nationaal Kiesersonderzoek/Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek: Opzet, uitvoering en resultaten [Nomination of candidates course of the campaign and results], Voorburg/Heerlen 2008.
- Kagie, Rudie: De Socialisten: Achter de schermen van de SP [The Socialists: behind the screens of the SP] Amsterdam 2004.
- Lepsz, Norbert/Wilp, Markus: Das politische System der Niederlande [the political system of the Netherlands], in: *Die politischen Systeme Westeuropas 4.*, updated and revised edition, Wiesbaden 2009, pp. 405–449.
- Lucardie, Paul: Das Parteiensystem der Niederlande [The party system of the Netherlands], in: Niedermayer, Oskar/ Sröss, Richard/Haas, Melanie (eds.): *Die Parteiensysteme Westeuropas*, Wiesbaden 2006, pp. 330–350.
- Lucardie, Paul: Populismus im Polder: Von der Bauernpartei bis zur Liste Pim Fortuyn [Populism in the polder: from the Peasants' Party to the Pim Fortuyn list], in: Werz, Nikolaus (ed.): *Populismus. Populisten in Übersee und Europa* [Populism. Populists overseas and in Europe], Opladen 2003, pp. 177–194.
- Mao Tse-Tung: *The Words of Chairman Mao Tse-Tung*, 1st edition, Peking 1967.
- March, Luke: Parteien links der Sozialdemokratie in Europa. Vom Marxismus zum Mainstream? [Points to the left of the social Democrats in Europe. From Marxism to the mainstream?], Bonn 2008.
- Slager, Kees: Het geheim van Oss. Een geschiedenis van de SP, [The secret of Oss: the history of the SP], Amsterdam/ Antwerp 2001.
- Voerman, Gerrit: De «Rode Jehova's». Een geschiedenis van de Socialistiese Partij [A history of the SP], in: *Jaarboek Documentatiecentrum Nederlandse Politieke Partijen* 1986, Groningen 1987, pp. 124–150.
- Voerman, Gerrit: Van Mao tot marketing. Over het populisme van de SP [From Mao to marketing. On the populism of the SP of drawings or have], in: *Socialisme en Democratie*, 2009, 9, pp. 26–32.
- Voerman, Gerrit/Lucardie, Paul (2007): De sociaaldemokratisering van de SP [the social democratisation of the SP], in: Becker, Frans/Cuperus, René (ed.): *Verloren slag. De PvdA en de verkiezingen van 2006* [the lost battle. The PvdA and the 2006 elections], Amsterdam, pp. 139–169.
- Weissbach, Cornelia: The emancipative Left in the Netherlands, in: Daiber, Birgit/Hildebrandt, Cornelia (ed): *The Left in Europe. Analyses of Left Parties and Party Alliances*, Berlin 2009.
- Wielenga, Friso: Die Niederlande. Politik und politische Kultur im 20. Jahrhundert, [The Netherlands. Politics and political culture in the 20th century] Münster 2008.

Newspaper Articles

- Jorritsma, Elsje/Valk, Guus: Activistische SP verovert de FNV [Activist SP takes over the FNV], in: *NRC Handelsblad*, March 30 2007, pp.1/3.
- Pegtel, Alice: De lange arm van Jan Marijnissen [The long arm of Jan Marijnissen], in: *HP/De Tijd*, November 23 2007, pp. 29–34.
- Van Dijk, Marc: Oosterhuis verwoordt wat de SP'er denkt [Oosterhuis expresses what the SP'er thinks], in: *Trouw*, November 13 2006.
- Van Raak, Ronald/Ivens, Laurens: Regels SP zijn wettig en terecht [SP rules on legal and fair], in: *De Volkskrant*, August 9 2007, pp. eleven.
- Voerman, Gerrit: SP moet partijorganisatie aanpassen [SP must adapt its party organisation], in: *NRC Handelsblad*, June 16 2007b, p. 7.

Homepages

<http://www.sp.nl>

Homepage of the SP, access to issues of the membership magazine Tribune of recent years, to studies by the academic sections of the party, Links to all elected officeholders and parliamentary groups of the party at all levels, extensive media archive.

<http://www.parlement.com>

«Parlement & Politiek» is a homepage of the Parlementair Documentatie Centrum at the University of Leiden (PDC). It contains extensive information about the parliamentary system of the Netherlands, the political parties and biographies of all MPs, including historical.

<http://www.rug.nl/dnpp>

Homepage of the Documentatiecentrum Nederlandse Politieke Partijen (DNPP), the leading Dutch party research Center at the University of Groningen. It contains all party programs, annual reports membership figures and access to the website archive Archipol.

<http://www.verkiezingsuitslagen.nl>

Homepage of the Election Counsel (Kiesraad); contains all of official electoral statistics even at the parliamentary level, in a very user-friendly database.

<http://www.cbs.nl>

Homepage of the Central Statistics Office; it contains such material as the electoral behavior report Nationaal Kies-
ersonderzoek 2006.

Daniel Schukovits

THE RADICAL LEFT IN AUSTRIA

Austria is not the easiest place in Europe to be a radical leftist. («Radical» meaning to the left of the Social Democrats and the Greens.²¹⁷) In the following essay, the Communist Party of Austria (KPÖ) and its associated organisations, and a number of small Trotskyist organisations, as well as left radical groupings beyond the party spectrum will be examined. The specific conditions which usually stand in the way of the development of a radical left spectrum in Austria shall also be addressed in this essay.

Austrian conditions

Austria's reputation as a stronghold of right-wing extremism is not unjustified. The thesis supported after the end of the Second World War by all political forces (according to which Austria had been «the first victim» of German Nazism) gave right-wing extremists the opportunity to maintain their structures and activities with a large measure of continuity. It also allowed the conservatives to glorify Austria's home-grown Christian-conservative fascism, which had ruled from 1933 to 1938, as a patriotic attempt to defend Austrian independence.

During the brief phase of toothless de-Nazification and re-education, which lasted until the Allies' withdrawal in 1955 and was largely supported by the KPÖ (which was then in government) the conservative ÖVP and the social democratic SPÖ took steps to integrate the ex-Nazis. Some 10 % of the population at that time were former Nazi Party members.²¹⁸ They were permitted in 1947 to found their own party, the

217 Unlike many Green parties in Europe, the Austrian Greens, like their West German friends, from the start included a leftist tendency consisting of ex-social democrats, ex-communists and autonomous leftists. In recent years and decades however, an increasing tendency toward liberalism can be ascertained, which hardly leaves any room for a critique of capitalism. The youth organisation, especially in Vienna, is an exception.

218 In 1951, the population was 6,933,905, of which almost 700,000 were former Nazi Party members. Sources: Statistik Austria: «The Population of Austria, since 1869, by State» accessible at: http://www.statistik.at/web_de/

«Federation of Independents» (VdU), which can be considered the precursor to the right-wing extremist Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ). That the integration of ex-Nazi supporters into the ÖVP and SPÖ worked very well can be seen from the first post-war election results:

*Table 1 Results of the National Council elections, 1945 to 1966*²¹⁹

Election	SPÖ	ÖVP	KPÖ	VdU/FPÖ	Others
1945	44.46 %	49.80 %	5.40 %	-	0.20 %
1949	38.70 %	44.00 %	5.10 %	eleven.70 %	0.98 %
1953	42.10 %	41.30 %	5.30 %	10.90 %	0.39 %
1956	43.00 %	46.00 %	4.40 %	6.50 %	0.04 %
1959	44.80 %	44.20 %	3.30 %	7.70 %	0.10 %
1962	44.00 %	45.40 %	3.00 %	7.00 %	0.50 %
1966	42.56 %	48.35 %	0.41 %*	5.35 %	3.33 %

*The KPÖ called for a vote for the SPÖ, and stood only in one constituency in Vienna²²⁰

During the ensuing decades, the FPÖ took a moderate, to some extent right-wing liberal course, which it maintained until the coup-like takeover of the party leadership by Jörg Haider in 1986. Thereafter, it pursued an openly right-wing extremist orientation, resulting in dramatic gains in ensuing elections, and an erosion of support for the old major parties, the SPÖ and the ÖVP. Also contributing to the latter process however, was the entry of the Greens into parliament in 1986.²²¹

The collapse of the KPÖ at the polls was due to a number of causes: first, with the withdrawal of the Red Army in 1955, and the onset of the Cold War, the governing parties, the SPÖ and the ÖVP, positioned themselves clearly on the side of the West, coupling this with a militant²²² revival of anti-Communism. Another factor was the intervention of the Warsaw Pact in Hungary in 1956, which was evaluated in a balanced manner by the KPÖ, while the events were broadly opposed by the popula-

static/ergebnisse_im_ueberblick_bevoelkerung_seit_1869_023290.pdf, Documentation Archive of the Austrian Resistance: «Denazification in Austria», accessible at: <http://de.doew.braintrust.at/m28sm129.html>, both accessed on March 22, 2010.

219 Source: Federal Ministry of the Interior, http://www.bmi.gv.at/cms/BMI_wahlen/nationalrat/NRW_History.aspx, accessed on March 22, 2010.

220 Cf. Baier, Walter: *Das kurze Jahrhundert. Kommunismus in Österreich. KPÖ 1918 bis 2008* (The brief century: Communism in Austria – the KPÖ, 1918–2008) Steinbauer Verlag, Vienna 2009, p. 138.

221 Cf. Pickl-Heck, Reinhard: *20 Jahre Grüne – Von der Protest- zur Gestaltungspartei* (20 years of the Greens: A protest party to a formulating party): http://www.gruene.at/uploads/media/pickl_eleven20_151959.pdf, accessed April 13, 2010.

222 For instance, a strike in October 1950 was labeled a communist coup attempt, and violently smashed by the social democratically led Construction and Woodworkers' Union. Cf. Baier 2009, pp. 109 ff.

tion.²²³ This Soviet-oriented policy of the KPÖ would have a negative effect later too, both in the elections and in the development of the party.

The ideological basis for this development in the political conditions of Austria can be summarised as follows: the integration of old Nazi strata, the country's west-leaning orientation, and an Austrian nationalism which, by means of the so-called «social partnership» model,²²⁴ moved all conflicts between capital and labour from the street to the negotiating table, and developed into what could be described as «democratic post-Nazism».²²⁵

This situation was also reflected in the population. In a study on the authoritarian personality carried out in Austria in 1978, patterned after the familiar work by Theodor Adorno, 80 % of Austrians felt that criminals received overly mild punishments, 74 % stated that «obedience and virtue» were their most important values, 60 % supported restoration of the death penalty, 51 % believed the «natural role» of women to be in the household and as mothers, and 47 % were of the opinion that «people can be divided into two classes: the strong and the weak».²²⁶ There has been no recent follow-up to this study, nor did it receive broad public attention; nonetheless, one can assume that the results are still largely applicable today, a fact reflected in the electoral results achieved by the conservative ÖVP and especially by the extreme right-wing FPÖ and its split-off, the Alliance for the Future of Austria (BZÖ, founded in 2005 by Jörg Haider²²⁷). This evident growth of right-wing extremism has coincided with the process of neo-liberal restructuring and the changes carried out in the world of work. For example, the then ruling SPÖ-ÖVP coalition during the '90s passed a number of clearly neo-liberal measures, including budget cuts in education in 1994, cutbacks in the area of unemployment insurance and supplementary motherhood support in 1995, and abolition of free public transport for students in 1996; all justified by the supposed necessity to relieve the public budget.²²⁸ The conservative-far right ÖVP-FPÖ coalition increased these cutbacks still further. The KPÖ said at that time:

«As a governing party, the FP is carrying out the same policy pattern that it did for a decade and a half as an opposition party: it implements the neo-liberal economic and

223 Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. eleven7 ff.

224 Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 136.

225 Cf. Grigat, Stephan/Markl, Florian: *Österreichische Normalität. Postfaschismus, Postnazismus und der Aufstieg der Freiheitlichen Partei Österreichs unter Jörg Haider* (Austrian normality: post-fascism, post-Nazism, and the rise of the Freedom Party of Austria under Jörg Haider), In: Grigat, Stephan (ed.): *Transformation des Postnazismus. Der deutsch-österreichische Weg zum demokratischen Faschismus* (The transformation of post-Nazism: the German-Austrian path to democratic fascism), Ça ira-Verlag, Freiburg 2003.

226 Study by the opinion research institute IFES, in cooperation the Institute for Recent and Contemporary History in Linz, quoted in: Rathkolb, Oliver: *Die paradoxe Republik. Österreich 1945 bis 2005* (The paradox Republic: Austria, 1945 to 2005), Paul Zsolnay Verlag, Vienna 2005, pp. 68 ff.

227 After he had led the FPÖ for two decades, the party split, and he set up the BZÖ as a minority break-away. The difference between the two is more personal than political.

228 Cf. e.g. Preglau, Max: *Das Solidarprojekt Sozialstaat – gestern, heute und morgen*, (The welfare state as a solidarity project – yesterday, today and tomorrow) accessible under: http://www.sws-rundschau.at/archiv/SWS_2002_3_Preglau.pdf, accessed April 4, 2010.

social policy stipulations of the EU most brutally, and at the same time criticizes their social effects. ... The public contributory social support system is to be transformed into a private precautionary market, the public education system into an educational market, and the health system into a health market. New possibilities for valuation of private capital have been created, and the state and business relieved of the responsibility to co-finance the social security systems. The only sure thing about this is its bottom-up redistributive effect and its social Darwinism, the racism of the beautiful, diligent and law-abiding. ... The consensus of all parliamentary parties is that the state is to be redefined as «Austria, Plc.»²²⁹

The fact that this analysis was correct can be seen from the fact that the SPÖ-ÖVP coalition, which once again rules the country, is pursuing policies that differ only in degree from those of the previous governing constellation. Let us turn then to the left opposition against them.

The Communist Party of Austria (KPÖ)

The above description of conditions shows that leftist politics in Austria is not always easy. The KPÖ is the only party which has always participated in elections as a left opposition. Founded in 1918 after the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and banned during the period of the two fascist regimes that ruled from 1933 to 1945, it has only held seats in the Austrian National Council from 1945 to 1959. Hence, its practice has largely been characterised by extra-parliamentary work.

Table 2: Electoral results of the KPÖ in National Council elections, 1970 to 2008²³⁰ in per cent

1970	1971	1975	1979	1983	1986	1990	1994	1995	1999	2002	2006	2008
1.00	1.20	1.00	1.00	0.70	0.70	0.60	0.30	0.30	0.50	0.56	1.01	0.76

Due to a lack of the requisite surveys, it is difficult to draw any conclusions with regard to the composition of the KPÖ voting base. Only regional electoral results provide the basis for some assumptions: the KPÖ in 2006 attained its best results in the states of Styria and Vienna, with 1.24 and 1.08 %, respectively.²³¹ Graz, the country's second biggest city, is the capital of Styria, and was probably responsible for this result. The results of the other large state capitals diverge notably from the over-

229 Speech by Walter Baier at the KPÖ party conference on November 16, 2000, accessible under: <http://www.kpoe.at/home/positionen/anzeige-positionen/browse/2/article/29/UEber-den-Widerstand-gegen-Schwarz-Blau.html>, accessed on April 4, 2010.

230 Source: Federal Ministry of the Interior, http://www.bmi.gv.at/cms/BMI_wahlen/nationalrat/NRW_History.aspx, accessed on March 22, 2010.

231 *ibid.*

all results: Linz (Upper Austria), 1.2 %;²³² Salzburg, 1.2 %;²³³ and Innsbruck (Tyrol), 1.09 %.²³⁴

Clearly, the KPÖ enjoys greater support in urban areas; moreover, the cities named are all university towns. At the state and local level, the KPÖ has seats in a number of municipal councils in Styria and Lower Austria, one in Tyrol, in the Styrian state parliament, in three borough councils in Vienna, and, since the municipal election in 2010, in the Linz City Council.²³⁵

Members, structures and decision-making

In 1996, the KPÖ had some 5000 members,²³⁶ a figure which dropped during the 1990s. Half the members were from Vienna, and generally the great bulk of the membership comes from Eastern Austria.²³⁷ In 1987, 42% of members were women,²³⁸ but this relatively high female share is dropping. Generally, the membership during the 1990s was aging. By 1990, a major proportion of the membership were retired.²³⁹

The KPÖ party structure²⁴⁰ consists of four levels: party groups, district organisations, state organisations and the national organisation. At the base are party groups, organised on the basis of territorial, workplace, professional or issue oriented criteria.²⁴¹ Depending on orientation, these party groups can be either district organisations, a state organisation or the national executive.

District organisations are associations of various party groups within a district, and state organisations combine the existing district organisations and the party groups operating at the state level. The highest organ of the KPÖ is the Party Congress, which elects the National Executive, the highest executive organ between Party Congresses. The National Executive then elects the National Committee from amongst its members, which constitutes the leadership of the entire party between sessions of the National Executive. The latter consists of at least the National Chair, the Vice Chair, the Women's Chair, the Treasurer and the Vice-Treasurer. All these officers are elected

232 City of Linz, http://www.linz.gv.at/zahlen/100_WAHLEN/100_NR06/, accessed on April 4, 2010

233 State of Salzburg: http://www.salzburg.gv.at/nrw06_bericht.pdf, accessed on April 4, 2010

234 State of Tyrol, http://wahlen.tirol.gv.at/WahlenTirolGvAtWeb/wahlenGemDetail.do?cmd=wahlInfoGemeindeDetail&wahl_id=18&bez_id=01&gem_id=01&cid=1, accessed on April 4, 2010

235 Cf., e.g. KPÖ Upper Austria: Wahlergebnisse der KPÖ (KPÖ electoral results), accessible under: <http://ooe.kpoe.at/news/article.php/20060624220735935>, accessed on April 4, 2010

236 Ehmer, Josef: Die Kommunistische Partei Österreichs. Geschichte, soziales Profil, aktuelle Situation. (The Communist Party of Austria: history, social profile and current situation), In: Moreau, Patrik; Lazar, Marc; Hirscher, Gerhard (eds.): Der Kommunismus in Westeuropa. Niedergang oder Mutation? (Communism and Western Europe: Decline or mutation?) Landsberg/Lech, Olzog, 1998, p. 212.

237 *ibid.*, p. 219.

238 *ibid.*

239 *ibid.*

240 Cf. KPÖ: Statute of the KPÖ, adopted at the 33rd Party Congress in Linz. Accessible under: [http://www.kpoe.at/index.php?id=78&tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=41&tx_ttnews\[backPid\]=74&cHash=f3d0408126](http://www.kpoe.at/index.php?id=78&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=41&tx_ttnews[backPid]=74&cHash=f3d0408126), accessed on April 12, 2010.

241 *ibid.*

at Party Congress, with the exception of the Women's Chair, who is elected only by the women, either at a Party Congress, a national women's structure, or a women's conference.

Decisions are made at the membership organisations of the party groups and district organisations, each of which has the right to submit proposals to the next higher level. At the state level, state conferences are held, where participants are delegated by the party groups and district organisations. These are convened by the state party leadership, or at the behest of one quarter of the party groups and/or district organisations. Between membership meetings, state conferences and party congresses, the decision-making process at each level is undertaken by the most recently elected leadership. Intraparty democracy is further strengthened by party conferences, which are convened to address particular issues or topics and membership votes, the decisions of which are binding. Cooperation with non-members of the KPÖ are possible within the context of working groups in which people organise to address specific social interests, political topics or areas of activity, or to form particular ideological tendencies,²⁴² on the basis of which activity they can submit proposals to the organs of the party and thus participate in the decision-making process.

The path to non-dogmatic Marxism

At its 33rd Party Congress in 2004, the KPÖ defined itself as a party that was in equal measure; anti-capitalist, feminist and internationalist.²⁴³ This programmatic position, particularly the equivalency of these principles, is new in the party's history, and is the result of a long debate within the party, and of a necessary reorientation process after the collapse of «eastern bloc» socialism in 1989–'90.

Since the mid-1920s, the KPÖ has had a «Marxist-Leninist orientation»,²⁴⁴ in other words, it formulated its politics in close cooperation with the Soviet Union, often displaying obedience even before the order was received. Even in the past, this practice did not go entirely unchallenged within the party; during the 1960s, for example, there was an attempt to implement a Euro-Communist orientation, which was primarily supported by those KPÖ members who had been in exile in Great Britain during the era of Nazi rule. Such tendencies were influenced by Khrushchev's de-Stalinisation policies, and especially by the Prague Spring, in which a synthesis of democracy and eastern bloc socialism had been propagated, for the purpose of providing the latter with a human face. For the dogmatic, «Marxist-Leninist» representatives of the party (who were strictly orientated toward Moscow) these views deviated too far from the traditional line resulting in an open factional conflict. In the course of the contro-

242 *ibid.*

243 KPÖ: Political platform of the KPÖ, access under: [http://www.kpoe.at/index.php?id=78&tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=40&tx_ttnews\[backPid\]=74&cHash=b5d01baad0](http://www.kpoe.at/index.php?id=78&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=40&tx_ttnews[backPid]=74&cHash=b5d01baad0), accessed April 5, 2010.

244 Cf. Baier, 2009, p. 31.

versy regarding the public condemnation of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, the debate at the 20th Party Congress of the KPÖ in 1969 was concluded with victory for the dogmatic faction, which led to the departure of one third of the party's members, mostly intellectuals and trade unionists.²⁴⁵

Sparked by the changes in the then eastern bloc socialist states, a process of reorientation began within the KPÖ, as well. Once again, the polarisation of 1968 emerged, so this process suffered a setback after the failure of the Soviet Perestroika and the resignation of the party leadership in 1991.²⁴⁶ In the ensuing struggle around reorientation, the stage was set that same year for a new understanding of the party and of Marxism. In spite of this basic consensus, a dogmatic wing re-emerged, marked by traditionalist, nationalist,²⁴⁷ and even neo-Stalinist views. The major protagonist here was the traditionalist orientated KPÖ in Styria, which was very active in municipal politics, and with whom the dogmatists attempted to ally. When the conflict escalated as a result of the financial crisis of the party and its partial dispossession by the German state,²⁴⁸ this alliance between the dogmatic faction and the Styrian state organisation fell apart, largely due to the brutal tactics used by the former.

The dogmatic-authoritarian oriented members then broke away and formed the Bolshevik-nationalist «Communist Initiative», and the KPÖ could in 2004 conclude, at least for the time being, its process of a new orientation, in unity with the Styrian state organisation, even if the latter still maintains a somewhat distant relationship to the national party.²⁴⁹

The current programme and ideology²⁵⁰

The point of departure for the current KPÖ programme is an open understanding of Marxism, leading to a critical investigation of the party's own history and tradition, as well as the current applicability of classical Marxism. In the party's view, independent and critical academic work is just as necessary here as recognition of the knowledge gained by political movements outside the sphere of orthodox Marxism, particularly the feminist movement. In its Political Platform, the KPÖ defines itself as a «Marxist party of diversity».

It sees neo-liberal capitalism as an attack on the rights achieved through struggle, to which there is no visible alternative in the dominant, patriarchal social state as it exists

245 Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 123–171

246 Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 193–199.

247 Here, a distinction must be made between the above mentioned right-wing nationalists, who are in effect German nationalists, and the brand of nationalism mentioned here, an Austrian nationalism, which, as stated at the outset, claims a progressive guise, since it rejects Austria being part of «greater Germany».

248 After reunification, the German government claimed ownership of assets of the former East German communist party, the SED, which it saw state, not party, property, including funds which it claimed the KPÖ had obtained from the SED; Germany successfully sued the Austrian party to obtain these funds.

249 Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 222–230.

250 Cf.: KPÖ: Political platform, *op cit.*

in Austria. The stated characteristics of this economic regime include the restructuring of the world of labour by means of «flexibility», undermining of workers' rights and the security of the unemployed in order to intensify the exploitation of labour power, cut-backs in state expenditure on education, social support and cultural affairs, and at the same time, measures to benefit capital and promote capitalist globalisation, which is marked by neo-colonialism and domination by the financial markets. Internationally, these developments are seen as the catalyst in the shake-up of international relations and of a new imperialism around the twin power centres of the USA and the EU. That, and increasing intra-imperialist rivalry raises the spectre of an increased danger of war.

The long-term results of this global development, which are identified as the «intra-capitalist revolution», are interpreted dialectically, to the effect that all local social, political, legal and cultural barriers standing in the way of the global development of the productive forces, including immaterial ones, are being permanently eliminated. This is characterised and driven by technological progress, which increasingly makes human labour power obsolete in industrial production. The production of knowledge too, so the interpretation goes, has become a determining factor here. This on the one hand, engenders a major potential threat, due to qualitatively new forms of exploitation, but on the other hand, also the possibility to move to a new stage of human civilisation.

Social democracy, especially those forms of it oriented toward a «third way», is not seen as an alternative for the current global situation. Like Green politics, not to mention the conservative and nationalist forces, it bases itself on neo-liberal capitalist conditions. Thus, centre-left governments too, even when they present a progressive argument promote current social cutbacks and thus, together with the associated dismantling of democracy, lay the groundwork for right-wing extremism and an all-monitoring police state. At the same time, such a «failure of reformism» also opens up possibilities and opportunities for revolutionary leftists.

The programme accords major significance to the trade unions. However, they have in the past played the role of an enforcer of order in the cooperative system of capital and labour, Austria's so-called «social partnership». Accordingly, a comprehensive reorientation of the labour union movement is seen as necessary, to enable it to react adequately to the prevailing conditions. This, according to the Programme will require focusing on «resistance against the logic of neo-liberal site competition,» involving the incorporation of immigrants, workers subjected to flexibility, and other social movements. Also necessary, moreover, are the dismantling of hierarchical structures in favour of democratisation and the raising of issues specific to women. In spite of these deficits, the Programme sees considerable potential available in the unions, and the KPÖ seeks alliances with them, especially in the various social forums. For the KPÖ, the new social movements, too, constitute a major potential force for change. As the Political Platform states, «this new unity of action is primarily characterised by

the following realisation: whether unionists, rural workers or landless peasants, radical ecology movements or feminists, peace groups, human rights activists, local political initiatives, progressive religious movements and groups, workers movements in the industrial centres, and their progressive political parties – all of them will be crushed by the unbridled neo-liberal capitalist system, if they continue to carry on their struggle against this vastly more powerful opponent in isolation.»

For social movements, local politics fulfils an important function, since «it is located at the interface of government administration and civil society,» and hence «an unavoidable field of action for leftists and communists.» The main issue here is seen as being the strengthening of the ability of the municipalities for action against threats of privatisation, and dismantling the politics of «substitutionism» in favour of «the self-empowerment of people,» according to the Latin American example.

Feminist positions have been adopted into the analysis of the current situation as a cross-sectoral issue. The patriarchal nature both of the old Fordist and the new neo-liberal varieties of capitalism is explicitly raised, and is itself seen as a tool of suppression equally deserving of struggle. In the history of the Austrian communist movement, it is stated, patriarchal and authoritarian tendencies achieved significance, and needed to be removed, not only as a precondition for renewal of the party, but also as a basis for societal emancipation itself. In the KPÖ's Women's Programme,²⁵¹ concrete intraparty rules are provided that go even beyond this political principle, such as a women's' quota of 50% in all bodies, or use of the «zipping» rule (gender alternation) for party procedures.

In summary, the KPÖ defines itself as a «Marxist party of various tendencies, which discusses and determines its politics freely. It upholds diversity of opinion and open debate, respects diversity of approaches and positions, and the full freedom of intra-party criticism and of minority opinions.»²⁵² In strategy and long-term perspective, that means the connection «of radical democratic reformist politics for social progress with revolutionary perspectives for overcoming the existing capitalist society. Its goal is a socialism of democratic character in a classless society, the elimination of the exploitation of people by other people, a caring way of dealing with nature, the elimination of patriarchal structures, and the free development of all human beings.»²⁵³

251 KPÖ: Frauenprogramm der KPÖ, adopted at the 30th Party Congress of the KPÖ in 1997, accessible under: [http://www.kpoe.at/index.php?id=78&tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=42&tx_ttnews\[backPid\]=74&cHash=44635d037c](http://www.kpoe.at/index.php?id=78&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=42&tx_ttnews[backPid]=74&cHash=44635d037c), accessed on April 5, 2010.

252 KPÖ: Statute of the KPÖ, adopted at the 33rd Party Congress of the KPÖ, 2004, accessible under: [http://www.kpoe.at/index.php?id=78&tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=41&tx_ttnews\[backPid\]=74&cHash=f3d0408126](http://www.kpoe.at/index.php?id=78&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=41&tx_ttnews[backPid]=74&cHash=f3d0408126), accessed on April 5, 2010.

253 *ibid.*

The KPÖ and the European Left Party

In the course of the programmatic reorientation of the late '90s, the KPÖ moved closer to other communist and left parties active at the EU level, and finally, in 2004, joined in founding the Party of the European Left. That was however, preceded by a fundamental change in the evaluation of the EU, and the strategic orientation that implied. In 1995, when Austria joined the European Union, the KPÖ had still been fundamentally opposed to that move, but in the ensuing years modified its position to one critical of the EU. The ideological reason for the fundamental rejection had been the party's support for the policy of neutrality, rooted in the Austrian Constitution since 1955, and also its reference to the first theoretical justification for the existence of Austria as a nation separate from Germany, developed by Alfred Klahr in 1937, at the time of the rise of Nazism.²⁵⁴

A widespread scepticism regarding the EU prevails in Austria, which is however not based on any rejection of neo-liberal capitalist policies, but rather to widespread nationalism, which plays into the hands of the right-wing extremist parties, the FPÖ and the BZÖ.²⁵⁵ In its re-evaluation of the EU, the KPÖ took this situation into account, for instance by stating in its Programme of Demands in 2007: «The global and European integration processes in the neo-liberal context are leading to a transnational system of regulation which is directly affecting and dominating the everyday life of people in all nation-states. The intertwining of international economic, social, environmental and health, cultural and other interests is becoming ever tighter. Many questions arising in that context can no longer be solved within the nation-state framework.»²⁵⁶

Thus, the KPÖ, is orientated toward fighting neo-liberal capitalist policies such as the Lisbon EU Treaty, which it interprets as a threat to democracy, and has the perspective of organising pan-European resistance within the context of the European Left Party, and in cooperation with civil society organisations and the new social movements.²⁵⁷

254 Cf. e.g. Schwarz, Vera: Rot-Weiß-Rot bis in den Tod. Manchmal sind auch Kommunist Innen Patriot Innen (Red, white, red to the death: Sometimes communist, too, are patriots). In: Unique, magazine of the ÖH Univ. of Vienna, no. 10/03, accessible online under: <http://www.univie.ac.at/unique/unique/index.php/schwerpunkt/1344-1003-anagramm-nation/2210-rot-weiss-rot-bis-in-den-tod>, accessed on April 5, 2010.

255 Cf. e.g. Furtlehner, Leo: Die Situation der Linken in Österreich In: Daiber, Birgit; Hildebrandt Cornelia (ed.): »Die Linke in Europa. Analysen zu linken Parteien und Parteiallianz«, RLS papers, Berlin 2009, p. 103.

256 KPÖ: Forderungsprogramm KPÖ in Aktion – Partei in Bewegung (the KPÖ in action: the party in motion), adopted at the 34th Party Congress of the KPÖ, 2007. Accessible under: <http://www.kpoe.at/home/positionen/anzeige-positionen/article/30/Beschluss-Forderungsprogramm-KPOE-in-Aktion-Partei-in-Bewegung.html>, accessed on April 5, 2010.

257 Cf. e.g. KPÖ Press Service: KPÖ kündigt Kandidatur bei der EU-Wahl an (KPÖ announces EU election candidacy), Jan. 29, 2009. Access under: <http://www.kpoe.at/home/positionen/themen-archiv/anzeige-themen-archiv/browse/13/article/159/KPOE-kuendigt-Kandidatur-bei-der-EU-Wahl-an.html>, accessed on April 5, 2010.

The KPÖ in the Social Forums

The KPÖ from the outset watched the growth of the Social Forum movement with interest, and in the ensuing period helped build it in Austria, and also at the European level. Although, as noted above, the shine and the euphoria of the initial phase has somewhat worn off, the Social Forum movement is still valued as a necessary and important forum for discussion of civil society, particularly due to the participation of the unions.²⁵⁸

Current challenges

Two elections important for the KPÖ took place in the autumn of 2010: the state and local elections in Vienna, and the state elections in Styria, to which the party sought to re-elect sitting representatives. In Vienna the party faced the challenge of surviving in a race polarised between the dominant SPÖ and the right wing extremist FPÖ, it raised the issues of the relatively low expenditures, compared with other Austrian states for minimum income security, and called for «basic energy security» for households, and abolition of fares on city-owned public transport lines.²⁵⁹ The elections were a major success for the right-wing FPÖ, which doubled its vote to over 25 % at the expense of all other parties; the KPÖ again failed to enter the parliament, where an SPÖ-Green majority emerged. At the level of the Viennese boroughs however, the KPÖ was able to not only defend the seats it had, but also to win several which it had barely missed five years earlier. In Styria, the KPÖ suffered a setback, losing two of its four seats in the state parliament, the only one where it holds any; the right wing also made major gains here; resulting in the left and right blocks being tied.

Organisations close to the KPÖ

The unions and the Workers' Chambers

In the unions and the Workers' Chambers, the KPÖ cooperates with the Left Trade Union Block (GLB), which is both a registered association and an organised faction within both the Austrian Confederation of Labour (ÖGB) and the Workers' Chambers. Programmatically, the stated goal of the GLB is to represent the interests of wage and salary dependent employees, the unemployed, job trainees, retired people and people in precarious jobs. It seeks to combine anti-fascist, anti-racist and anti-discriminatory commitment with a clear class struggle orientation. It rejects the «social partnership» system as a specifically Austrian expression of compromise politics.²⁶⁰ Currently, the GLB is represented in the Workers' Chambers in Vienna and

258 Cf. Hopfgartner, Günther: Europa verändern! (Change Europe) March 4, 2008: <http://www.kpoe.at/nc/home/aktuelles/anzeige-aktuelles/article/20/Europa-veraendern.html>, accessed on April 5, 2010.

259 Cf. KPÖ Vienna: <http://wien.kpoe.at/news/>, accessed on April 6, 2010.

260 Cf. GLB: Statute of the GLB, adopted at the GLB National Conference, 2007. The festival under: <http://news.glb.at/news/article.php/2006022022064786>, accessed on April 6, 2010.

Styria, and in many works councils, especially in social and public facilities, industry and transport systems.²⁶¹ Part of the Austrian University structure is the Austrian National Union of Students (ÖH), which is unique among student representative organisations in Europe, in that it has official bodies at all levels of the university system. At two levels, the national and the local university level, there are bodies which are elected by the students every two years by means of proportional lists.²⁶² The Communist Student Association/Left List (KSV-LiLi) is active within, but also outside of these institutions as an independent organisation with a friendly relationship to the KPÖ. Since 2006, the KSV-LiLi has developed a new quality of openness toward others, particularly non-communist radical leftist students.²⁶³ This was achieved in a struggle with dogmatic neo-Stalinist activists who wanted to ideologically constrict the association into a traditional brand of Marxism-Leninism. The latter group, which is closely tied to the similarly orientated Communist Youth of Austria (KJÖ), is supported by the above described Communist initiative, which split off from the KPÖ, and by the KPÖ in Styria, where it holds one seat at the University of Graz, as it does at the national level.

The KSV-LiLi

The KSV-LiLi is also represented in the National Students' Association; its major stronghold is the University of Vienna, the nation's largest. There, it has for years been involved in the executive of the University Council, in coalition with the Green-Alternative and the Social Democratic student organisations, and in close cooperation with left-wing activist groups involved at the level of university departments, which represent the majority of students in the institutes.²⁶⁴ In the National Students' Association, the KSV-LiLi supports a centre-left coalition of Greens, Social Democrats and representatives of the technical colleges, albeit from a sceptical distance. The KSV-LiLi is actively involved in fighting against the politics of substitutionism, and for the self-empowerment of people. Its formulated politics are based on non-dogmatic Marxism, and equally on a feminist perspective. The activities of the organisation in recent years have been characterised not only by activity in the area of educational policy, such as within the powerful student movement of 2009, but also by anti-fascist, anti-nationalist and feminist interventions and actions.

261 Cf. GLB: <http://news.glb.at/news/index.php?topic=wahlen>, accessed on April 6, 2010.

262 Cf. ÖH Austrian National Union of Students The work of the ÖH, accessible under: <http://www.oeh.ac.at/#/en/home/>, accessed on November 17, 2011.

263 Cf. e.g. KSV-LiLi: KSV-LiLi und ÖH-Wahlen 2007 (The KSV-LiLi and the ÖH elections in 2007): <http://votacomunista.at/news/article.php/20070422194116372>, accessed on April 6, 2010.

264 Cf. e.g. KSV-LiLi: KSV-LiLi wird Gegenpol im reaktionären Mainstream der ÖH sein (The KSV-LiLi will be accountable to the reactionary mainstream at the ÖH), Press release of June 6, 2007, accessible under: <http://votacomunista.at/news/article.php/20070606194943316>, accessed on April 6, 2010.

The Youth Organisation Young Left (JuLi)

The youth organisation Young Left (JuLi) was formed in the course of a political dispute within the KPÖ, which also shook the party's youth organisation, the Communist Youth/Young Left (KJÖ-JuLi); the JuLi broke away and aligned with the KPÖ majority, while the remainder of the organisation abandoned the second half of the name, in accordance with the constriction of its political content. After initially being most active in Upper Austria, following the founding of the Young Left in Vienna in 2009, its activities, largely shifted to the capital. There, its membership consists in equal parts of school pupils, students, trainees and young workers, who due to their pluralistic Marxist basic orientation, are largely active in the area of anti-racism and in educational work.²⁶⁵ In addition, a group calling itself the Young Communist Party of Wels has been founded in Wels, Upper Austria, where it pursues similar politics, and is especially active at the local level in the area of anti-fascism.²⁶⁶ The «Marxist-Leninist» orientated Communist Youth of Austria (KJÖ) sometimes cooperates with the KPÖ at the regional level, particularly in Styria and Tyrol.²⁶⁷

The Anti-Fascist Movement

In recent times, new anti-fascist groups have arisen in many areas of Austria, particularly in Carinthia²⁶⁸ and Vienna. They are struggling not only against the obvious strengthening of parliamentary and extra-parliamentary right-wing extremism, but also against its preconditions, which are manifested in the current Austrian situation. Unlike older anti-fascist groups, these are not anarchistically oriented, but rather support an autonomous un-dogmatic model of communism.²⁶⁹ The major groups are the Carinthian Autonomous Anti-Fascists and the Viennese Autonomous Anti-Fascists (AFAW), which often cooperate in alliances with the KPÖ and with organisations close to it.

The rest of this spectrum of groups oriented toward consistent anti-fascist work is mostly anarchist or gay-feminist oriented, particularly the Vienna Pink Anti-Fascists (RAW).²⁷⁰ Moreover, the Autonomous University Anti-Fascists, now known as the 'AuA! Group'²⁷¹, which do mostly background and theoretical work.

265 Cf. Junge Linke: Wer wir sind und was wir wollen (Who we are, what we want) accessible under: <http://www.junge-linke.at/news/article.php/20090205030619619>, accessed on April 6, 2010.

266 Cf. JKP Wels: <http://jkpwels.wordpress.com/>, accessed on April 6, 2010.

267 Cf. e.g. KPÖ Tirol: Tirol braucht Druck von Links, (Tyrol needs pressure from the left) accessible under: <http://tirol.kpoe.at/news/article.php/20080419090817246>, accessed on April 6, 2010.

268 [zus. FN] Called by its German and Slovenian names, Kärnten/Koroška; the Slovenian minority in the state is the target of right-wing attacks; anti-Slovenian sentiment is a reason why the state is the stronghold of the FPÖ and BZÖ.

269 Cf. e.g. Autonome Antifa Wien: Du bist Kommunismus! Eine Annäherung an den Kommunismus-begriff, (You are communism! An approach to the term communism), accessible under: <http://antifaw.blogspot.de/2009/eleven/eleven/eine-annaecherung-an-den-kommunismus-begriff/>, accessed April 6, 2010.

270 Cf. Rosa Antifa Wien, <http://www.raw.at/>, accessed on April 6, 2010.

271 Cf. Gruppe AuA!, <http://aua.blogspot.de/>, accessed on April 6, 2010.

This spectrum organizes nationwide anti-fascist demonstrations; currently, the major focus is on right-wing extremist fraternities,²⁷² which in Austria provide a link between the parliamentary and the extra-parliamentary far right.

The Anarchist Spectrum

The anarchist movement in Austria is, aside from its anti-fascist activities, primarily orientated toward autonomously managed centres and localities. In recent decades, an active squatters' movement has developed, which regularly calls attention to its issues through its activities, and thus puts a focus on other municipal problems, such as speculation on rental housing in Vienna. This might be an opening for interesting cooperation opportunities with the KPÖ, which also raises issues of mistaken decisions by the SPÖ led government of Vienna. However, the relationship between these two groups has been soured by a massive conflict around a building called the Ernst-Kirchweger-Haus (EKH). In 1990, when it was owned by the KPÖ, it was occupied by a number of anarchist and leftist groups, who set up a number of projects there. In 2004, when the KPÖ lost a major part of its assets to the German state as the result of a German court decision (see FN 239, above), it was plunged into severe financial distress, and sold the occupied house.²⁷³ Although the squat is still in existence and the projects active, this incident was the cause of severe differences between the KPÖ and the anarchist scene in Vienna.

Trotskyist Micro-Parties

There are a large number of Trotskyist oriented groupings, most of which are based in Vienna, and despite their minimal size are strictly regimented party organisations. This form of organisation is in most cases accompanied by an extremely dogmatic political orientation, which generally stands in the way of any joint action by these groupings. Programmatically, they are largely orientated toward the establishment of a proletarian mass party which, by means of coordinated labour struggles, would then overthrow the political system and build socialism. Deserving of mention are for example the Revolutionary Socialist Organisation (RSO), and the group Linkswende (Left Turn).

Other groups concentrate on raising the issue of certain international conflicts, with the Middle East being the principal focus of interest. Here, rhetorical formulations are often used which are capable of connecting to the very widespread anti-Semitism in society.²⁷⁴ In this context, the League for the Socialist Revolution (LSR) and the Anti-Imperialist Coordination (AIK) should be mentioned; they have largely

272 Cf. e.g. Bündnis No WKR, <http://nowkr.wordpress.com/>, accessed on April 6, 2010.

273 Cf. e.g.: KPÖ verkauft besetztes Ernst-Kirchweger-Haus (KPÖ sells occupied Ernst-Kirchweger-Haus), In: Der Standard, Oct. 21, 2004: <http://derstandard.at/1832060>, accessed on April 6, 2010.

274 Cf. e.g. Aktion gegen den Antisemitismus in Österreich: Die Antiimperialistische Koordination (AIK) – Antisemitismus im linken Gewand (The Anti-Imperialist Coordination: Anti-Semitism in leftist guise): <http://www.gegenantsemitismus.at/00012003.php>, accessed on April 6, 2010.

abandoned the idea of class struggle and concentrate on global «national liberation» struggles, i.e., support for ethnic and political nationalisms, and also religious fundamentalism.²⁷⁵

Within the SPÖ, too, Trotskyist «entrist» tendencies exist, which are however largely isolated, due in large part to repressive measures taken by the SPÖ leadership.

In addition to these tendencies, it is necessary to mention the Socialist Left Party (SLP), which also differs from the other groups with respect to its agitation and its rhetoric. It is oriented toward a combination of reformist and revolutionary politics,²⁷⁶ often participates in elections, and in 1996 joined in a cooperative campaign with the KPÖ.²⁷⁷ However, as the election results showed, this cooperative effort was not successful.

A United Left?

The failed results of left coalition candidacies in the past, in which the KPÖ in some cases receive even fewer votes than when it stood alone,²⁷⁸ show that neither the label «left» nor «left party», nor the coalition of a number of groups, tendencies and parties, is sufficient to radically change the Austrian political landscape. For that, it would be first necessary to overcome the garden-parcel character of the left-wing scene, but also to fundamentally re-examine and overcome the specific Austrian conditions. But that is much easier said than done, for the reasons described above.

275 Cf. AIK: Manifest der Antiimperialistischen Koordination (Manifesto of the Anti-Imperialist Coordination) February 20, 2006, <http://www.antiimperialista.org/node/13>, accessed April 6, 2010.

276 Cf. SLP: Was wir wollen. Kurzprogramm der SLP (What we want: Brief Programme of the SLP), <http://www.slp.at/48.html>, accessed April 6, 2010.

277 Cf. e.g. Furtlehner, Leo: Eine Linkspartei, aber wie? June 1, 2008, <http://oe.kpoe.at/news/article.php/20080730141520278>, accessed April 6, 2010.

278 Cf. Furtlehner, in Daiber/Hildebrandt, op cit., pp. 101–2.

Holger Politt

LEFT-WING PARTIES IN POLAND

The long-time front runner – The SLD

From 2001 to 2005 Poland was ruled by its social democratic flagship party, the Democratic Left Alliance (Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej/SLD), which managed, during those four years, to lose three quarters of its support, falling from just below 40 % of the vote in 2001 to just eleven % in the autumn of 2005. The party has yet to recover from this precipitous drop in popularity; all attempts to extricate it from its plight have so far failed. These include a drastic rejuvenation process in the party leadership and an attempt to form a broader centre-left alliance, so as to win over new constituencies, especially in the cities and among younger people. The SLD has remained stuck at – and now below – the 10 % mark in the polls, far behind its moderate-conservative and nationalist-conservative rivals. The party's strongest support is among pensioners, i.e. people who spent their active years in the Polish People's Republic, before 1989. Hence, the SLD shares the fate of many of the so-called «successor parties» to the old communist ruling parties, albeit with a programme very different from some. Moreover, the most recent signs are that any renewal of the Polish left could bypass the SLD.

The post-communist-turned-social-democratic party enjoyed great popularity during the late 1990s, especially among younger people, which has now been lost. In the struggle for the loyalty of these constituencies, the SLD lost out to the strictly market-conservative Civic Platform (*Platforma Obywatelska*/PO), particularly in the mobilisation of younger, well-educated constituencies against the nationalistic-conservative excesses of the brothers Lech and Jarosław Kaczyński and their Law and Justice Party (*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*/PiS), who for a time held both the presidency and the premiership. The PO benefitted almost exclusively, while the SLD lost its trump card, held since the mid-1990s, as Poland's most competent and most pro-EU party, with the message: «We are choosing the future, and leaving the entrenched positions of

the past behind us. Our goal is entry to the EU and integration into the transatlantic structures, and we take a clear stand for the development of a «modern society».»

The party is now faced with a choice between making itself a clearly identifiable left-wing force with a strong emphasis on social justice, or seeking in the medium term to find a place in the political centre, either as a possible parliamentary partner of the ruling PO, or as its chief rival, with a liberal agenda. In opinion poll surveys asking what alternative the supporters of other parties might consider voting for, the SLD was in the lead in 2010. Apparently, it was everybody's second-favourite party – especially that of PO adherents – but not so many people's favourite, as the results of the 2011 election indicated. Influential party strategists therefore saw great potential for the party. However, its claim to be a party of social justice was being undermined by its inability to deliver. Notably, voters concerned with social welfare issues were switching to Jarosław Kaczyński's PiS (Lech, the president, was killed in an aeroplane crash). His closest supporters then split off and launched a new party, the PJN, which added extravagant social-welfare promises to the PiS's cleric-nationalism, but failed to enter the Sejm, the lower house of the Polish parliament.

The young Party Chair Grzegorz Napieralski who took office in the summer of 2008, called for another approach, geared more toward the country's social issues and the trade unions; he favoured a clear left-wing trend within the framework of the Party of European Socialists (PES), modelled on the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party, especially its leader, Jose Zapatero. In 2010 however, Napieralski and his followers suffered inner-party defeats on such issues as how to respond to the governments drastic cuts to early retirement. In the European Parliamentary elections of 2009, the SLD leadership opted in favour of a united social democratic list including representatives of other left parties; the List won seven seats in Brussels. After the party's disastrous showing in the 2011 election, Napieralski was ousted by former Chair Leszek Miller. Although the SLD officially sees itself as a modern, up-to-date left-wing political force, there is no escaping its lack of popularity among two important voter categories – younger people and women. And although it is at pains to pay due attention to gender issues, it tends to lose sight of them in the rough and tumble of day-to-day politics, and in its battles with the two big right-wing parties. It is true there are well-known female politicians both in the SLD and associated with it, but when it comes to real decision-making powers, they have often been marginalised, with men having the ultimate say. Perhaps it is no accident that for some years now, the share of men among SLD voters has predominated. This was not the case at the time of its great election successes of 1993, 1995 and 2001. Some observers predict that the SLD will suffer the same fate as other parties with similar histories elsewhere in east-central Europe.

But even for some years after its heyday, the SLD continued to be a dominant factor among Poland's left-wing and left-leaning forces. Until recently, no other force succeeded in establishing itself as a strong permanent presence alongside the SLD;

all other groupings had a hard time emerging from its huge shadow. In almost every respect, it was superior to all others – in accumulated experience of parliamentary work, in its sophistication, in the number of its experienced leaders, and in its financial resources. It still has roots in all parts of the country, experience in election campaigning, has held power for many years, is integrated into the European political structures, and has a broad intellectual milieu around it. The fact that the party in years gone by was not able to integrate these assets adequately has been shown by its recent setbacks. One frequently heard conclusion drawn by other leftists is that only the complete downfall of the SLD could clear the way for a genuine new beginning for the left in Poland. As late as 2010, it seemed clear that any attempt to bring such a situation into being might soon turn out to be a foolhardy blunder. Since the 2011 election however, that assessment is open to question.

Other social democratic options

The most loyal grouping at the side of the SLD is the Union of Labour (*Unia Pracy/UP*), which began life as a left-wing splinter group that broke away from *Solidarność* and has gone through some politically turbulent times since. Although several party chairs (including one party chairwoman!) have thrown away their party cards, the party still exists. And although its great days, when it held ministerial posts and had influence in the country, are presumably gone forever, the party long benefited from state financing, thanks to its participation in the LID alliance in the 2007 election, even though it had won no seats in the Sejm. It sees itself as social democratic, explaining that it differs from the SLD primarily in terms of political pedigree; nonetheless, it has always been a reliable ally of the SLD. But it has also been a model of political decency, important for a party system in which personal ambitions are frequently a substitute for sober political calculation. The party has had no election successes in recent years and has few options for merging with other parties, favouring broader left-wing electoral alliances which might enhance its own chances. The UP sees itself as a kind of «ecumenical» force on the Polish Left, that could also imagine teaming up with forces to the left of social democracy. The UP is a member of the Socialist International. Like the SLD, it sees itself as a «pro-European force» that works to further EU integration. Unlike the SLD, it traditionally places more emphasis on social justice, for the stability of the body politic, and the development of society. Despite its *Solidarność* origins and its name, it has few close ties with the unions, but popular with the left-liberal spectrum, and has always stressed emancipatory issues – such as the protection of minorities – more vigorously than the SLD.

The Polish Social Democracy (*Socjaldemokracja Polska/SDPI*) was founded in 2004 by former prominent members of the SLD, led by Marek Borowski, who justified the move with the critical observation that the other parties, especially the SLD, were helping themselves to state resources. The SDPI sees itself as social democratic, although it does not qualify for admission to the Socialist International. It is a strongly

«pro-European» force. It went before the voters for the first time in the EP elections of June 2004, winning several seats in a surprise result; like those of the SLD and UP, its MEPs sat with the Socialist Parliamentary Group. Its greatest electoral success came in the autumn of 2007, when it won ten seats as part of a centre-left bloc LID. After the election, in early 2008, the SLD leadership then provoked the disintegration of the LID by trying to expel the liberal Democratic Party (PD) from the group. Borowski and the SDPL tried to preserve the alliance, but it dissolved in 2010 after a profound intra-party crisis in the SDPL, which greatly weakened it. It did not stand in the 2011 election, and no longer has seats in the European Parliament.

The little party Polish Left (Polska Lewica/PL) was founded in September 2007, when former SLD chair and Prime Minister Leszek Miller left the SLD in protest against the formation of the LID. In some parts of the country, he succeeded in setting up viable structures; however, his party failed to attain the minimum threshold for representation in the 2007 election, and was unable to find a firm place in the left-wing spectrum. The SLD offered Miller a spot on its united Social Democratic List for the EP elections in June 2009. He declined, but the next year came back to the SLD, and took over the chair again in December 2011. Despite this turn of events, the PL still exists.

Options to the left of the social democracy

The Polish Socialist Party (Polska Partia Socjalistyczna/PPS), with its eleven5-year-old tradition, is one of the oldest socialist or left-wing parties in all of Europe. At present however, the party is going through a serious internal crisis. The number of active members has fallen steadily in recent years, and it has had no electoral successes to speak of since 1997. Even at the local-government level, there is hardly a glimmer of hope for it, and it is racked by violent internal disputes, with the decisions of the last two party congresses even being challenged in the courts, which has reinforced an existing solipsistic tendency. Over the years, the party has been increasingly unable to present itself as an electable alternative.

And yet the PPS bears what is perhaps the most attractive party profile on the Polish left. Its members proudly claim the title of Polish Socialists and its entire long history. It had always supported social justice, democratic socialism, and Polish independence, and has fought for them with numerous sacrifices, so it is painful to see how little these things seem to count in its present political activities. And there have been various proposals in the party as to how to extricate it from its present predicament. First and foremost is that the party should join forces with others, without, however, abandoning its own identity or its own organisation. Another is to seek ways of uniting other smaller groupings under the PPS banner. A minority urges the party to make a virtue of necessity, see itself as primarily an extra-parliamentary force, and concentrate its activities exclusively on that. In the 1990s, the PPS tried to become a member of the Socialist International, but like the SDPL later, was not admitted, as

two Polish parties belonged to it already. The PPS is more critical of the EU than the social democratic parties.

Another grouping is the *Reason Party of the Polish Left (Partia Racja Polskiej Lewicy/ PR)*, which, unlike Poland's other left-wing parties, has concentrated on the failure to observe the constitutionally prescribed separation of church and state.

Both the SLD and the PPS say they don't want to wage «war against God» – meaning they are more or less resigned to the concordat between with the Vatican, although the PR does criticize the Church's effective monopoly on moral, philosophical and ideological issues.

From 2007 to 2011, the party chair was Maria Szyszkowska, one of the best-known female personalities on the left, having made a name for herself in Poland as a stout champion of minority rights and peace in the world. She has succeeded in giving greater space to questions of civil rights and democratic participation in the work of the party. Thus the PR is what might be called the civil rights party on the Polish left. The party works consistently for the observance and expansion of social rights and for social justice, and sees EU as providing integration opportunities for the further development of Polish society.

As the party sees little chance of clearing the percentage hurdles in parliamentary elections on its own, it is always on the look-out for allies. In the summer of 2007, the PR and other groupings launched an initiative called the «Congress for an Alliance of the Left» (*Kongres Porozumienia Lewicy*).

The PPP

Another party that sees itself as part of the left-wing spectrum is the Polish Labour Party PPP (*Partia Pracy Polska/PPP*), which is backed by the small trade union *Sierpień 80* (August 80), which engages in radical rhetoric. The union's membership is assumed to be less than 10,000, mostly workers in the coal-mining industry. The PPP itself is estimated to have far fewer than 1000 members, almost all of whom are also members of *Sierpień 80*.

The chair of both organisations is Bogusław Ziętek, who has opposed the EU, but has discovered a «social Europe» as a left-wing project in which it would like to participate. He sees his party as the only real left-wing force in Poland, the only real workers' party, with close union ties, and consistent opposition to privatisation. The PPP must be Poland's party with the lowest proportion of women – nearly all its members are men.

The PPP is run on authoritarian principles; its chair is almost all powerful. The party's stated purpose is the strict defence of an independent Poland, although it also takes a strictly «anti-capitalist» line, which apparently means mostly the struggle against privatisation. It calls NATO a terrorist organisation, and opposed «NATO's criminal war» in Iraq; it sees Poland's membership in the EU as a one-way street to Poland's detriment. The party has or has had ties with French right-wing extremist

Jean Le Pen, and with the Catholic Radio Maryja, which is anathema to most leftists. The PPP does not cooperate with left parties. Its main foe is the SLD, which it has described as an «anti-worker party»; it calls PR leader Maria Szyszkowska «politically venal», and regularly insinuates corruption by other trade unions. Two thirds of PPP voters consider themselves part of the conservative camp.

The 2011 election and a new party: The RP

The parliamentary elections in Poland in the autumn of 2011 brought some cataclysmic changes to the left side of the political spectrum. The big losers were the Left Democratic Alliance, the SLD, which dropped even further, to 8.2% of the vote, their worst result in history. The SLD's typical potential voter up to that point were people lived for some time during the period of the People's Republic of Poland, i.e. prior to the overthrow the regime in 1989. This potential has been largely exhausted. These tried-and-tested core SLD voters could not, despite their above-average degree of voter discipline, prevent the catastrophe. The future of the SLD will now depend to a large extent on whether it can attract new electoral strata. Many observers currently believe that it will have a hard time doing so. In recent years, the SLD has continually attempted to win over key groups of voters, especially from the governing Civic Platform (PO) under Donald Tusk. Grzegorz Napieralski, the party chair from 2008 to 2011, saw himself as the right man for that job, primarily due to his youth. His election campaign was largely aimed at forming a coalition government with the PO. This exclusive orientation is seen as one of the key reasons for the electoral debacle.

SLD in this election lost its previous monopoly of dominance among the left or social democratically oriented parties in Poland. That title has now been taken by the «Palikot Movement» (Ruch Palikota/RP), named after its leader, Janusz Palikot, which did not even nominate its list until the summer of 2011. This party has now entered the Sejm claiming to lead opinion among the left-oriented forces in Poland. The RP won 10% of the vote off the bat, concentrating on such demands as a strict separation of church and state, as the Constitution demands, and with other issues regarding the philosophy of life. Unlike the SLD, the RP called openly during the campaign for the legal equality for sexual minorities. All in all, it was able to raise issues which were especially attractive to young voters, winning 20% of the vote of those under 30, and out-polling all other parties among first-time voters.

While the SLD never succeeded in luring significant numbers of voters away from the PO, the RP was able to attract 700,000 voters who had voted for Tusk's ruling party in 2007. Palikot himself was a PO Member of the Sejm until December 2010, when he withdrew from the party and resigned his seat. He is now trying to give the left-liberal camp in Poland a new profile. Pollsters have so far been split with regard to his chances of success. Many have compared the success of the RP with the rise of the Pirate Party in Germany during the summer of 2011.

The PPP lost half its previous 1 % of the vote. Party Chairman Ziętek then announced that the party would in future seek a more nationalistic, i.e., EU-sceptical profile. Although the SLD and the RP emphasize their pro-European position – for good reason – the PPP seems to be moving toward nationalist-conservative and nationalist-patriotic positions.

Table 1: Overview of electoral results and seats won

Party		2011 election			2007 election		
Name	Abbr.	%	Votes	Seats	%	Votes	Seats
Civic Platform (conservative)	PO	39.18	5,629,773	207	41.51	6,701,010	209
Law and Justice Party (nationalist-conservative)	PiS	29.89	4,295,016	157	32.eleven	5,183,477	166
Palikot Movement (left-libertarian)	RP	10.02	1,439,490	40			
Polish People's Alliance (centrist-peasant party)	PSL	8.36	1,201,628	28	8.91	1,437,638	31
Democratic Left Alliance* (social democratic)	SLD	8.24	1,184,303	27	13.15	2,122,981	53
Poland is Most Important (populist-nationalist)	PJN	2.9	315,393	-			
Polish Labour Party (left-nationalist)	PPP	0.55	79,147	-	0.99	160,476	-

* In 2007, the SLD stood as part of the combined list «Left and Democrats» (LiD), together with the SDPL and the UP, and the small liberal PD (see above). These figures thus refer to the entire LiD.

Stanislav Holubec

THE CZECH RADICAL LEFT

The Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSČM) was founded in 1990, as a regional organisation of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSČS). After the split of the party into Czech and Slovak parts, the KSČM became a successor of the pre-1989 official ruling party in The Czech Republic. Since the beginning of the nineties, the KSČM has been the third strongest party in Czech politics. It has polled election results ranging between 10 and 20 per cent of the vote (1990: 13 %, 1992: 14 %, 1996: 10 %, 1998: eleven %, 2002: 18 %, 2006: 13 %). Since 1996, the Social-Democratic Party (ČSSD), which was also the ruling party between 1998 and 2006, has been able to present itself as the strongest party in the centre-left spectrum. During this period, the KSČM has easily been able to distinguish itself as the left opposition, which has won it the support of many disappointed ČSSD voters.

The representation of social groups in the KSČM

The strongest group in the membership base of the KSČM is that of pensioners, who accounted for 67.4 % of all members in 2003;²⁷⁹ workers (13.6 %), intellectuals and officials (approx. 10 %) are minorities within the party; the unemployed and small businesspeople are even fewer. Notable amongst the membership is the number of former policemen and army officers and of lower functionaries of the former official party. Three of the 26 KSČM MPs were army officers before the political change, and one, Josef Vondruska, was a prison guard in a prison which also held political prisoners. Complaints by dissidents about his brutality brought him and the whole

²⁷⁹ Cf. Obsahové materiály VI. sjezdu KSČM Zpráva ÚV KSČM o činnosti KSČM v období po V. sjezdu KSČM, (Materials. VIth Congress, KSČM CC Report on the activities of the KSČM since the Vth Congress), p. 52, in: <http://www.KSČM.cz/article.asp?thema=2859&item=24140>, accessed Jan. 10, 2009.

party many political problems after the 2006 elections.²⁸⁰ He did not apologize, but rather commented to the effect that he had «protected honest citizens from various parasites» there. Vondruska is an MP to this day, and court proceedings against him have not yet been initiated.

The membership of the KSČM has been shrinking continually since the political change of 1989. In 1991, it was still 562,529, but in the first year after the upheaval, many members withdrew.²⁸¹ This involved primarily younger and better educated members; in 1989, the proportion of members with higher-education degrees was still 19%, but by 1999, that figure had shrunk to 9.2%. The only ones who stayed were those for whom KSČM membership involved no impairment of their careers, especially people of retirement age. After 1996, membership figures stabilised at 171,323. Although members have since that time no longer left the party on a massive scale, they are gradually dying, accounting for an annual loss of approx. 6–7% of KSČM membership.²⁸² As of January 1, 2008, the party had 77,115 members, so that the KSČM had a relatively large membership figure, compared with other Czech parties. However, only 7.9% of KSČM members joined the party since the political change (2007 figures).

The shrinking number of members is leading to the feminisation of the party. The average age of party members was 70 in 2008; only 18,217 members were younger than sixty, and today, 44% of members are women.²⁸³ The feminist organisation, Fórum 50%, has described the KSČM as the second or third most pro-women party in Czechia.²⁸⁴ The Czech Greens are the only party which has introduced a quota for women, and they also have the highest share of women in their parliamentary group, with four of the six members. The ČSSD also has various mechanisms which give an advantage to women, however, so that 15.4% of its parliamentary group consists of women. The Communists have two women amongst the five party vice-leaders (between 2004 and 2007, however, there were none), and 27% of the parliamentary group consists of women.

Almost no immigrants are active in the party, although several members with different nationalities play an important role in the KSČM. These include the children of Greek Communists who emigrated to Czechoslovakia during the '50s, notably the singer Statis Prusalis, and students from the Third World who came to Czechoslovakia

280 Josef Vondruška, *Kdo je vyvrhel?* (Who is an outcast?), *Haló noviny*, 4. září 2006, p. 5.

281 Cf. Vladimír Handl: *Transformace komunistické strany: «Od strategie levicového ústupu k evropeizaci»* (Transformation of the Communist Party: «From the strategy of leftist retreat toward Europeanisation»), in: A. Gjuríčová, M. Kopeček (ed.): *Kapitoly z dějin české demokracie po roce 1989*. (Chapters in the History of Czech democracy after 1989) Litomyšl 2000, p. 100.

282 Cf. KSČM: *Historie*, in: <http://volby.KSČM.cz/index.asp?thema=3334&category=>, accessed Jan. 10, 2009.

283 Cf. Fórum 50%: *Strana otevřená ženám 2008* (Woman-Friendly Parties) in: http://www.padesatprocent.cz/?c_id=575, accessed Jan. 10, 2009.

284 Cf. KSČM: *Vznik KSČM* (formation) in: <http://www.KSČM.cz/index.asp?thema=2677&itmID=24002&chapter=1297>, accessed Jan. 10, 2009.

before 1989 and stayed, like Syrian Hassan Charfo, head of the foreign section of the CC. The immigrants living in Czechia today are not active in politics, they often do not have Czech citizenship, and their children are not old enough yet to be active politically. Because of their specific age distribution and due, too, to the nationalist rhetoric of its functionaries, the KSČM is hardly interesting at all for immigrants as a party, nor is it likely to become so in future. This also is due to the relatively low number of immigrants in Czechia, compared, for example, with France or Germany.

Another problem for the KSČM involves the Roma people (Gypsies). This minority makes up approx. 3–5% of the Czech population, and exists in a very precarious social situation. The political activity of the Roma is rather low. It is assumed that of the few who do vote, many vote KSČM; no relevant Roma party exists. Moreover, the KSČM has no politicians from this community. When Czech neo-Nazis marched through the Janov neighbourhood of the city of Litvinov in northern Bohemia on November 17, 2008, the KSČM issued no official statement of condemnation.²⁸⁵ The internal explanation was that the party did not want to provoke its own voters. The party newspaper *Haló Noviny* even published an article which stated: «The march of the right-wing radicals was not the cause, but rather the result of existing conditions, in which the police are either unable or unwilling to stand up for the citizens who are being attacked or annoyed by this lumpen proletariat,» (i.e., the Roma).²⁸⁶ However, other articles in this party organ warn against right-wing extremism.

The position of the KSČM in politics and society

In terms of the size of municipalities, the party has its strongest position in smaller towns and villages. The party is particularly weak in Prague, which has been a winner from the transformation process.²⁸⁷ In 2006, it won only 7.9% of the votes here, compared with 12.8% nationwide. The situation is similar in other cities with more than 100,000 inhabitants, where the Left, Communists and Social Democrats together have never won an election since the political change. The only exception is in certain northern Moravian towns, where the KSČM ruled between 2002 and 2006 in coalition with the Social Democrats. In fact, it provided the mayors of Havířov (84,000 inhabitants) and Karviná (62,000). After 2006 however, the Social Democrats decided to form coalitions with other parties.

Regionally, the KSČM has a particularly strong position in northern Bohemia and northern Moravia, regions with a traditional industrial sector which has been affected particularly heavily by unemployment since the political change. The party has also achieved good election results in the formerly German-speaking border areas, where

285 Stated during an interview by the author with party chair Jiří Dolejš on Dec. 15, 2008.

286 Jan Minář: Příčina a následek (Cause and Effect), in: *Haló Noviny* 4 Dec. 2008, p. 4.

287 Cf. Volby do Poslanecké sněmovny Parlamentu České republiky konané ve dnech, 2–3 June 2006, in: <http://www.volby.cz/pls/ps/2006/ps9?xjazyk=CZ>, accessed 10 January 2009.

the Czech population was settled only after 1945. Here, the party has won votes partly out of fear of possible claims by the Sudeten Germans. Another reason is that the population here sees the Communists as those who gave them their land and houses. Finally, many former border guards who were settled here by the communist regime still live in many of these villages. Perhaps this explains the persistent loyalty of these areas to the Communist Party.

The KSČM is strongly oriented towards parliamentary practice. Since 2006, its parliamentary group has held 26 of a total of 200 parliamentary seats. In the Senate, with its majority voting electoral system, the KSČM has never held more than three out of eighty-one seats. Since 1998, the party's votes have been very important for the ČSSD, without which they could have passed only a few bills. However, the Communists have also in a few cases voted with the ODS, as for example in the election of Vaclav Klaus to his first presidential term in 2004. KSČM MPs have also held the position of vice president of the parliament since 2002, as well as one or two committee chairs. Nevertheless, the Social Democrats have declined to form a common government with the Communists, and prefer to accept the support of the KSČM for their minority government. The ČSSD sees a coalition with the KSČM as impossible until the KSČM deals critically with its past, apologises for its crimes, and accepts private property and Czech membership in NATO. However, these demands have been unacceptable for the KSČM to date. The Social Democrats and Communists never had a majority at the regional level until 2008, the only exception being in North Bohemia after the 2000 elections, but here the ČSSD preferred a coalition with the ODS. Since October 2008, things have changed; the ČSSD and the KSČM together won a majority in all thirteen regions with the exception of Prague, where no regional elections were held.²⁸⁸ The ČSSD and KSČM formed coalition governments in two regions, Karlovy Vary and North Moravia; in four regions the KSČM tolerates a ČSSD minority government; and in seven regions, the ČSSD has formed coalitions with other parties, in five cases with the ODS. Since 2006, the KSČM has ruled in only one major city, Most, with 70,000 inhabitants, where it has provided the deputy mayor. The KSČM has mayors in 132 smaller villages, of whom thirty are party members.²⁸⁹ Prior to the 2006 local elections, however, it was 372.

The following table of the election results of 2006 shows that primarily older people with low education and lower income who vote for the left in The Czech Republic.²⁹⁰ This applies primarily to the KSČM, but also to some extent to the ČSSD. Gender has no great effect on voting behaviour. Two factors play the most important role

288 Cf. Všech třináct krajů zná své hejtmany, 29 November 2008, in: http://kralovehradecko.regiony24.cz/ak_tualne/vypis.aspx?id_clanku=42934, accessed 10 January 2009.

289 Personal interview with Petr Šimůnek and Ivan Dvořák of the staff of the CC of the KSČM, 10 January 2008.

290 Income and education are extremely dependent on age: In many cases, being old also means being poor. The older generations also had fewer possibilities to obtain higher education than does the present one.

for voting behaviour in The Czech Republic: social stratum and, possibly even more significantly, age. When seeking an explanation for the disproportionate support for the KSČM amongst older citizens, it is necessary to remember that the various generations in The Czech Republic during the 20th Century were socialised under the influence of very different political discourses, which brought forth very different political opinions; the war, the fifties, the sixties, the seventies and eighties, the post-political change period. Moreover, the older generations were the first victims of the transformation after the political change. Their pensions dropped relative to wages, and they were blamed for the existence of «communism».

The parliamentary elections in The Czech Republic in 2006: ²⁹¹

Analysis of voting groups

Despite its stable position as the third strongest vote-getter, and the strongest membership base after the Social Democrats (ČSSD) and the conservative Civic Democrats (ODS), the KSČM does not play a commensurate role in society. The media predominantly have an anti-communist orientation, the old age of the party's member's makes communication with middle-aged and younger generations more difficult, and the KSČM lacks support amongst the societal elites, activists, civil society, artists, and professionally active academics. It should not be forgotten, moreover, that active engagement in the KSČM carries with it a real threat to one's career in The Czech Republic. The KSČM of course has no business lobby.

The non-parliamentary work of parties is not very widespread in The Czech Republic. Most citizens keep their distance from politics, and the KSČM has few activists able to communicate with broader society. The KSČM organises demonstrations of its own only very seldomly. Its events are rather such regular public festivals as May 1st, the press day of the Haló Noviny in September, and meetings of leftists in Kunitická Hora in September and in Lázek in July. The party's politics are otherwise known primarily from the media, from public appearances of its politicians, from the party newspaper Haló Noviny, and from the work of its 4264 local councillors²⁹² and eleven⁴ members of regional parliaments.²⁹³

The front organisations of the party gather the party members according to interest groups. The anti-Sudeten Germans are members of the «Club of the Czech Border Areas», the anti Roman Catholics, of the «Club of Freethinkers», and the salaried employees of the Federation of Trades Unions of Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia, which

291 Sources: A. Voliči, T. Lebeda, L. Linek, P. Lyons, K. Vlachová: Sociologický ústav AV ČR, Prague 2006/2007, p. 8–9; Volby do Poslanecké sněmovny Parlamentu České republiky konané ve dnech, 2–3 June 2006, in: <http://www.volby.cz/pls/ps2006/ps3?xjazyk=CZ>, accessed 10 January 2009.

292 Cf. Volby do zastupitelstev obcí, in: <http://www.volby.cz/pls/kv2006/kv22eleven5?xjazyk=CZ&xid=0&xv=10&xid=6&xnumnuts=0>, accessed 10 Jan, 2009.

293 Cf. Volby do zastupitelstev krajů konané dne, 17–18 October 2008, in: <http://www.volby.cz/pls/kz2008/kz63?xjazyk=CZ&xdatum=20081017>, accessed 10 January 2009.

is however rather weak in comparison with the main trade union organisation. The women also have an organisation of their own. The youth organisation Federation of Communist Youth was strongly Stalinist oriented (e.g. it had the hammer and sickle as its symbol, although the symbol of the KSČM itself has been a red cherry since the political change). This organisation was shut down by the Czech Home Office in 2008, which sparked many protests from abroad, primarily because various right-wing extremist organisations were able to operate freely at the same time.

The Czech trade unions are officially non-partisan, but they support the ČSSD in practice. The trade unions functionaries nevertheless have good personal relations to the KSČM. For instance; they regularly give interviews to the communist newspaper *Haló Noviny*. The social movements, Trotskyists, anarchists, and the environmental and feminist movements, have generally been weak in The Czech Republic since the political change, and hostile towards the KSČM. This situation changed to some extent in 2006 when the party started a successful initiative against the planned U.S. radar base («Ne základnám»). Many KSČM members are involved in this initiative, and representatives of the initiative speak at communist demonstrations. The Federation of Communist Youth was also a collective member of the initiative, but it was eventually excluded because of its Stalinist agitation at the demonstrations.

The orientation of the public discourse in The Czech Republic is strongly neo-liberal and right-wing conservative. With the exception of the *Haló Noviny*s and to some extent the *Pravo*, Communists cannot publish their articles in major newspapers and magazines. KSČM politicians are invited to many political television programmes, but unlike other politicians, rarely to non-political talk-shows. At the political talk-shows, the moderators often display their own political opinions, and discriminate against the KSČM politicians in various ways. Recent TV documentaries have also been anti-communist-oriented. The anti-communism in the public discourse is primarily aimed at the KSČM, but indirectly also at the ČSSD, whose role as a future ruling party is to be weakened by limiting its coalition potential.

The programmatic, strategic orientation of the party

Programmatically, the KSČM is part of the traditional left in Europe. On the one hand, its programme does not include the radical slogans familiar from many European parties which define themselves as communist, such as the Greek and Portuguese CPs; on the other, it is cut off from the discourse of today's emancipative, feminist and ecological left. The KSČM understands its programme, in the short term, as a «corrective» to that of the Social-Democratic Party, and in the long term, as an independent project for «socialism». The short-term demands and solutions in its programme are very similar to those of the Social Democrats;²⁹⁴ the party states that its primary

294 Zaměření politiky a hlavní úkoly KSČM v období mezi VII. a VIII. sjezdem strany, in: <http://www.KSČM.cz/article.asp?thema=3784&item=38464>, accessed 10 January 2009.

goal is the «transition from the capitalist social structure to a socially more just society – socialism.»²⁹⁵ The KSČM defines socialism as «a democratic society which, due to its prospering economy and full employment, will protect the political, personal, economic and social rights of all people.»

In everyday politics, the KSČM rather plays the role of a critic of existing society. It defends the past of its members, and emphasises the positive aspects of the pre-1989 regime in comparison with today's reality. Most frequently, the KSČM expresses criticism of decisions of the government, right-wing and neo-liberal parties, and the media which report negatively about the KSČM. As regards foreign affairs, its strongest criticism is directed at the USA, with the European Union and Israel following close behind. The KSČM speaks positively about Russia and China, and the communist press reports in a particularly friendly manner about Cuba and Venezuela, and to some extent about Belarus.²⁹⁶ It keeps some distance from North Korea, but does regularly publish the press releases of the North Korean embassy in Prague in its party newspaper *Haló Noviny*.

The KSČM strives actively to assume governmental responsibility at the regional level, but is not really clear about the question of governmental responsibility at the national level. Within the KSČM, the opinion predominates that that the party would rapidly lose its voter base if it were to participate in government. Its official position is that the KSČM would only want to participate in a government in which the realisation of its party programme were possible. The party itself prefers the option of a toleration of a Social-Democratic minority government.

In social conflicts, the KSČM generally supports the «weak», the «underprivileged» and the «discriminated»; however, due to the structure of its membership and its functionaries, it is not in a position to help these groups effectively. The trade unions do not want its open support, nor do social movements or citizens' action groups, since that would stigmatise their entire cause as «communist». It is also necessary to emphasise that social conflicts in The Czech Republic seldom adopt a demonstrative character, i.e., there are fewer demonstrations or strikes than in other European countries.

The present economic crisis is described by the KSČM as something which flows completely logically from the evolutionary trends of capitalism. For its short-term struggle, the party generally prefers Keynesian solutions, but emphasises that only socialism represents a long-term solution. As of January 2009, the economic crisis is not discussed much in The Czech Republic on the whole, either within the KSČM or in public discourse. Controversial topics which dominate public debate include the

295 Ibid.

296 Cf. e.g. Korea musí být sjednocena formou konfederace, in: *Haló noviny*, 18 October 2004; Sloužíme lidu! In: *Haló noviny*, 7 October 2004; Zkušený politik Kim Čong-il, in: *Haló noviny*, 14 February 2005; Výročí úmrtí prezidenta Kima, in: *Haló noviny*, 8 July 2006; KLDŘ slaví příchod republiky pod Kimem, in: *Haló noviny*, 9 September 2006.

reforms of the neo-liberal government, the relationship towards the Lisbon Treaty, the Czech Council presidency of the EU, and such foreign policy questions as the American radar programme already mentioned, and relations with Russia and Israel.

The European policy concepts of the KSČM

Traditionally, the KSČM appears to be an EU-sceptical party. The party's point of departure is always the tradition of the nation-state. In the 2003 referendum over Czech membership in the EU, the KSČM was the only parliamentary party to reject membership. However, its «no» was a «weak no», not a «strong no»; i.e., the KSČM also noted the advantages of membership as well as disadvantages. Some KSČM politicians like Ransdorf, Dolejš and Kohlíček even stated that they intended to vote «yes» in the referendum. Similarly, the KSČM rejected the European Constitution and the Lisbon Treaty, arguing that the EU project was neo-liberal in its direction, and that Czech society would lose its national identity in such an EU. Nor has the KSČM accepted full membership in the Party of the European Left. It was originally disoriented, was accepted as a founding member, but then settled for observer status. They did become full members of the Party of Democratic Socialism, a grouping with no political influence and which does not run in elections. The KSČM's justification for this was, first, that not all European communist parties were invited to join the European Left (primarily the Russian, Ukrainian and Moldavian Communists were left out), and that the KSČM could not accept the rejection of Stalinism. At the founding party congress of the EL in Rome, a KSČM delegate explained this position by saying that Stalin had liberated the Czechs.²⁹⁷ Moreover, the KSČM justified the rejection of full membership by saying it did not want to lose its identity in a non-communist party, nor did it want to have smaller parties dictating its policies to it, and that the planned membership dues were too high for the KSČM. The head of the Department of International Relations, Hassan Charfo, preferred to align the KSČM with the positions of the Greek Communists.

Traditionally, The KSČM has had good contacts with the Slovak Communists and the Left Party in Germany. This is due to their being neighbours, their common fate, and the fact that the two CP parties are the only politically relevant forces in east-central Europe to the left of the social democrats. This close relation has nevertheless been weakened in recent years, because the German Left has in the opinion of the KSČM moved too far towards the centre. Some KSČM members participate in the European Social Forum. However, this initiative is not of any great importance for the party. The KSČM also participates in regular meetings of communist and workers' parties across Europe.

297 Cf. Stanislav Holubec: *Vznikla Strana evropské levice*, 12 May 2004, in: http://www.sds.cz/docs/prectete/epubl/sho_vscl.htm, accessed 10 January 2009.

Organisational structure and the party's self-definition

The highest party organ of the KSČM is the Party Congress, which meets once every four years and elects the Party Chair and the Chair of the Decision and Auditing Commission. The KSČM delegates are elected at assemblies of the district organisations.²⁹⁸ The Party Congress votes on the party programme and various party calls (always at the last day of the Party Congress: For example, on the issue of young people, on various members and sympathisers of the ČSSD, on small and medium-sized businesses, on the radical left in Europe, against the American military base, against government policies). Although the Party Congress is formally the highest organ of the party, the material dealt with there is prepared beforehand by the party apparatus, and the delegates usually need only accept it. The choice of the party leader is practically the only competitive vote. The second important function of the Party Congress is that delegates can speak freely about the policy of the party, which they in fact do, albeit without any real practical effect.

The highest party organ during periods between Party Congresses is the Central Committee (CC), which has approx. ninety members. This organ meets four times a year. The agents of the district committees sit in the CC. The members of the CC are elected by the district committees. Notably, the Central Committee elects the vice-chairs of the party at its first meeting. The «Executive Committee,» which consists of 20-three members elected by the CC, meets more often than the CC. No other platforms exist in the KSČM, they have been banned since 1993 because their existence caused many inner-party conflicts. No minority votes are authorised in case of strategic, programmatic questions. And while the Party Statute does provide for referenda within the party, the last one was held in 1991, to choose the party's name.

The greatest power in the KSČM is in the hands of the mid-level functionaries who shape the CC. These also provide the largest share of municipal and regional politicians in the party. The membership base is fairly over-aged and inactive. Even the highest party functionaries must submit to the CC. In case of emergency, the CC can also vote out the party leadership. The party functionaries are mostly older than sixty, and there is no new generation within the party. KSČM politicians who are younger than forty are rather the exception. Some functionaries, particularly the well-paid MPs and MEPs, are trying to pass these positions on to their children. The two most important factions in the party are the Nostalgia Faction, also known as the Stalinists, for example people such as Marta Semelová, Stanislav Grospič or Václav Exner, and the Pragmatist Faction, including Party Chair Vojtěch Filip or Petr Braný. A third faction, the Democratic Socialist tendency, is rather split and individualised (Jiří Dolejš, Vlastimil Balín, Miloslav Ransdorf). The Stalinists mostly want to defend the past, and deeply reject today's capitalism. The Pragmatists primarily want to promote their

298 Cf. VII. sjezd KSČM, in: <http://www.KSČM.cz/article.asp?thema=3784&category=>, accessed 10 January 2009.

own business and power interests, and the interests of businessmen connected with the party, which is easy to combine with radical slogans for the grassroots membership. The Democratic Socialists want to try to create a new politics for the left of the 21st century. The discussion within the party is provided by the party newspaper *Haló Noviny* and other media. However, this paper is largely in the hands of the Nostalgia Wing of the KSČM. Left-emancipative and democratic-socialist opinions, and those critical of state socialism, are not often published there. Nor does *Haló Noviny* publish any criticism of the policy of the KSČM, or of its functionaries. Unfortunately, even nationalistic, Stalinist, authoritarian and homophobic items are published from time to time. (e.g. articles by Jan Minář, Pavel Sirucek, Václav Jurnr, Jaroslav Doubrava).²⁹⁹ Many articles also contain sexist prejudices. The following event reveals much about the inner culture of the party. In 2000 the KSČM wanted to sell its headquarters in central Prague, because it did not have enough funds for its renovation. The vice-chair responsible for finances had signed an unfavourable contract with a company on behalf of the KSČM. The question was whether he himself profited from this financially, or whether he simply did not have enough experience. When the party leadership discovered this, they cancelled the contract, but were immediately sued by the company for «violating the terms of the contract». The party ultimately had to pay a high penalty fee to the company. Obviously, control mechanisms necessary to prevent such occurrences were simply lacking within the party. A second symptomatic event occurred in January 2009. The KSČM elected the journalist Josef Tomáš as its new press speaker. It turned out that during the early nineties, he had been a publisher of the radical right-wing newspaper *Politika*, where various racist and anti-Semitic articles appeared. Amongst other things, a list of the Jews in Czech politics was also printed. Tomáš was sentenced to a two-year prison term in 1995. This fact had not been known to the KSČM Executive Board when it elected him. The Party Chair even tried to defend Tomáš to the press. However, after two weeks, Tomáš stepped down. Unlike in the past, the KSČM does not define itself as a workers' party. To judge from its voting base, the KSČM is predominantly a pensioners' party. These people were not all workers during their working lives, but pursued various occupations. The other two important groups of KSČM voters are workers and the unemployed. For this reason the KSČM tries to speak in the name of all citizens, or specifically of the «employees». Moreover, there are hardly any attempts to win over the activists of social and cultural movements, such as ecological, feminist, homosexual or anti-racist groups. In this environment, the KSČM is always seen as the former state party which discriminated against them. The KSČM itself would not like to lose the mass of its own voters in exchange for the support of these rather small and exotic groups. In this context, it is important to emphasise that social

299 Cf. e.g. Václav Jurnr: V politice není hlava zbytečná, in: *Haló noviny*, 19 March 2005, p. 4.

movements do not play as large a role in Czech society as they do in Western Europe. Civil society has not really constituted itself yet since 1989. The party sees itself as a «besieged fortress». Its members and activists have experienced so much hatred and discrimination that they are automatically suspicious of journalists, young people, or anyone who looks different. The KSČM is not offensive. Communist politicians have to spend most of their time defending the party against reproaches regarding its own past. The membership base wants to hear «how good everything was before the political change». Today's reality is viewed, in this context, with pessimism and hopelessness. With such rhetoric, it is only possible to appeal to the losers of the societal transformation, but this «protest potential» makes up no more than 10 % of the vote, and has been declining steadily. Other societal groups are not accessible by means of this rhetoric. It appears that the KSČM leadership chose this strategy of a restricted but safe position in society during the mid-nineties, because other possibilities were too risky. A radical move beyond this type of politics is a question of survival for today's KSČM.

Norbert Hagemann

THE COMMUNIST RE-FOUNDATION PARTY: DEVELOPMENT OF THE CONTRADICTION BETWEEN «GREAT AMBITION AND LITTLE POWER»³⁰⁰

Introduction

In the aftermath of the demise of the «Soviet Union and the crisis of the social democratic parties and their political concepts in the West, the Communist Refoundation Party (Partito della Rifondazione Comunista – PRC) is an interesting phenomenon in the spectrum of left parties. Its willingness to learn and its innovative nature rapidly brought this very young party international recognition on the left, as well as an influential position in the domestic political arena. But something went wrong in this process of refoundation; in the course of only a few years, all that is left of a party that was at one time the fourth strongest in Italy is an extra-parliamentary force torn by internal strife over its «own ego», and, cut off from its old source of funds, struggling for its very existence.

The formal foundation of the PRC took place in mid-December 1991, at a founding party congress in Rome. Initially, the movement consisted primarily of two minority tendencies of the Italian Communist Party (Partito Comunista Italiano – PCI), the tightly organised and more traditionalist wing around Armando Cossutta, and representatives of the unorthodox Ingrao tendency. In May of that year, two key figures of the New Left, Lucio Magri and Luciana Castellina, joined the party, as did part of the Proletarian Unity Party for Communism (Partito di Unità Proletaria per il Comunismo – PdUP). At its 8th Party Congress In June 1991, that party, which always saw itself as a collection of Maoist, spontaneous and Trotskyist groups, the latter aligned to the IVth International, voted to dissolve itself and to recommend that its members join the PRC which was then being founded. Shortly thereafter,

300 Undici tesi dopo lo Tsunami: a cura del Centro per la Riforma dello Stato [Theses after the Tsunami: published by the center for the reform of the state], in: *Alternative per il Socialismo*, Rivista bimestrale, no. 6 – July–Sept. 2008, p. 235.

the Communist Party of Italy/Marxist-Leninist Red Line joined the movement.³⁰¹ Hence, at that time, the PRC brought together a broad spectrum of tendencies of the parliamentary and extra-parliamentary left.

In view of the great heterogeneity of political culture, party socialisation, experience and political approaches, which in the past had caused severe hostility, the party defined its identity as open and pluralistic. Compared with the monolithic identity of the PCI, this represented a qualitative leap in a new direction, which was destined, in the coming years to become a true source of vitality and innovation for the party, permitting it to keep pace with societal developments and remain rooted in societal struggles. However, within a short period of time no less than eight, in some cases very serious, splits occurred along the internal boundaries which marked the parties' pluralism. This naturally caused, a dissolution of the groups initial diversity. Abandoning ship were parts of; the Cossutta wing, the New Left, and the Trotskyists, but also the tendency around Fausto Bertinotti, which had for many years been in the majority within the party. These splits never yielded any gain for the party, either in terms of influence nor of organisational strength and cohesion; the only result was a multiplication of the Communist symbols scattered across Italy's political landscape.

The political programme of the PRC

The PRC currently does not yet have any coherent concept of national structural reform which might serve as an alternative to the former Berlusconi government's course of unfettered market-radical reconstruction of the country, or as a response to the effects of the current global crisis. The proposals the PRC has developed in recent years in the context of the numerous local and regional elections inherent in Italy's federal structure are aimed at gaining political leverage especially at the regional level, and can be grouped into four thematic areas:³⁰²

1. In view of the serious economic and financial crisis, as well as the dismantling of social security systems by the national government, measures are called for at regional level to protect low income groups, the unemployed and those threatened by unemployment. These measures include; 1. A ban on layoffs during the next 36 months. 2.

301 Cf. Simone Bertolino: *The PRC – Emergence and Crisis of the Antagonistic Left*, in: Uwe Backes/Patrick Moreau (eds.): *Communist and Post-Communist Parties in Europe*, Göttingen 2008, p. 223; Mimmo Porcaro: *Die Partei der kommunistischen Neugründung – Traditionen, Innovationen, Perspektiven*, in: Michael Brie (ed.): *Linksparteien im Vergleich. Rahmenbedingungen, strategische Ansätze und Erfolgskriterien*, Berlin 2003, pp. 17 ff.

302 Cf. Massimo Ioly: *Toscana, il Prc e il PdcI presentano una legge contro la crisi* [Tuscany, the PRC and the PdCI introduce a law against the crisis], No. 12, November 13 2009; *Programma per le elezioni comunali e provinciali* [Programme for local and Provincial elections], April 1 2009, available at <http://www.rifondazionecomunista.org/ufficiolettorale/index.php?view=article&id=56%>; Stefano Vinti: *Le proposte del Prc per uscire «a sinistra» dalla crisi economica* [Proposals of the PRC for a left solution to the economic crisis], in: *Liberazione*, November 12 2009.

The provision of a supplement for part time wage compensation (cassa integrazione), the payment of which would be tied to an employment guarantee. 3. Severe restrictions on the possibility of chaining time-limited work contracts, so as to put an end to the spreading tendency towards precarious jobs.4. The establishment of a solidarity fund for part time work and the introduction of a minimum income (salario sociale) for the unemployed in the context of a reform of unemployment benefits. They also call for;a) the requirement to undertake no cuts in the area of existing social benefits, and if necessary, to «freeze» fees for public services, or even to temporarily suspend such payments.b) To expand social housing construction, providing it with the appropriate funding base, and c) to introduce a social rent scale.

2. In contrast to the privatisation of public provision of services envisaged by the current government, as well as the drastic restrictions to the regulatory authority of regional and local governments, the PRC would like to considerably strengthen their position in this regard. Privatisation measures in the areas of water, gas, public transport, education etc. should be stopped. For already privatised services, the goal would be to re-nationalize them. Based on a secure public provision of services, investments are to be made in building public corporations, in developing their competencies, and in putting them in a position to be able to provide a complete spectrum of their particular goods and services from a single source. Regional and local administrations are to be mandated to provide high-quality services from the public sector as a standard, and for small communities of less than 5,000 inhabitants, a minimal level of public services including post offices, schools, health care and social support. At the same time, regulatory intervention by the respective administrations is to be established, with the goal of sparking a conversion of the local economy by way of targeted subsidies, oriented toward social and ecological interests and problems of each particular local community.

3. In order to secure the necessary funds for these purposes the financial autonomy of regions and municipalities, in terms of income and spending, are to be strengthened. And Available financial policy instruments are to be directed towards the targeted implementation of alternative proposals. To this end the demand to expand financial policy leeway should be enacted by: 1) increasing the Maastricht debt limit by one percentage point, 2) by ensuring a fairer taxation structure, and 3) by earmarking tax income, and also 4) by using loans for targeted investments.

4. Based on the idea that a re-orientation of economic policy can be derived from the wishes of the citizenry itself, the PRC demands the strengthening of instruments for direct democratic participation by the citizens in the requisite planning and decision-making processes. There have been two good experiences with so-called participatory budgeting, to which reference is made. The proposal is to apply these experiences in a targeted manner to specific policy areas, so that citizens can participate in decision-making and verification as to which goals are being pursued in the social budget or the environmental budget, and how they are being implemented.

The goal of implementing such interlocked defensive and offensive measures is to build a social alliance based on a «compromise in solidarity» between the interests of various wage dependent groups and also between them and the middle strata, which are traditionally very strong in Italy. It is envisaged that regional governments shall play the role of the political organizer for this compromise, for which they will have their authority in the area of social regulation strengthened once more, and they shall be appropriately legitimised via codetermination and collaboration mechanisms.

The organisational development of the PRC

The organisational development of the party is characterised by the tension between explosive development and stagnation. The PRC rapidly achieved a very respectable mass base, won new members every year, and, via their social composition, represented a broad spectrum of interests. It initially had a stable electoral base, was able to expand its presence in all areas, and establish itself as a national party. However, it was not able to bind its members over the long term very well. «Ideologically motivated» splits undermined its membership base, its voter potential stagnated, and the binding of its core voters to the party deteriorated. The PRC also developed very differently in the northern and southern parts of the country.

The membership base

Due to the manner in which the foundation process was carried out,³⁰³ even in its first year of existence the PRC achieved a membership strength which was to characterize it as the organisation with the strongest mass base within the spectrum of alternative left parties. From 1991 to 1996, its membership base fluctuated at around eleven 5,000 members, generally peaking just before party congresses.³⁰⁴ In 1997, the year of the party's first indirect participation in government, the membership jumped to 130,000, only to drop to a level of approx. 95,000 members after the split-off of the faction led by Armando Cossutta and Oliviero Diliberto, which then founded the Party of Italian Communists (Partito dei Comunisti Italiani – PdCI). The PRC's membership then stabilised at that level.³⁰⁵ The second, and this time direct, participation of the PRC in the national government came in 2007 causing further split-offs (especially of Trotskyist splinter groups) and resulted in a further drop in membership

303 Even several months prior to the actual foundation of the PRC, Armando Cossutta's minority tendency had a tightly organised structure, on the basis of which a rapid wave of recruitment was organised, and its own financing secured especially in the «red regions» of Central Italy, the industrial belts around the major cities in northern and southern Italy, the major rural settlements of the Po plain, and in the regions of Apulia and Calabria. This process was «rounded out» primarily by the «mass accession» of entire left-wing splinter parties – the Proletarian Democracy Party brought in a total of 10,000 members – and the wave of so-called emotional memberships.

304 In the tradition of the PRC, national party congresses had a high mobilizing effect, since they were generally the places where the results of previous congresses of mass organisations could be verified and reoriented.

305 Cf. Aldo Garzia: *La Sinistra-L'Arcobaleno. Numeri, date e cenni di storia* [The Rainbow Left: Facts, Figures and historical Aspects], in: *Alternative per il socialismo*, 4, November 2007- January 2008, p.216.

to 87,827 members. A majority of the faction around the former leadership group of Fausto Bertinotti (representing a plurality of the Party which nonetheless suffered defeat at the party congress in 2008) for left the party in early 2009 in order to realize their political goals outside the PRC. The effect on the party was disastrous. That year, membership dropped to only 38,000, or 53 % of what it had been a year earlier.³⁰⁶

According to the statutes of the PRC, members renew their party membership annually by turning in their membership cards and being issued new ones. This mechanism is an embodiment of the constituent identity of the party, according to which all political work in and for the party must be voluntary. However, it is also the basis for the growing phenomenon of so-called unstable memberships, i.e., new members who leave the party again the following year. «The party has a definite ability to attract new members, but its ability to repel them again is just as great» stated an assessment based on a survey of party members.³⁰⁷ Even in the second year of its existence, the PRC lost 14,481 of its members, but this was more than balanced out by 19,108 new members. In the following years, the share of non-renewed memberships amounted to approx. 8 % of members. Starting at the end of the '90s, this figure doubled, and the party's ability to attract new or former members stagnated.³⁰⁸

The party is increasingly characterised by politically inexperienced members and functionaries. Only approx. 20 % of the founding members still belong to the party today.³⁰⁹ A representative survey of all leadership levels of the party in 2009 showed that approx. 30 % of functionaries had only joined the PRC during the preceding five years, and approx. 44 % only during the preceding nine years.

Looking at the socio-economic composition of the PRC membership, the share of wage earners – workers, white-collar employees, teachers and the unemployed – has dropped considerably, and amounted to only 46.1 % in 2006. In 1999, it had still been 50 %. At the same time, the share of small business people, owners of small companies, professionals, tradespeople, merchants, increased from 8.2 % to 10.4 %, and that of students, pensioners and housewives from 40.5 % to 43.6 %. Due primarily to the increased numbers of students (9.3 % to 14.2 %) and of housewives (1.3 % to 4.2 %), this group approached the wage earners' group in size. The share of the unemployed group, which in 1999 had still been the fourth-largest with 9.7 %, also dropped considerably by 2006 was only 7.6 %.³¹⁰

306 Cf. Claudio Grassi: Su la testa, si riparte!, *Relazione Assemblea nazionale sul Partito* [heads up! Here we go again!, speech at the national meeting on issues of the party], November eleven, 2009, available at: <http://home.rifondazione.it/xiststest/content/view/6892/314/>.

307 Cf. *L'inchiesta sul Partito* [Survey on the party], May 2007, p. 30.

308 Cf. Simone Bertolino: *Rifondazione comunista – Storia e organizzazione* [The Communist Re-Foundation Party –history and Organisation], Bologna 2004, pp. 180 ff.

309 Cf. Stefano Bocconetti: *Rifondazione comunista, radiografia di un partito che si avvicina al congresso di Venezia* [The Communist Re-Foundation Party, Analysis of a Party Approaching the Venice Party Congress], In: *Liberazione*, February 12 2005.

310 Cf. Bertolino: *The PRC – Emergence and Crisis of Antagonistic Left*, p. 243.

Since the foundation of the party, its regional structure has also changed. The focal points of new membership were initially in the more industrial areas of the North, in the former «red regions» of Tuscany, Emilia-Romagna and Liguria, which accounted for 31 % of membership, and in the Northwest, with 22.9 %. By contrast, the shares of the central and southern regions Italy, with 28.9 %, and of the islands, with 8.8 %, were much lower. However, this trend ended in the mid-'90s, while the latter regions were largely able to maintain their membership figures the party's base in the North deteriorated significantly after 1995.³¹¹ The party's members in the North are today much older on average than those in the South. Especially in the former «red regions», the share of pensioners, whose political socialisation took place during the period of the Cold War, is much higher than the national average. Here, the party is primarily rooted in the traditional industrial areas, which historically have a higher degree of trade union organisation. The membership of the party in the South, by contrast, is much younger, and has a much higher educational level; the share of young people here is twice as high as in the North. Here, the party has more students, but also more people in precarious jobs and more unemployed people in its ranks. Furthermore, its membership base was not politically socialised in the old PCI milieu.³¹²

The deep-seated transformation of the membership base has been accompanied by a clear change in the individual ties of members to the party. Here, reasons of political pragmatism are now of much greater importance than reasons based on ideological tradition and original identity with the party. A survey of delegates at the 5th Party Congress in 1999 in this regard showed that 53.7 % of delegates saw identity and ideological tradition as main reasons for joining the party, and that their importance of these factors declined in proportion to how recently the delegates had joined. Largely unchanged by the «renewal» has been the low degree of attractiveness of the party for women. The share of female party members, while it may have increased continually over the years, has remained very low rising from 25.5 % in 1999 to 27.7 % in 2004 and 29.4 % two years later.³¹³ Even 20 years after its foundation, the PRC is still a male-dominated party, in which women are primarily seen as objects of the policy of the party.³¹⁴ This is ultimately reflected in a clear underrepresentation of women amongst the higher levels of functionaries, as well is in the lack of development of any tools for changing that situation.

311 Cf. Bertolino: *Rifondazione*, op. cit., p. 185.

312 Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 190 ff.; Bocconetti: *Rifondazione* op. cit.

313 Cf. Bertolino: *Rifondazione* op. cit., p. 243

314 Cf. Alcune note sui risultati dell'inchiesta – Il rapporto conclusivo dell'inchiesta partito 2006–2008 [Some notes on the results of the survey; the final results of the party survey 2006 – 2008], In: *Bollettino di Inchiesta*, no. 41, November 2008, p. 66.

The electoral base of the PRC

Just three and a half months after its formal founding, the PRC faced its moment of truth, which would show whether its efforts to renew the communist tradition and practice had any societal base. While the traditional parties, the Christian Democrats, the Socialists and the old PCI, which now called itself the Democratic Party of the Left (*Partito Democratico della Sinistra*/PDS) all experienced defeats of almost landslide proportions in the parliamentary election of April 1992, the PRC won 2,202,574 votes for the Chamber of Deputies (5.6%) and 2,163,317 for the Senate (6.5%) its first time out, which translated into a parliamentary representation of 35 deputies and 20 senators. In the following elections, too, the party was able to maintain that result, receiving 2,334,029 votes for the Chamber of Deputies in March 1994, and, two years later, 2,229,604. The consistency of these results shows that this block of approx. 2.2 million voters is the electoral potential which the PRC can address.

In various situations, the PRC was able to use this potential effectively in the context of the balance between the two blocs of left and right parties which remained relatively stable over a number of years. Nonetheless, it remained stuck in a societal minority role. The party always succeeded in expanding upon this electoral potential conjuncturally whenever the elections were connected with a societal option for change in Italian politics. In 1996, in an election which unexpectedly brought a centre-left government to power, the PRC increased its vote by some 50%, attracting 3,215,960 votes, or 8.5%. Again in 2006, the PRC for the first time entered a centre-left government, winning 2,229,604, and increase of 25%. These results can be considered conjunctural, because the party was never able to translate the expectations of voters for representation of their interests into reality, through the implementation of real change. In 1999, an irreparable internal struggle occurred; in 2008, the party's failure was due to a complex of intraparty disputes, insufficient substantive preparation and ill-conceived concepts for alliances. The message behind this was that in spite of all goodwill and good ideas, it may be impossible to have an effect on the processes of real life;³¹⁵ the immediate result was a massive loss of votes. The Rainbow Left Alliance (*La Sinistra – L'Arcobaleno*), in which the PRC stood for election, attracted a total of only 1,124,298 votes, and thus lost all representation in Parliament.

The socio-structural composition of the electoral base of the party shows a balanced societal representation, and considerable agreement with the social structure of the membership base. Waged employees represent the major share, with 49%, of which 23% are workers in 16.5% are white-collar employees. The share of the unemployed is considerably less, at 3%, and the same is true of those with precarious jobs, rural workers and management staff, which account for 6.5% of the voters. According to

315 Cf. Eduardo Aldo Carra: Elezioni, europa e crisi economica (Elections, Europe and the economic crisis), in: *Critica marxista*, no. 3–4, 2009, p 11; Luciana Castellina: The Italian Case: a Point of View, In: *The Left in Government, Latin America and Europe Compared*, Birgit Daiber (ed.), Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, Brussels 2010; p. 72.

available sources, the party has a level of support from these strata which is between 2 and 6% higher than their respective shares in the social structure of the Italian population. The share of voters in the sectors small traders/small business people, independent professionals, craftspeople, and merchants amounts of 9.5% of PRC voters, considerably less than their share of the population; the same is true in the areas of persons outside the labour market, students, pensioners and housewives. Pensioners account for a share of 21%, housewives, 7.5% and students 12%.³¹⁶

What has become increasingly apparent in recent years is a tendency towards a loosening of ties of core voter blocs to the party, which evidently reflects a significantly reduced capacity of the base organisations of the party to mobilize voters.³¹⁷ Even in the elections to the Chamber of Deputies in 2001, the result of the first failed indirect participation in a centre-left government showed that a significant share of core voters shifted to non-participation in the election, thus expressing their massive dissatisfaction with the concrete work of the party. In 2001, that involved 482,000 voters, or one third of the party's losses compared to the 1996 elections. Looking at the results of the early elections in 2008, analysis of changes of voter behaviour shows an equally massive use of this «tool». Approx. 17% of the supporters of the Rainbow-Left Coalition, or almost 650,000 voters, denied their parties the proverbial «leftist loyalty», and abstained from casting their votes. This was especially true of workers.³¹⁸

Identity and organisation of the PRC

The identity of the PRC is marked by contradiction between words and deeds, and between concepts and reality. The PRC wants to process the historical experience of its predecessor parties in practice, and move beyond them, and sees itself in a constant process of negotiating evolving challenges. Politically, it is often ambiguous and lacking in understanding for its own fundamental transformation as a party, and in the instruments for the day-to-day implementation of intra-party diversity. As a mass party, the PRC seeks to be deeply rooted in society, but its base organisations have problems making contacts and meeting the necessary challenges. The party also lacks the organisational competence to change the situation.

316 Cf. Paolo Chiochetti: *Partiti della sinistra radicale a confronto – Francia, Italia e Germania, 1999–2006* (The parties of the radical Left, a comparison of France Italy and Germany, Thesis on political systems in the EU, University of Bologna, Second term, 2005–2006; p. 185., 1999–2006)

317 An analysis of election results in terms of how many voters there are one per party member shows that this coefficient is dropping noticeably: in 1992, the relationship was 1 to 5.4; in 2001, it was 1 to 4.9, and in 2006 it was only 1 to 4.2. Viewed regionally, the tendency indicated elsewhere is confirmed here as well. The base organisations in the central and southern Italian regions and on the islands were able to maintain or expand their vote getting capacities, while by contrast, the party has collapsed entirely in the North. Cf. Bertolino: *Rifondazione Comunista – Storia e organizzazione*, p. 169.

318 Cf. Tonino Buccì: *Sinistra hai perso ma la crisi ti dà ragione* [Leftists, you have lost the crisis shows you are right], in: *Liberazione*, March 3 2009; Poggi & Partners: *I flussi elettorali – Analisi secondaria dei dati relative alle elezioni politiche del 13–14 aprile 2008* (Camera) [Electoral shifts: Analysis and results of the election to the Chamber of Deputies, April 13–14 2008], op. cit.

Internal party democracy

The PRC is pluralistic in its origins and its identity, and clearly rejects democratic centralism as a principle of organisation and leadership. The organisational principles stated in the statutes describe the party as an ideologically and organisationally open and internally democratic organisation. Openness here means substantive cross-pollination of traditional party ideals with other political cultures such as feminism, the anti-globalisation movement, the environmental movement and the peace movement. It also means a more direct and especially competence based incorporation of non-party members into the daily work of the party. For this purpose, in addition to the traditional regional and workplace-based organisations, the possibility is also provided for the formation of issue oriented structures, as well as intra-party and extra-party associations, magazines and forms of political theoretical research.

In terms of its own democratic structure, the statute defines the fundamental right of each individual member to participate in party life, as well as in discussion and decision-making processes in the party; including, the right to introduce proposals and have them be examined and answered, the right to information on current discussions and decision-making processes at all levels of the party, the right to vote and be elected to office, and the right to exercise criticism of all party bodies and to state one's political opinions openly. In the framework of a strongly decentralised organisational concept, the various party structures have the basic right to take up those initiatives which, in their own view, are best suited for them, within the limits of the general policy goals formulated in each case by Party Congress, or, between its sessions, by the National Political Committee.

The PCR explicitly rejected all concepts and practices of organisation and party life based on hierarchy or unanimity, and a very broad scope is given to exchanges within the existing diverse, intra-party structure. Diversity of positions, free discussion and the constant search for a political synthesis have been established as structural principles. The Statute sees the possibility for free and transparent expression of diversity, structures and groupings, the existence of which are however to be limited to the period of preparation and implementation of party congresses, and of intra-party discussions of fundamental political significance. The formation of permanent tendencies or factions is banned.

The PRC as an umbrella for various «souls»

In the practice of party life, the stipulations regarding the formation of tendencies have been largely ignored, evidently with political intent.³¹⁹ The rapid political and

319 One indication of this is that the party leadership, referring to a corresponding article in the statutes (Article 50 of the version adopted at the last Party Congress in Chianciano), took great pains to reflect the relations of forces between the factions when occupying positions of party bodies. What is there provided as a possibility became a permanent process. Intra-party debates became ever sharper, especially at and after the Sixth Party Congress in

organisational success of the PRC was initially based on the fact that it was able to make use of the established structures of what was then the minority tendency in the ICP around Armando Cossutta, to which the representatives of other communist traditions, cultures and socialisations attached themselves.³²⁰ At no point in the development of the PRC was there any process which might have been capable of affecting a true synthesis of this diversity. The instrument of a party programme, which might reflect the common understanding of the entirety of the membership with regard to their goals, their politics and their «own ego», and bind them to that, does not exist in the tradition of Italian communism. Fundamental political debates in processes of clarification are generally only carried out at party congresses. Basically the party congresses generally only affect the orientation of the party in the short term, by solidifying existing majority/minority relationships, or reorienting the party accordingly, on the basis of corresponding political analyses. Thus to date within the PRC there has been no fundamental process of mutual basic questioning or of the common arrival at understanding or of common further development. That has not meant that there have not been a large number of important political renewals of the party, such as the clear rejection of any incarnation of Stalinism, the acceptance of nonviolence, the overcoming of patriarchy, or the turn toward new social movements as an expression of the contradictions of social development.³²¹

However, the party's differing spheres of experience were basically able to stay within their traditional identities, and group themselves politically in the familiar way. Organisationally and culturally, the PRC today is thus somewhat of an umbrella³²² over the party's various «souls», organised in clearly factional structures, into parties within the party, armed and barricaded against one another in a fierce struggle for control. In view of the decentralised financial control mechanisms, the struggle for access to the requisite funds is pulling the entire party into a maelstrom.³²³

Although this activity clearly contradicts the statutory rules, there is a high degree of intra-party acceptance of the situation. In a survey in 2007, 31.2% of the party's officials and elected representatives stated that they were «satisfied» with the existence of factions, 33.8% were «fairly satisfied», 20.8% saw the situation critically,

Venice, where a majority decision was taken to break this «rule» and to expel minority tendencies from the close decision-making circle, the Secretariat.

320 Only later did the party address the issue of expanding the existing structures of the party outward. Cf. Franco Astengo: Un partito nel travaglio della transizione italiana [A party in the birth pangs of the Italian transformation], in: Aprileonline, September 2 2009, <http://www.aprileonline.info/notizia.php?id=12781>.

321 The party's statute explicitly mandates that each member support the structures of the alternative left, of critical and anti-capitalist movements, of class labor unions, of democratic associations and mass movements, contribute to their development, and to work within them in a democratic, egalitarian and nonsectarian manner.

322 Cf. Gianpaolo Patta: L'Italia è il primo paese d'Europa dove non c'è né una sinistra comunista né socialdemocratica [Italy is the first country in Europe which is neither communist North social Democratic left], in: Liberazione, July 15 2009.

323 Cf. Tonino Bucci: Stop alle correnti, Rifondazione ci prova e ci crede [Stop the factions: the PCR tries it and believes in it], in: Liberazione, August 5 2009.

and only 6.2% demanded that they be dissolved in accordance with the statutes.³²⁴ With regard to concrete party work, however, two directly negative effects can be ascertained. On the one hand, the overall political climate in the party generates demotivating impulses, even amongst the most active of members. Thus, in the same survey, one member in five stated that he or she was less active than had previously been the case, blaming this on political problems in their base organisations (18%), or on disagreement with regard to recent political decisions of the party (27%).³²⁵ Moreover, there is a clear tendency to circumvent party decisions, which is certainly seen outside the party as a discrepancy between words and deeds, and as a problem of trust which is then projected upon the party as a whole. In view of renewed defeats in the European elections and disputes within the electoral campaign based on factionalism,³²⁶ PRC Secretary-General Paolo Ferrero demanded at a meeting of the national political committee in June 2009, that the «crystallisation of tendencies» be overcome, and that a consensus regarding future policy be sought, which should include all. However, at that meeting, no fewer than five alternative documents were voted upon.

While the most influential faction to date, Essere Comunisti (Being Communists), transformed itself into a cultural organisation in August 2009, and has since then been actively working to make its own contributions to the development of the party, the Falce e Martello (Sickle and Hammer) faction, which belongs to the International Marxist Tendency, clearly rejects any analogous step. The faction around the Journal *L'Ernesto* and the Rifondazione per la sinistra (Re-foundation for the left) factions, these being supporters of the old Bertinotti majority, are still biding their time.

The base organisations of the PRC

Clearly delimited from any vanguard party concepts, the PRC sees itself in the tradition of the communist mass party. However, its self-identification in this respect already went far beyond the organisational initiatives that the PCI had already made. The mass character of the PCI was reflected primarily in strongly verticalised organisational structures, and in the corresponding centralisation of intraparty processes by way of an extensively branched and professionally operating party apparatus which operated on the basis of a high degree of division of labour, the clear subordination of deputies and other elected officials to the party apparatus, the tight control of its «own» mass organisations, and a well-developed ability to bind members «intellectually and morally».

324 Cf. *L'inchiesta sul partito*, p. 21.

325 *ibid.*, p. 12.

326 In spite of the disastrous electoral defeat in the parliamentary elections of 2008, several factions again in 2009 supported only those candidates for the European elections who came from their own ranks. Cf. speech by Giusto Catania at the meeting of the national political committee (CPN) June 13–14, 2009 in: *Liberazione*, June 17 2009.

The PCR by contrast is based on decentralised structures, pluralism, wide-ranging organisational and political latitude, the independent responsibility of various party bodies, and a high degree of initiative on the part of party members. In the implementation of these organisational approaches, the PCI in its first years concentrated primarily on building a capillary system of base organisations,³²⁷ to secure its nationwide presence by means of territorial and workplace-based structures. Nonetheless, the number of base organisations was reduced by up to a third over the course of the first ten years.

At the same times the number of municipalities in which the PRC no longer had any local party structure had also increased, which directly affected the party's ability to address potential voters or to work continually with its electoral base. In 1996, 74.6% of municipalities already no longer had any party organisation; by 2002, this had risen to 79.5%.

Only after 2003 did the party managed to put an end to this development and turn things around, so that the number of base organisations rose from 2,010 to 2,500 in 2007.³²⁸

In view of the severe defeats in the European, national and regional elections in 2008 and 2009, the situation of the base organisations will become considerably more serious in the foreseeable future. The reason for that is the financing system which was adopted by the PRC over the years ultimately proved to be a serious problem. It was essentially based on the pillars of membership dues and contributions on the one hand and «subsidies» from state party subsidies and the contributions of elected representatives to the party on the other. In order to keep the financial threshold for membership in the PRC as low as possible, the PRC over the years kept its membership dues very low, and thus made itself completely dependent on state party subsidies.³²⁹ However, these dried up when the party lost its seats both in the European and national parliament, and also in 80% of the local councils. As a result, the PRC brief period lost up to 80% of its hitherto available income.

The youth organisation; Young Communists and the Permanent Women's Forum are both associated with the PRC, and have a high degree of political and organisational autonomy. However, they both have only a very low capacity for mobilisation.³³⁰

327 In the PCR's language, the base organisations are no longer called sections (i.e., of the whole), as they were in the PCI, but rather circles, evoking image of circulation, exchange and flow.

328 Cf. Bertolino: *Rifondazione op. cit.*, p. 207; Bertolino: *The PRC, op. cit.*, p. 235.

329 Party members pay annual dues of €20 to €40, regardless of their financial situation. Hence, less than 8% of needed funds come from self-financing i.e. dues and income from events sponsored by the party newspaper *Liberazione*.

330 Only 16.1% of woman members state that they are actively involved in the women's forum; Cf. *L'inchiesta sul partito*, p. 16. Moreover, the Conference of Communist Women, which is provided for in the statute and was seen primarily as an instrument of policy formulation, has remained a paper construct. Since 2000, it has not been convened even once.

The PRC has no mass organisations that could directly influence development processes in society. Since the founding of the party there have been repeated discussions on the question of whether, in view of increasing political leanings toward social partnerships in leftist unions, the goal should not be to support «communist wings» within the major union association, the CGIL, or to build the party's own communist «labour union». Ultimately however, neither of these options was able to win a majority within the party.

In terms of practical politics, the lack of its own mass organisations means that the entire social web of relations within the party necessarily operate exclusively via the base organisations and the members. However, in view of the contradictory developments of its base structure, the party has evidently been incapable of meeting the requirements of this situation in terms of organisation and personnel in recent years. The causes for this are the limited willingness of members to engage in actions, and insufficient opening of party work towards its societal environment, as well as deficits in professionalisation.

First: By statute, party members are mandated to involve themselves actively within democratic mass organisations. In this respect, the PRC has a relatively high degree of organisation, especially in the area of historically developed associations for the representation of interests. Some 31 % of PRC members are also members of unions,³³¹ 27 % are also members in the Association of former partisans (ANPI), and 31.9 % are members of the Democratic Recreational and Cultural Association (ARCI). This degree of organisation is not however reflected in adequate involvement of members in those groups, only 33.1 % of party member's state that they actively involve themselves in the work of these associations.³³²

Second: The PRC has in recent years clearly developed a kind of «we care» profile in local politics around concrete «regional» issues especially in the areas of transport and the environment. It is associated with actions against the construction of new coal-fired power plants, waste incinerators, new high-speed rail lines and construction speculation. It also proposes new forms of citizens' participation in the organisation of local matters, such as designing citizens' budgets. However, these political profiles, which have now achieved recognition even outside the party, cannot be credited with basic change in the political action of the base organisations. The focus of their activities is still the public implementation of national party campaigns,³³³ with such traditional methods as distribution of leaflets, and staging electoral campaign events and protest rallies.³³⁴

331 Cf. Bocconetti: *op. cit.*

332 Cf. *L'inchiesta sul partito*, p. 7.

333 Cf. Dante Goffetti: *Il Partito si fa inchiesta – Inchieste sullo stato dei circoli del partito nella campagna bergamasca* [The party investigates itself: survey on the condition of the base organisations of the party in the Bergamo area], In: *Bollettino di Inchiesta*, 40, December 2007, pp. 21–2.

334 Between 55 and 65 % – depending on various forms – of those surveyed stated that their involvement was exclusively within the framework of such forms of struggle. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 10.

Third: Viewed in terms of their prerequisites for engaging in activity professionally, clear limitations and deficits can be ascertained which are in stark contrast to expectations. In an effort to give party members in local areas a visible centre of operations, a «spatial home», the PRC has in recent years invested heavily in the acquisition of appropriate real estate. By contrast, the infrastructural equipment of the base organisations has lagged behind dramatically in the development of the party to date, even though that is precisely what is needed for «networked» activity in a world marked by a rapid change towards modern communications media. Thus, in 2010, 55 % of base organisations had no computers, 70 % have no access to the Internet, 62 % had no telephone, and approx. 74 % had no fax machines. Clearly, the party has only a very limited communications capacity.³³⁵

Is the PRC a network party?

When looking at the conflict between the demands upon the base organisation and its capacity to fulfil them (a conflict that is absolutely insoluble for the party as a whole), the PRC began to consider possible routes out of this dilemma. In this context, it developed the approach of a network party, which was to bring together three conceptual «innovations» with regard to the concept of the party:

Firstly, «the task of the transition of the subordinate classes into leading classes» is no longer seen as the sole task of the party, but rather as a result of the common action of «a network of various social institutions». Secondly, from this, the party derives the task of interlinking these various institutions in a political process. Thirdly, the traditional division «between politics and movements» could be overcome through the abandonment of any theoretical or practical claim to hegemony in such political processes, and having the party see itself as a «component of the movements», acting at the level of parity with other components.³³⁶ In terms of practical implementation, the PRC initially supported the construction of a form of the alternative left, in which left parties of various orientation, unions, cooperatives, citizens associations, feminist and environmental groups, student committees etc., could cooperate in a national or regional context.

The implementation of these considerations, accelerated due to the snap parliamentary elections of 2008, carried out in the context of insufficient interparty rooting in the Sinistra Europea. The low involvement of the party base and the political failure of the unification process between the parties of the Rainbow Left,³³⁷ resulted in a mas-

335 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 13.

336 Porcaro: Porcaro: Die Partei der kommunistischen Neugründung – Traditionen, Innovationen, Perspektiven (The PRC: Traditions, Innovations, Perspectives), pp. 13–14.

337 Cf. The explicit description by the former party manager Fausto Bertinotti on the varying points of departure and political approaches of the participating parties, and also the contradictory character of the unification process, marked by conflicts of interests and contradictions which were never handled between the parties, due to the rapidity of political developments and also due to its insufficiently democratic character. Cf. Walter De Cesaris: Cronaca di un processo unitario: tra ambizione e fallimento [Chronicle of the unification process: Ambition and failure], in: *Alternative per il socialismo*, 6, July-September 2008, pp. 169 ff.

sive acceptance problem. It thus became the point of crystallisation for the political defeat of the Bertinotti majority. «The snap elections ... slammed into the Italian left as it was in the midst of a process of unification.»³³⁸

The current strategy of the PRC

The split of the party

The serious electoral defeat in the 2008 elections plunged the PRC into a deep intra-party crisis. Fierce debates over the conclusions to be drawn for the party's strategy and tactics dominated the preparations for the upcoming Party Congress. «I don't believe that the question Ferrero or Vendola is the essential question to be addressed. ... There is an urgent need for reflection not only with regard to the decisions and the responsibility of the leadership, but also with regard to the ideas and the new image of the Italian left.»³³⁹

Thus did Pietro Ingrao attempt to give the debates a political orientation. The transitional party leadership, which moved in to replace the leadership which had resigned, had the task of leading the party in an orderly manner into a process of discussion and decision-making, but did not see itself in a position of organizing a learning process coming out of the developments as a collective process of the entire party. The discussion was rapidly reduced to a question of power politics over the issue of whose interpretation and whose answers would prevail politically.

Basically, two relatively equally strong platforms faced one another. These were, the former Bertinotti majority in the party led by Nichi Vendola (the regional president of Apulia), on the one hand; and an alliance of the Essere Comunisti³⁴⁰ faction, which had long been in opposition to Bertinotti, with some parts of the previous majority faction of the party, on the other. This latter group was led by Paolo Ferrero, minister of social affairs in the Prodi government, and Claudio Grassi, the party's former secretary of international relations.

The conflict came to a head at the PRC Party Congress in July 2008, in the form of two competing basic proposals. The first analysed the electoral defeat as having been caused by the policy of the previous party leadership, with the goal of liquidating the party, a policy purportedly rooted theoretically in an underestimation «of the key role of the basic contradiction between capital and labour». With regard to the strat-

338 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 169.

339 Vgl. P. Ingrao, *Corriere della Sera*, 20 giugno 2008.

340 This «Being Communists» faction rejected on principle the «integration» of the party into the anti-globalisation movement, as well as the paradigm shift to nonviolence, counterposing the thesis that «the primary task of the party should not be its renewal, but rather its strengthening.» Cf. A. Burgio/C. Grassi: *Radiografia del conflitto sociale* [An x-ray of the social conflict], in: *Il Manifesto*, July 19 2001; Andrea Colombo: *La segreteria val bene una messa* [It's worth being in the Secretariat], in: *L'Altro*, June eleven 2009; Mimmo Porcaro: *Die radikale Linke und das Problem des Pluralismus: der Fall Italien* [The radical left and the problem of pluralism: the Italian case]; paper for the Seminar of the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation on parties of the radical European left, Berlin December 16–18 2005, p. 9.

egy and work of the party, this proposal identified an overemphasis on the «political aspect» and of a severe neglect of the «social aspect». The second basic proposal, by contrast, blamed the historic defeat of the PRC primarily on long-term social transformations which the party had neither perceived nor understood.

In spite of all attempts not to allow the discussion, marked as it was by mutual slanders and insults prior to and during the Party Congress, to end in a victor-and-vanquished situation, the Congress closed with the formation of a «platform coalition», and which defeated the largest group in the party, which had grouped around the second proposal. The very heterogeneous segments of the newly constituted majority quickly arrived at a minimum political compromise: the preservation of the PRC and the renewal of the party «from below towards the left». This was apparently enough to bring together the new majority, but not enough to address the task of leading the entire party to the necessary next step of its development. Without the will or the means to solve the conflict, the disputes within the party continued even after this much heralded new beginning, and almost unavoidably ended in the split of the party in early 2009.

Split-offs from the PRC

During January 2009 the leadership of the Re-Foundation for the Left (Rifondazione per la Sinistra), the re-organised Bertinotti faction, gathered for a national conference to discuss the future of their work within the party. Although the majority of the faction at this point still called for staying within the party, the result of the discussions was that 90 of the 134 members that the faction had elected at the last Party Congress to the National Political Committee voted to resign from the party and to found the Movement for the Left (MpS – Movimento per la Sinistra).³⁴¹ In view of the upcoming European elections and the simultaneous administrative elections, and the fact that the Berlusconi government had introduced a 4% minimum threshold, the MpS attempted to rapidly provide their central project of a conceptual and political renewal of the party spectrum of the left with a concrete image. At the end of February, the MpS succeeded in bringing together parties and movements of various traditions of the Italian left, and in forming the electoral alliance «The Left and Freedom» (SeL – Sinistra e Libertà). For the first time, it united organisations from the communist,³⁴² socialist libertarian³⁴³ and environmental realms, parts of the «social left», and leftist

341 Those leaving the party ultimately included almost the entire former leadership of the party. In addition to former party chair Franco Giordano, they included the regional president of Apulia, Nichi Vendola, former parliamentary group chair Gennaro Migliore, former Vice Foreign Minister Patrizia Sentinelli and MEP Roberto Musacchio.

342 In addition to the MBS, the platform also included the leftist minority split from the PdCI, «Unite the Left» (Unire la Sinistra) around Katia Belillo and Umberto Guidoni. The MpS and the ULS are both politically associated with the GUE/NGL.

343 The socialist libertarian tradition is represented on the one hand by the Socialist Party led by Riccardo Nencini, which emerged from the old PSI of Bettina Craxi, and also the Democratic Left (SD – Sinistra Democratica) around Fabio Mussi and Claudio Fava.

intellectuals and artists.³⁴⁴ In the elections for the European Parliament, the SeL was able to win 3.12% of the vote, or 958,458 votes. This was a major success, considering the fact that the party had no access to state electoral funding, was largely ignored by the mass media, and was under attack from its former comrades in the PRC and its Left Alliance. Politically however, the result was insignificant, since the SeL, like the PRC's alliance, failed to meet the minimum threshold. In this situation, characterised by both success and failure, a discussion quickly broke out within the electoral platform regarding its future and the further development.

One proposal was that the platform should, as a result of a joint process of transformation of all participants, in the medium-term be transformed into an Italian left party. Opposed to this were particularly the Socialists and parts of the Greens, who supported the formation of a federation. Since these two parties were not able to win over the SeL to their view, they abandoned the project in October and November 2009, respectively. Thus, the months-long crisis of the SeL project could not be brought to a conclusion until the end of December 2009, when it became possible to democratize this discussion and decision-making process at the constituent assembly in Naples.³⁴⁵ If the SeL had hitherto used itself up dealing with the divergent tactical interests of the headquarters of the participating parties and organisations, it was now the delegates, elected on the basis of votes cast in the election, who had to make decisions without the parties' being able to correct or counteract the result, and thus provide legitimacy for the grouping from the base.

With an overwhelming majority, the delegates decided in favour of the path of forming a party, which was carried out in October 22–24, 2010 at a founding Party Congress in Florence. In order to open the way for participation for parts of the greens, the name was changed from the Left and Freedom to the Left, Ecology and Freedom (SEL – Sinistra, Ecologia Libertà).

Today, the SEL does not yet have a clear political programme; that is yet to be created in the course of the party formation process. On the basis of the various existing electoral programs, it is still possible to foretell several basic pillars of a future programmatic construct. These include:

- defence of the Italian Constitution and its principles of equal rights and opportunities, the rule of law, the secular character of the state, and freedom of information;
- the implementation of morality and transparency in the realm of public life, and in administrative governance;
- the protection of working people and the social state, through such measures as

344 Prominent representatives during the election included especially well-known cartoonist Sergio Staino, the famous representative of the Italian peace movement Lisa Clark, the journalist for Manifesto Giuliana Sgrena, who became famous due to her reporting about war crimes in Afghanistan and Iraq, Alessandro Bottoni, chair of the Italian pirate party, actor Sergio Troiano, and children's book author Bianca Pitzorno.

345 Cf. Pax a sinistra ma senza liturgie: Intervista a Gennaro Migliore [Peace on the left, but with no liturgies: Interview with Gennaro Migliore], in: *Gli Altri, Settimanale di politica e cultura*, March 26 2010, 2/15, p. 7.

- the implementation of the right to work for all, be they employed persons, the precariously employed or unemployed; expansion of the scope of applicability of the Workers' Statute, and the defence of the national collective contract;
- the prevention of privatisation in the area of public utilities, including in the area of education and the water supply, and the qualitative expansion of state public service;
 - the transition to a sustainable economic model based on a pronounced extension of the use of alternative energies and energy efficiency.³⁴⁶

Even if the discussion process must still be considered open regarding the further political orientation of the program of the SEL, the forces involved in the SEL nonetheless agree on three basic axioms, according to which the SEL is currently developing its politics. These certainly appear suited to overcoming the crisis of trust amongst the politically organised left. The SEL considers these axioms the precondition for a «political and not merely organisational interpretation of the leftist space.»³⁴⁷ They are:

- The implementation of a clearly different political style than that which has hitherto been leftist practice. The SEL bases itself on the assessment that politics itself has become the private property of political castes.³⁴⁸ In future the goal is to ensure that the real, not merely the perceived, needs and expectations of the citizens become the foundation of policy. This shall be done by means of directly tying party members, voters and citizens in general into the process of the definition and implementation of policy. In this context, the SEL is currently building so-called «factories» nationwide which in their horizontal organisational structures are to serve the discussion and development of real alternative politics. In addition to the so-called innovation laboratories, electoral functions will be fulfilled only by people and personalities with a direct connection to the electoral constituency concerned. The occupation of electoral functions by professional politicians, or those of the «party apparatus» is to be banned; the confirmation of SEL candidates will take place through so-called open primaries.
- The development of alternatives, especially those with a direct connection to concrete local problems: By contrast to the Lega Nord, which wants to seal off the territory against anything foreign, and within it, organize the defence of selfish interests, the SEL wants to try to develop alternatives based on local peculiarities, which can be implemented by means of good governance and thus spark developments capable of sparking societal change. Under the leadership of SEL National

346 Cf. Sinistra Ecologia Libertà presenta candidati e programma per le regionali [The SEL presents its candidates and program for the regional elections] available at: <http://www.arezzonotizie.it>.

347 Cf. Pax a sinistra op cit., p. 7.

348 Cf. Cara Rifondazione Ora Unità: Intervista a Nichi Vendola [Dear Rifondazione, unity now: Interview with Nichi Vendola], in: Gli Altri, Settimanale di politica e cultura, December 18 2009, p. 3.

Speaker Nichi Vendola, the regional government of Apulia was able to provide some good examples which permitted this traditionally backward region to make major progress. These include social programmes, programmes against precarious employment, the massive support of alternative energy sources, a ban on the privatisation of water, and also on the construction of nuclear power plants in the region, as stipulated for a time – prior to Fukushima, and his own demise – by Berlusconi.

– Overcoming the historical/traditional model of the party as an «educational institution»,³⁴⁹ according to it needed a «doctrine» and an apparatus for disseminating it and ensuring its implementation. Hence, the SEL is currently trying to avoid the construction of «rigid» party structures. At the founding conference in December 2009, in addition to the election of a speaker and the appointment of very small working bodies – an eight-member secretariat and a 32 member Political Coordinating Committee – it initially limited itself to convening a Scientific Advisory Committee.

With these policy approaches, the SEL was able by the time of the regional elections in March 2010 to confirm the results achieved in the European elections: 3.03 % of the electorate voted for the SEL in spite of the fact of the Socialist Party and the Greens were no longer part of the project. Overall however, the SEL was not able to achieve its goal of establishing itself as a national party throughout Italy. While it was able to attract 146,145 votes (9.7 %) in Apulia, where Vendola was re-elected regional president, it won considerably less than 100,000 votes in all other regions. In the North, it attracted an average of 1.5 % of the vote; in the central Italian regions, the average was 2.95 %. Thanks to the very good results of Apulia, the SEL scored 6.6 % in the South. A success followed in the North in May of the next year, with the election of Giuliano Pisapia, an independent, as Mayor of Milan, with SEL support.

349 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 4.

Mimmo Porcaro

THE ITALIAN COMMUNIST REFOUNDATION PARTY: APPARENT CONTINUITY AND ACTUAL BREAK

A risky situation

The results of the last election for the European Parliament delivered a depressing picture of the radical Italian left. The Communist Refoundation Party (*Rifondazione Comunista*/PRC), together with the Party of Italian Communists, (*Partito dei Comunisti Italiani*/PdCI) achieved 3.4% of the vote, while the Communist Workers' Party (*Partito Comunista dei Lavoratori*), a recent left-wing split off from the PRC, won only 0.5% of the vote, and the Left Ecology Party (*Sinistra Ecologia e Libertà*/SEL), which had grown out of the Left and Liberty Alliance (*Sinistra e Libertà*), and had likewise recently left the PRC, but toward the «right», won 3.1%. Thus, none of the three groups, the Italian successor parties of the Communists, the Socialists and the New Left, was able to exceed the 4% threshold, and none is now in parliament, either in Strassburg or in Rome.

Leaving aside those votes for the SEL which originate from other sectors, including those Greens who emerged from the old Socialist Party and did not enter the centre-right alliance, the remaining 7% of the splintered vote went to political forces which had previously all been united in a single party. A significant trove of political experience, which had succeeded in surviving tough and difficult tasks, is now for the first time in danger of vanishing from the political landscape of Italy and Europe.

This result has also highlighted the structural limits of the PRC, which are clearly attested in an admittedly small number of studies about that party:³⁵⁰ its serious in-

350 J. I. Dormagen, *I comunisti. Dal Pci alla nascita di Rifondazione Comunista. Una semiologia politica* (The Communists: From the PCI to the Communist Refoundation Party. A political Semiology), Koinè, Rome, 1996; S. Bertolino, *Rifondazione comunista. Storia di un'organizzazione* (The Communist Refoundation Party: History of an Organisation), Il Mulino, Bologna, 2004; F. De Nardis, *La Rifondazione comunista. Asimmetrie di potere e strategie politiche di un partito in movimento* (The Communist Refoundation Party. Asymmetries of power and political strategies of a party in motion), Angeli, Milan, 2009.

ternal splits, which prevented the emergence of any true «party loyalty», and which probably also slowed down its renewal process; its inability to build a stable relationship with the electorate, which has led to its dependence on its political environment; the character of the modern left; and the results of its own short-term decisions.

Moreover, the heirs of the «old» Refoundation were not even able to use the political space created by the orientation of the Democratic Party (*Partito Democratico*/PD) toward the centre market. For the SEL, the reason was that they had indeed left the PRC precisely in order to bind themselves to the Democratic Party; in the case of the PRC itself, the reason was that such a project would have been very difficult to carry out, due to the nature of the political debate and also of the electoral system existing in Italy – as we shall see.

Even if the PRC were able, either alone or in alliance with others, to occupy a major share of the space, and to provide alternative answers to the electoral base of the PD, it would not be enough to spark the emergence of a socialist people's movement with a mass character as an alternative to the right wing, since the common electoral base of the PD and the radical left includes only a small part of the lower strata of the population. If the Italian radical left is to survive, and if it is to become an independent, significant political force in future, it cannot be active only on the political supply side, but must also address the demand side. For example, the demand for security and protection which exists among most of the lower social strata who vote for the right today must be transformed into a demand for social justice and democratic control of the economy and the environment.

In order to get a better grasp of the context of the difficult current problems facing the radical left, and the perspectives for solutions to them, it will be necessary to reflect on several characteristics specific to the social structure of Italy, to the type of political debate being carried out there, and to the Italian electoral system.

The end of the collective people's movements

The deep changes which have gripped Italian society since the end of the 1980s has primarily spelled the end of collective people's movements and the politics of social change. In its place, there emerged individual and corporatist actions and a politics shifting between the mass clientelism of the centre-right and macro-economic «strictness» oriented toward European integration of the centre-left. This transformation was the result of conscious action by the ruling classes, aimed at destroying the societal base of the powerful workers' movement of the '70s. It included a large-scale use of the tool of the decentralisation of production, and the upgrading of small business, the weakening of unions, and the development of individual, or at least non-union-protected, forms of employment. Added to this was the spread of an individualistically characterised model of consumption and lifestyle, particularly promoted by the private TV companies of Silvio Berlusconi, which was then also copied by the public networks. The core of this transformation is easy to locate in the policies of the Social-

ist Premier Bettino Craxi, who was strongly supported by Silvio Berlusconi, when, at the beginning of the 1980s, he took major measures against the social and political role of the unions and against the «veto power» which the Communist Party was able to exercise against government decisions. Craxi solved the problems of social consensus which emerged from such a policy by means of a major increase in state spending. State-funded monetary gifts thus replaced social struggles for wage increases. It can therefore be said that the greatest increase in Italian government debt was not the result of the development of the class struggle, but rather, on the contrary, the result of its interruption, and of the emergence of a new hegemony based on the relationship between individualised citizens and clientelist governments.

The germ of this was formed during the years of growing flexibility and insecurity of workers, together with the emphasis on individual «performance» and supposed «freedom of decision», and was reinforced further by the decline of the social unitary state which had emerged in Italy during the period of the First Republic. In place of the social state, which had been created out of the labour struggles of the 1970s a trend towards privatisation of numerous public services was established. These services were taken over by a mixture of public and private actors, with the latter playing an increasingly important role. The unitary state, which (albeit unsuccessfully) had attempted to reduce the gap existing between the northern and southern parts of the country, was replaced by a federal state, which was supported not only by the autonomous party, Lega Nord, but also by the expanding stratum of politicians in the regional institutions. This led to the uncontrolled increase in the power of the regions – but not of the municipalities – and increased the inequality between the various regions of the country, to the benefit of the richer regions. In the process, the common interest of the country was replaced by the interests of territorial communities.

For many analysts and commentators, this process marked the return of the *longue durée* in Italian history, a history which had since the 16th century been characterised by the weakness of the unitary state and of collective identity, and the dominance of particularism and individualism.³⁵¹ Others argue by contrast that such an interpretation of Italian history leads to the false assumption that the emergence of a larger collective identity and open political/ideological conflicts in Italy were either imposed from above, as in the case of fascism, or constituted only of brief parenthetical episodes, such as the immediate post-war period, or the 1970s. However, this argument, which fails to explain the dynamic and highly participatory character of the overall development of the First Republic, which was based on the mass parties and their conflicting philosophies.³⁵²

351 C. Duggan: *Force of Destiny: History of Italy since 1796*, London 2008. Also, in German: C. Jansen: *Italien seit 1945*, Göttingen, 2007.

352 G. Crainz: *Autobiografia di una Repubblica. Le radici dell'Italia attuale* [Autobiography of a republic: The roots of today's Italy], Rome 2009.

In any case, if one views the current events in Italian society only from the perspective of the *longue durée* of individualism in the weak state, one will in fact arrive at an understanding neither of the significance of today's individualism, nor of the current role of politics. While individualism in Italy has always been an expression of the rule of relatively privileged social strata, it has today spread through large segments of the wage dependent strata, to some extent as an expression of their subordination under precarious employment relationships and consumerism, which are experienced as freedom of choice and equality with the imagined lifestyle of the «upper» classes; and to some extent as the form in which they imagine their own emancipation.³⁵³ While Italian individualism has moreover always depended on political support, the large number of small enterprises could not have come into being without state subsidies, it needs that support today more than ever, due to the changing conditions of the world market as a result of the great crisis. On the other hand, it has been successful in gaining much greater political weight. While in spite of the abnormal mixture of public and private interests, which has always been characteristic of the history of the Italian state, the levers of power have nonetheless almost always been in the hands of politicians.

Today, that situation has been reversed, so that politics, both at the local and national levels, increasingly tends to be the direct expression of private interests.³⁵⁴ In view of the social situation, the regressive traits of which are further reinforced by the racist and defensive reaction to the widespread phenomenon of integration, the left as a whole seems to have no answers.

The «moderate» left, whose positions are ever less distinguishable from those of the centre, attempts to interpret this individualism as progressive by emphasizing that performance and the free competition between individuals are important elements for the modernisation of the country. In this ideological realm however, the right has a much greater chance of success. From the political point of view, the behaviour of the modern left is schizophrenic. On the one hand, it is deeply involved in the mesh of public and private interests at the regional and local levels, and even exceeds the political right wing in its defence of the privatisation of public services; on the other, once in power, it no longer pursues this clientelist version of politics, but rather develops a political line oriented toward austerity and toward Europe, without worrying about the emergence of any alternative form of consensus in the population.

The radical left oscillates between a progressive individualism, especially for the protection of individual rights in sexual, moral and religious areas, and the resurrection of the old forms of collective solidarity, labour and class consciousness, which seem to

353 M. Magatti, M. De Benedittis: *I nuovi ceti popolari. Chi ha preso il posto della classe operaia?* [The near lower social strata. who has taken the place of the working class?], Milan 2006.

354 A. Statera: *Il Termitaio. I signori degli appalti che governano l'Italia* [The termite hill. the Lords of procurement who ruled Italy], Milan, 2009.

have an ever smaller social influence. Collective actions which continue to take place in Italy, (with which the radical left in the case of alternative globalisation) has generally been successful in harmonizing the largely involved movements of an elite section of the population who have a large stock of «cultural capital»; while the majority of the less qualified social strata organize only sporadically, through trade union actions or fragmentary short-term protests and which are often not clearly definable in terms of form, or content nor are they very visible politically.³⁵⁵

The nature of political conflict in Italy

While the above difficulties involved the structural problems of the Italian left, which are the result of the special nature of political disputes in Italy, there are others with origins in the specific nature of political conflict in Italy which are, as is well known, apparently focused on the person of Silvio Berlusconi. Indeed, we could now count among the numerous disasters which can be laid to this clever captain of industry the emergence of the ideology of «anti-Berlusconi-ism», which caused the values and the feeling of community of the left to be increasingly reduced to simple opposition his policies, or even to his personal style. Everything which even smacks of respect for institutions or laws, of private or public morality, or even of mere civility, in other words anything that differs from Berlusconi's vulgar populism, already counts as «left» – a very modest definition of the character and mission of the left. However, a new definition of this character and mission will require a realistic analysis of political relationships and their roots in the social classes of the country, an analysis extending beyond the external appearance of political theatre.

What is going on in Italy today is a clash between two different «blocs» of the ruling classes. The first, the large and medium-sized enterprises in industry and finance, financially oriented toward Europe and the world market, has great economic power, but no corresponding capacity to build a consensus, since the European policy of Italy has to date presented itself almost solely in the form of privatisation and restrictive monetary policies. The second bloc encompassing medium and small business with a tendentially anti-European and national orientation, who has much less economic power, but much greater consensus-building capacity, in part due to the populist use of the medium of television. This is the bloc led by Silvio Berlusconi, while the first bloc tended to be identified with the centre-left camp, although it could have supported Berlusconi, had he decided to promote clientelism a little less, place less em-

355 An exception are movements to defend areas against capitalist speculation, like the no tav movement in the Piedmont area against the high-speed rail line from Turin to Lyon, or the movement against the bridge across the Straits of Messina between the mainland and Sicily, an area severely threatened by earthquakes and also by the risk of the control of public contracts by the Mafia. Often, all strata of the population are involved in such movements. Cf. D. Della Porta, G. Piazza: *Le ragioni del no. Le campagne contro la TAV in Val di Susa e il Ponte sullo Stretto* [The reasons for the No: The campaigns against the high speed rail line in the Susa Valley and the bridge across the Straits of Messina], Milan 2008.

phasis on his own private interests, and behave somewhat less outrageously. The two blocs have numerous common points of contact, inasmuch as they agree around such issues as the expansion of precarious employment, the privatisation of public services, the reduction of judicial control of politics, the support of major public construction projects as profitable investment opportunities for corporations, and the regionalisation of power. In all these points, the differences are only tactical, not strategic. The most important strategic decisions, on the other hand, involve modalities of access to the world markets (the right wing bloc often favours protectionist solutions), the degree of control of the government over public funds (the right wing bloc, which represents weaker companies, needs the direct support of the state to a much greater degree), the involvement of union organisations (the right wing bloc vehemently demands the separation of the unions and the exclusion of the leftist union federation CGIL from collective bargaining), and tax policy (the right wing supports tax evasion). But, for example, the right wing does not really have the power to stand in the way of European integration and really only tries to achieve some corrections. Hence, all these differences would be negligible, and peaceful coexistence between the two blocs would be possible, if it were not for the fact that in a capitalist system the owner of a major corporation can only become head of government if he shows himself capable of subordinating the specific interests of his company to the general interest of his class. By contrast, Berlusconi's legislation favours his company to the detriment of others. Since he moreover has to try to ward off numerous criminal prosecutions which would almost certainly lead to his conviction, he is willing to sacrifice both the stability of the relations between the institutions and the balance of the relationship between the majority and the opposition, both of which are necessary to govern a country in time of crisis, upon the altar of his own personal safety.

It is therefore not true to argue that there is no difference in Italy between the centre-right and the centre-left. Even if there are differences within the bourgeois camp, the political line of the «national» bloc is currently more dangerous than that of the «European» bloc, since it is more vehement in supporting the expansion of precarious employment relationships, and because, due to the growing power of the Lega Nord in the government, it is undertaking an extremely difficult ethnic segmentation of the labour market. It is bringing forth a reactionary culture consisting of a hypocritical mixture of private immorality and respect for traditional forms of the Catholic Church. In fact, with its frenzied attacks against the judiciary, it supported white-collar crime and constantly tried to shift the relationship between the institutions in an authoritarian manner for the benefit of the government. Berlusconi therefore emerged as the most important enemy, an enemy whose power consisted primarily in his success in filling the vacuum left by the dissolution of the left and its uncritical acquiescence to liberal European policies.

While the social base of the centre-right camp, i.e. the reservoir from which it draws its funding and its political actors, consists of medium-sized businesses and a large

share of the professional strata, its base in the mass of the population consists of the most disadvantaged people with regard to gender, age and employment opportunity, such as housewives, pensioners, the unemployed, the youth and workers in precarious jobs. And while the centre-right gets only approximately half the votes of those employed in «stable» jobs at major industrial corporations, and while only a minority of public employees vote for the centre-right, this camp has been able to attract a clear majority of the votes of employees in small and medium-sized enterprises, who are subjected to stiffer competition, and the majority of the votes of those in short-term employment. Hence, the proletariat tends in its electoral behaviour to support the right, although one should not ignore the fact that the major share of the workers' vote which the Democratic Party (PD) and the radical left lost in the last parliamentary election did not go to the right, but rather disappeared into the nonvoting bloc. It is the weakest section of the proletariat that votes for the right, i.e. especially workers in precarious jobs whom the radical left claims to represent in the political sphere, but who in turn view the PD as the party of workers who have «guaranteed» jobs³⁵⁶.

Thus, while the centre-right coalition implements decisions clearly aimed against organised labour action, it still succeeds in portraying itself as the guarantor of the protection of the weakest segments of the population. With this purpose, it skilfully uses the information systems and also the capacity of the old politics of the left which was rooted in the population and replaces it with populist rhetoric in place of the liberal rhetoric of today's left. This became clear in the initial reactions to the first phase of the economic crisis. While Berlusconi was wise enough to leave the stage to his Economics Minister Giulio Tremonti, a convinced «opponent of the market» and, at least in his own words, of the dominance of the banks and the major corporations, and portrayed his government as one that intended to intervene directly in the economic sphere, to fight the banking capitalists and to protect the weakest strata (although his measures were in fact inappropriate and propagandistic), the PD took the side of the Banca d'Italia, to defend the banks against «interference» by the state. What prevents the PD from re-establishing its consensus with the lower strata of the population is its class barriers.

All this is an additional problem for the radical left. On the one hand, the need to defeat Berlusconi at the polls – and, within the left, to disguise the true nature of the anti-Berlusconi, pro-European block – caused many potential voters of the radical left

356 At least three of the most important studies of the last Italian parliamentary election agree in this assessment: R. Mannheimer, *P. Natale: Senza più sinistra. L'Italia di Bossi e Berlusconi* [Without a left: The Italy of Bossi and Berlusconi], Milan 2008; E. A. Carra: *Ho perso la sinistra. Le ragioni del declino e le proposte per reinventarla* [I have lost the left. The reasons for the decline and some suggestions for reinventing it], Rome 2008; I. Diamanti: *Mappe dell'Italia politica* [A cartography of political Italy], Bologna 2009. Salvo Leonardi notes that the left has always been in the minority in the working class, and that among all employees, it won a majority in the last election. Cf. Salvo Leonardi: «Il voto operaio in Italia; declino o continuità?» [Workers votes in Italy: decline or continuity?], in: *Quaderni di Rassegna Sindacale*, April 2006. Yet this is only a slight majority, and it becomes a minority if the votes of workers in atypical jobs and of the unemployed are included.

to vote for the strongest opposition party, the PD. On the other hand, the PD's opposition was, due to the above-mentioned «points of contact» between the two blocs, entirely insufficient to win the battle against Berlusconi, since, with its support for the liberal model, it was not in a position to beat him on the field of social consensus. As long as Berlusconi ruled, the radical left was limited by the necessity of voting for the PD in order to «not waste one's vote». But as long as the PD led the opposition against Berlusconi, he seemed able to sleep peacefully.

For all these reasons, it did not seem possible for any political space to open up to the left of the PD which might be occupied by the radical left, in spite of the continual drift of the PD toward the centre. What did open up was the space of «radical anti-Berlusconi-ism», which was filled by the party Italy of Values (*Italia dei Valori*/IdV), a political grouping led by Antonio di Pietro, a former judge and leader in the fight against corruption. While he did level harsh criticisms against the PD, due to its insufficient opposition to Berlusconi, he essentially shared that party's concepts on social and economic issues, and was hence fully a part of the centre-left alliance.

The origins and results of the majority voting system

There is another reason why the political space to the left of the PD will not open up, that is the particular nature of the Italian voting system. The end of the First Republic and of the old mass parties was accompanied by the abolition of the proportional representation voting system, and the introduction of majority voting. The goal of the supporters of majority voting, which included most of the dominant groups in Italy, was to eliminate the «wings» of various groupings, and to steer all political forces toward an undifferentiated position in the «centre», so as to eliminate the representation of the lower strata of the population which had been provided, under the proportional representation system, by the Communist Party. The leaders of this party saw the opportunity in the majority voting system of entering into government and of reducing the power of competitors within the left spectrum, forcing them to decide between forced entry into alliance and political irrelevance. This policy has been maintained to this day, with the additional problem that the PD is attempted to replace bipolarism – which is at least involved a contest between alliances which have each grouped a number of parties – with a true two-party system, which would eliminate the smaller political forces from parliament altogether.

This attempt has not been undertaken by means of any further change in the voting system, which, due to a tactical decision of the right wing, has been corrected by the reintroduction of elements of proportional representation, but rather by a political decision after the defeat of the last centre-left government, to exclude any alliance with the radical left, in order to attract all tactical anti-Berlusconi votes to the PD. This operation was continued through the increase of the minimum threshold for election to the European Parliament from 3 to 4%, and is now continuing with the decision to contest regional elections in alliance with the Union of the Centre (Un-

ione di Centro/UdC), a political force which emerged from the old Christian Democrats and which had until recently belonged to the centre-right alliance. On the other hand, cooperation with the PRC is to be terminated even in those regions where the alliance yielded positive results. This thus involves a systematic decision on the part of the PD to eliminate the competition of the PRC by excluding them from possible electoral alliances, in the illusion that the «orphaned» PRC electorate will then decide to vote for the PD, rather than staying home.

The necessity for continuing to pursue the weakening of the radical left, which is already implicitly present in the majority voting system, shows that the goal pursued by the introduction of the system was not really achieved. While it is true that the radical left has lost considerable ground in all recent elections, it is also true that this weakening only threatens to result in the complete disappearance of the PRC as a result of the most recent split. Indeed, there are still 6 or 7% of the vote located to the left of the PD, even if that vote is divided among various groupings. It is primarily the presence of the SEL which prevents this segment of the electorate from openly opposing the PD.

The theory of the two-party system has moreover failed within both camps. The new centre-right party People of Liberty (*Popolo della Libertà*/PDL) indeed only united the former *Forza Italia* – Berlusconi's «personal» party – and the former post-fascist national alliance (*Alleanza Nazionale*/AN), while the *Lega Nord* maintained its independence, and regularly demonstrated it. In the centre-left camp, the IdV established itself, primarily at the expense of the PD, at the centre of this camp, while the UDC managed to expand its position, sometimes allying itself with the right and sometimes with the opposition, so that it became a possible deciding factor for coalitions. The majority voting system has thus shown that a simplification of the political system cannot be achieved by a simple change in the voting system, for that change did not prevent at least three influential political poles – aside from the radical left, which did not disappear altogether – from emerging next to the two major parties, each with between 6 and 8% of the vote. Rather, the system clearly became a straitjacket which determined political life in Italy, and many, even within the two major parties, want to return to proportional representation.³⁵⁷ Until that happens,

357 It cannot be forgotten that those who in Italy are known as the strong force – the national business association Confindustria and the Catholic Church – have, in view of the unsatisfactory results of the bipolarism of the majority voting system, for some time been attempting to create a «broad centre», i.e. a political force which would be in position to dictate the strategic interests of the ruling class both toward the right and toward the left. The system has proved unsatisfactory since on the one hand, it has proved unable, under the last Prodi government, to force coalition discipline upon the radical left, and on the other hand to «normalize» and moderate the right, so that instead, the *Lega Nord* gained in power. The attempt, first undertaken by the PD and then by Berlusconi, to solve the problem of bipolarism by transforming it into a two-party system, has now forced the idea of a «broad centre» into the background. However, the failure of the project of a two-party system could cause it to be resurrected, although it is not entirely clear whether this goal would be easier to achieve by means of proportional representation or by a full or partial majority voting system.

the electoral system will continue to greatly limit the chances of success and survival of the radical left. It should be noted that they achieved their best results when they were able to present themselves as the «left-wing» of the centre-left camp.

Due to the strategic decision that the PRC took at the end of the Prodi government, the PD decided to refuse even local alliances with the PRC, although the PRC did not reciprocate. As a result, the PRC no longer appears as the left-wing of the centre-left camp, so that its fate at the polls is uncertain. This is not because Italian voters prefer moderate parties or reject radical programmes, but rather reflects a peculiar characteristic in the electoral behaviour of the Italians which emerged especially clearly in the last parliamentary elections: the tendency to grant «bonuses» to the outer wings of both alliances – the IdV in the centre-left alliance and the *Legga Nord* in the centre-right coalition. In other words, Italian voters reward radical positions, provided they present themselves as part of a coalition, and thus have a real chance of participating in the government of the country. For this reason, a radical position which is not part of any coalition, i.e. the position which the PRC has adopted, to some extent consciously and to some extent by necessity runs the risk of foregoing this bonus from the electorate. This is also the reason why the SEL, which has decided to side with the PD «always and under all circumstances», can claim the position of being «the left-wing» of the centre-left alliance, and can thus attract additional votes from the PRC – as long as its voters do not see the contradiction between the party's programme, which at least formally still exhibits the rhetoric of the radical left, and participation in alliances with the increasingly moderate PD, as too great.

The burden of «short-term-ness»

Clearly, an independent social rooting of the PRC is very difficult in a situation such as that described above, and «short-term» events, such as splits, mistaken analyses of the current situation, or political mistakes can have very serious consequences. The most recent split of the PRC certainly contributed to its present difficulties.

Even if the number of the members and functionaries who left to form the SEL was relatively small, they achieved some success in the elections, pulling equal with the PRC. Even taking into account the share contributed by the votes of Greens and Socialists, the SEL nonetheless won that share of the PRC vote which saw an alliance with the PD as unavoidable.

But other factors too have contributed to the current situation: a misinterpretation of the nature of the Prodi government, including exaggerated expectations of the centre-left alliance, which was also shown in the acceptance of a high institutional office by Fausto Bertinotti, and especially the failure to found a moral political subject during the period between the demonstrations in Genoa in July of 2001 and the beginning of the centre-left government in the spring of 2006. During this time, the PRC probably missed a historic opportunity. For while the electoral heritage of the

old Communist Party of Italy was gradually being consumed,³⁵⁸ the alternative globalisation movement emerged as a new reality of the social left.

An intelligent proposal of a federative nature with the potential for bringing together parties and associations in a common project, might have been able to tie the PRC to a new social base, and to form a political subject which might have succeeded in bringing effective pressure to bear on the Prodi government, and to exhibit a less catastrophic manner of dealing with a possible defeat. The fact that neither occurred was due to the relatively low level of maturity of the movements and associations, but also to the fact that the party was dedicated intensively to the renewal of its own rhetoric and communications («being part of the movement», «renunciation of violence», «participatory democracy»), which however did not correspond to any consciously new organisational structuring of its relationship to external subjects, but rather an imitation of the pluralism of the movements within the PRC's own organisation. This again led to a confused overlapping of decision-making levels which was temporarily united in the charismatic personality of Fausto Bertinotti.

The tough political debate at the party congress in Chianciano in the summer of 2008, at which those who wanted to maintain a communist orientation and those who wanted to form a broader «left without adjectives» faced off, was interpreted by the media as a conflict between conservatives and innovators. In fact, what was mainly at issue was the evaluation of the PD, and hence the question of how the alliance with that party was to be assessed.³⁵⁹ Even those who held the opinion that the PRC must be preserved because it represented an independent position outside and independent of the PD, were aware of the inadequacy of the PRC in the face of the overall task of building an alternative left. The withdrawal of the members who founded the SEL reduced the element of innovative discourse, and increased that of emphasis on the communist tradition. But in fact, innovative processes of considerable importance are taking place within the context of this apparent continuity: United leadership of the party; the building of the «social party»; and the idea of the Federation of the Left. Let us examine each of these elements in turn.

The first renewal of united leadership

Since its foundation, the PRC had formerly been a unitary party, but had nonetheless been federal in essence. It consisted of a coalescence of political families which already

358 S. Bertolino, *op. cit.*, p. 168.

359 Generally, the proposal that supported the continuity of the party nonetheless continued to support renewal, and the fundamental idea that the party should be a subject «within» the social movements. For detailed reconstruction of the debate at the party congress, cf. F. De Nardis: *Da partito di governo a partito extraparlamentare. La parabola della Rifondazione Comunista, tra antagonismo sociale e calcolo delle compatibilità* [From a party of government to an extraparlimentary party: The parable of the Communist Refoundation Party, between social antagonism and compatibility assessment], presentation to the annual meeting of the Italian Society for Political Science, Pavia Sept. 5–6 2008.

existed at the national level, each with its own culture, its own traditional forms of organisation and its own personal ties.³⁶⁰ In view of this «genetic marking», the unitary leadership of the party was either the result of a precarious balance between these components – which brought with it corresponding difficulties in establishing a clear political line, or beyond that, of realizing a «communist revalidation» based on clear cultural guidelines – or else there wasn't one, as was the case after the Venice Party Congress in March at which the internal minority was completely excluded from the party leadership.

After the Chianciano Party Congress, the successful coalition that elected Paolo Ferrero as party chairman offered the minority led by Nichi Vendola, which won 47 % of the vote, the overall joint leadership of the party at both central and peripheral levels. This offer was rejected. That was the first act of a long process of a «phased split off», which ended with the definitive withdrawal of a part of this minority. The successful coalition moreover created a de facto uniform work-style in spite of its heterogeneous character, such as had seldom been seen in the PRC, and which was particularly demonstrated in complete agreement on some most important decisions. The interparty factions certainly have not disappeared, even if points of consensus are becoming ever more common, especially in theoretical debates. However, the consciousness of the tragic critical moment which the party experienced has caused cooperative elements to outweigh competitive forces.

The most important result of this first renewal since the existence of the PRC is that particularly the unity of the leadership group has made it possible to explore further renewals, which the interparty conflict had previously made impossible. This also confirms the fact that it may be easy for splintered and «polyarchic» parties to adapt to the immediate context of their environments, but that centralised unitary parties have a better ability to introduce conscious renewal.

The renewal in this case has not yet affected the internal life of the party.³⁶¹ In this respect, the main problem with the PRC after the catastrophic electoral defeat of 2008 was and is securing the minimum requirements for survival. The leadership team was concerned with the difficult question of financial and organisational rationalisation, which led to painful cuts in the greatly overblown administrative apparatus,

360 S. Bertolino, *op. cit.*, p. 361.

361 It is therefore logical to assume that the general problems identified in a recent internal study continued to exist, or that they have even become more serious: a low presence of workers, women and young people among the membership, a lack of ties between the various struggles organised by the party, and especially a lack of ties between the «top» and the «base», combined with the consequential inability to plan social activities and examine their results, and to provide the necessary support and orientation for the party in public office. Moreover, the study indicated a strong and widespread presence of the party in numerous conflict situations, and the continuation of an extremely positive connection between the intensity of the willingness to struggle within the party, and their associated independent networks of movements. This also shows the extent to which the «turn of Genoa» has entered into the culture of the PRC (see: *Rapporto conclusivo dell'inchiesta sul partito 2006/2008* [Final report of the party study 2006/2008], under http://home.rifondazione.it/xisttest/dip_36).

as well as major cutbacks in support for the party's daily newspaper, *Liberazione*. The renewals involved to a greater extent the relationship of the party to society and the rest of the alternative left.

The second renewal: The «social party»

With regard to its relationship to society, the PRC is increasingly oriented toward adopting the form of a «social party». The basic idea here is that in view of the dispersion of workers outside the traditional factories, in view of the loss of the socializing function of the remaining plants, and due to the widespread mistrust of politics, no general political discourse with working people – or any individual – in the 21st century can be perceived and understood unless it is accompanied by concrete solutions to concrete problems.

Every social dispute can only lead to more than a transitory protest if social relationships of mutual support emerge prior to such a dispute, and for the purpose of supporting it, and which permit the individual to gain renewed trust in collective action. If the elementary action of a member of the «classical party» is the distribution of leaflets, which for instance call for struggle against rising living costs, the elementary action of a member of the social party is the foundation of a group for social shopping (GAP – Gruppo di Acquisto Popolare), which will enable them to be supplied with everyday necessities at low-cost. During and after the foundation of a GAP, a leaflet can and must be distributed, and the political line disseminated.

This applies to certain health services, social care facilities, groups for senior citizens etc. Also, the support for the struggles of workers affected by the crisis is carried on not only in the form of political support, but also includes concrete solidarity networks between workers and citizens. Thus, mutual aid does not replace political action, but becomes the elementary grammar in which the overall political discourse is formulated. Moreover, it connects with the practice of interviewing as one of the key modalities of mass action of the party. In addition to the problem of the relationship to the electorate of a Communist Party – or at least a people's party – the social party also addresses the question of the internal function of the party by permitting its members to seek not only locations of political/ideological debate in the base «circles», but also solutions to everyday problems. The assumption of the logic of common action could provide the party with the possibility of entering into contact with the widespread culture of political associations which have long since replaced the actions of parties in Italy, and have become important sites for the search for identity and political socialisation of people.

The PRC has undertaken a very large number of initiatives in this area.³⁶² The determinant for the party in this respect, particularly with regard to its symbolic power,

362 For a description of the activities of the «social party», in which nonparty members also participate, see <http://www.partitosociale.org>.

was the experience of the actions in Aquila after the famous tragic earthquake. It was an experience through which the trust of the people in the party increased, and the commitment of many party member groups was mobilised. However, the social party is not only expanding at the traditional locations of social life, but is also attempting to be present in the new forms of virtual networking, the so-called social networks. Especially, involvement in new virtual spaces has permitted the PRC to pursue online mobilisation, and to some extent also to organize, one result being the major demonstration in Rome of December 4, 2009, the No-B-Day, in which thousands of young people, most of them in precarious jobs, gathered to protest against the policies of Berlusconi. It was the first major opposition event after the temporary decline of the movement of school pupils, the so-called «wave».

It is difficult to say to what extent this renewal, perhaps the first concrete renewal to be implemented by the PRC after Genoa, will be in a position to actually comprehensively change the practice of the party. Even though it has officially adopted the idea of the social party, there is significant resistance, and it is difficult to generalise the practice, which demands many skills and much energy of the party, and where young people are in the minority and in which it is primarily traditional political skills which are present. In any case, it appears that the essential path will be to re-establish relationships with all strata of the population, especially to the most excluded groups which are particularly receptive to populism, but also to the qualified and individualised strata. In any case the path to the gradual emergence of a solid basis of consensus for the party and the expansion of this consensus beyond the current limits of the left electorate, while at the same time preserving the party from the looming danger of isolation and political extinction, will be very long.

The third renewal: The Federation of the Left

The question of the relationship to other forces of the radical left has been addressed by the PRC with a clear change with respect to the past. Its main problem of the PRC in this area was and is the preservation of its complete independence from the PD, without on the one hand dissolving into a general «component of the left», as the majority at the Chianciano Party Congress wished, and without, on the other hand, withdrawing inward or simply becoming a «component of the communists», which would not enhance the perspectives of the party, but rather reduce them. The proposed solution is for a Federation of the Left, a subject which would be composed of various parties and associations, and also be open to individual members; a subject which would be independent in its decision-making and to which its separate components could hence transfer a portion of their sovereignty; and a subject which would be in a position to guarantee a reasonable balance between all its partners. Such a solution had already been considered in the period before the formation of the centre-left government.

That was the project of the European left, which at that time would have had the capability of bringing together at least a part of the alternative globalisation move-

ment, and to form a positive balance between parties and associations. In view of the inevitable difficulties connected with any such solution, the party's leadership team blocked the project, in the conviction that an electoral victory could be achieved if the party were to stand only under its own symbol, that of Communist Refoundation, which ultimately proved to be the case. The only later deviation was the version of this vision that emerged in the form of the Left Rainbow Alliance (*Sinistra Arcobaleno*), wherein, after the death of the centre-left coalition, the issue was to «save what could yet be saved». But at this point, the Left Rainbow was nothing more than an electoral association of party leadership teams in a deep crisis, and the result in terms of votes received, was a disaster.

The current proposal is emerging in a completely different context. The PRC has clearly been weakened, the alternative globalisation movement has returned to its social activities, and many of the associations which it had helped found have withdrawn from politics, or have virtually merged with the PD. The most recent protest actions too have not brought forth any firm discussion partner. Nonetheless, a federation too seems to be a viable path, since there is currently no political idea powerful enough to be able to unite the various forces of the Italian left in only one party, and because on the other hand, only a federation can succeed in creating a fair balance between the necessary communities of action and the necessary preservation of the diversity of political actors; a «diversity of languages» which could establish the best possible connection between a political project and a highly differentiated and «individualised» society such as that of Italy. The founding Party Congress of the Federation took place on 20–21 November 2010, at which Oliviero Diliberto was elected speaker. Today, the federation includes, in addition to the PRC, the Party of Italian Communists (PCI), and two political associations: Socialism 2000, a split-off from the Democratic Party of the Left, the predecessor of the PD; and Labour and Solidarity, the political arm of a minority tendency of the union federation CGIL. However, numerous contacts with other political and social forces are being created.

In this context, the question of the relationship to the SEL also arises. The apparent difficulties of the political project of this organisation are no less daunting than those facing the PRC. The split-off of the SEL from the PRC was justified as a decision for the «new» and against the «old», for a «left without adjectives», and against a new version of communist identity. In reality, the dissent was, as stated above, not over the necessity for renewal, nor over the necessity of expansion beyond a mere ideologically new version of communism. The idea of a social party and of a federation shows the PRC was and is open to renewal. The true point of conflict involved (and still involves) the relationship to the PD. The PRC underscores the necessity for independence, while the SEL considers cooperation necessary. However, this is becoming very difficult, since the PD has decided openly for an alliance with the Union of the Centre; an alliance which in Apulia has led to a break between the PD and the SEL's most prominent representative, Nichi Vendola, hitherto the Apulian regional president.

After the loss of an important component – parts of the greens and other forces – and after the political idea which resulted in the formation of the SEL has failed, the SEL is currently facing very difficult decisions. Even if it does enter into alliances with the PD wherever this is possible, it is clear that such alliances will not be able to influence the PD in any significant decisions, while the PD will force the SEL to adopt political positions which it has opposed in the past.

The relations between the various political forces operating to the left of the PD are in any case still uncertain and dynamic. It can certainly not be excluded that in the near or distant future, new unitary solutions will emerge, even if these are made more difficult by the fact that the essential «right to exist» of the SEL is its alliance with the PD. Even if such a unitary solution could not lead to the SELs joining the federation, but would rather be limited to a simple political alliance or an electoral association, a paradoxical situation would nonetheless emerge. For it would mean that three important forces which were previously united in the PRC, the rump PRC itself, the PCI and the SEL – aside from a possible convergence of «left» dissidents – would be forming a new united political pact between different organisations. While the old PRC was formally united, but in fact essentially a plural party, here, there would be a formally plural association essentially with an at least tactically unified political line. This paradox, if it became reality, would raise numerous questions from the point of view of political scientists and theoreticians of the «party as form», and also for all who consider the relationship between the idea of a new left and its forms of organisation.

Fighting against the crisis and for a «constitutional government»: On the way to a fourth renewal?

The general political programme of the PRC during this phase can be broken down into two areas: on the one hand, the proposals of the party for fighting the economic crisis by means of measures for expanding social security, financed by an increase in taxes on higher incomes and an assets tax, and by a drastic fight against tax evasion, which is very high in Italy;³⁶³ and second, the nationalisation of companies affected by the crisis, together with the re-nationalisation of the banks. According to this perspective, the economic upswing of the country is to be achieved by a comprehensive plan for restoring the environment and public infrastructure, while opposing the concentration of funds in a few propagandistic super-projects, as well as environmental destruction, the dismantling of public structures such as schools and hospitals, and the neglect of the construction of housing; instead, investment in alternative energy is to be promoted. In spite of its often very general formulations (which do become ever more precise and detailed when they concentrate on certain areas) this plan is an actual alternative which defines a Socialist and Green direction. In addition, there will

³⁶³ By conservative estimates, the state loses some €100 billion per year to tax evasion, which is equal to approx. 7% of the GDP; cf. R. Ippolito: *Evasori: chi, come, quanto* [Tax evaders: Who, how, how much], Milan 2008.

in the next months be a proposal for a referendum on abolishing the law permitting the expansion of precarious employment relationships, the so-called Law Number 30. The goal of the referendum is to reverse the low-wage policy traditionally pursued by employers in Italy, a policy which often involves doing without technological innovation, and to re-establish the political ties between the PRC and the precariously employed, who, as described above, have largely either abstained from the electoral process, or have voted right wing.

In a purely political sense, the PRC sees the experience of the centre-left alliance as conclusively terminated, as far as a programme for national government is concerned, and instead calls for a «constitutional government» supported by a majority ranging from the PRC to the UDC.

This government would have to pass a law against «conflicts of interests», and reintroduce a proportional representation system. Then, it would have to resign and permit new elections to be held. Such a framework would certainly be favourable for the PRC and the Federation of the Left, since it would eliminate the compulsion to «not waste one's vote», and enable freer elections.

Even if this is an intelligent proposal, it is resisted not only by the PD, but also by unpredictable doubts in the electorate, which, in times of crisis, are hardly interested in an electoral campaign mostly dedicated to institutional issues, so that the voters would once again support the right wing, which has great rhetorical experience regarding the issues of protection and safety.

In any case, for a party (or federation), the existence of which depends primarily on short-term decisions, the question of a programme or of general political guidelines is certainly decisive. The societal and political situation in the country remains highly unstable. It is true that two of the four electoral regions into which Italy can be divided – the Northeast and the Centre – have demonstrated consistent electoral behaviour over time (right-wing in the case of the Northeast, and left-wing in the case of the Centre), while the other two regions, the Northwest and especially the South, have demonstrated much greater volatility. For instance, the shift of workers' votes in the Northwest and those of the disadvantaged segments of the population in the South enabled Romano Prodi's electoral victory, and it was the disappointment of the same strata that then led to his defeat. A hypothetical left alliance could, if correctly oriented, also regain the numerous non-voters, whose increasing numbers have come particularly at the expense of the left in recent years. The current economic crisis could reinforce electoral volatility in the unstable regions, and a possible crisis of leadership of Berlusconi could open the way for entirely new scenarios.

In view of the situation, the PRC in the Federation would have to develop a broad range of social and political proposals suitable to ensure preparedness for any possible situation. The PRC in the Federation would have to provide the cultural and public image of a government, by recognizing the severity of the crisis and its character as an epochal change, even if they were to assume that they would not be able to assume

government responsibility for ten years or more, for the electorate in the disadvantaged segments requires clear, credible and concrete statements.

It will therefore be important for the PRC to use its regained unitary orientation to undertake a further renewal of the procedure for establishing a programme and political guidelines. If the splintering of the party has prevented programmatic coherence, unity could lead to a planned development of a programme. This should be carried out by systematically incorporating the numerous intellectual resources spread across Italy, which are to a large extent untapped by most political forces. On this basis, the party could address the task of a coherent development of political forces, which has been consistently hampered by previous intra-party conflicts. In the systematic development of a programme, the PRC could, finally, concretely initiate its communist refoundation, i.e. a new definition of the heritage of the workers' movement in view of today's tasks, by bringing together the numerous fragmentary elements existing within the political culture of the Italian left. They can be brought together in the vision of a green socialism based on democratic, participatory institutions and on the liberation of labour and the environment from the status of commodities. The creation of a mixed economic system should be the goal which provides a strategic public presence and, where necessary, the continued existence of mercantile production, and the development of communal production based on solidarity. Such a cultural and programmatic development can certainly be effectively addressed, if the PRC succeeds in abandoning the risky phase which is today threatening its survival. But it is equally certain that such a further renewal would itself be the precondition for survival. As Antonio Gramsci noted, a party which is not firmly rooted in civil society can only address these weaknesses by developing a precise programme which consists not only of the listing of economic and social proposals, but also addresses the general problems of the country – its inner unity, its role in the international geopolitical sphere, the composition of its leadership strata, and the future of its socially disadvantaged strata.³⁶⁴ Developing such a programme would, for the PRC, mean that the party would have to thoroughly discuss from the start its relationship to the country and its history. This is exactly the task that now faces the party at this decisive moment in its history.

364 A. Gramsci: Prison Notebooks, volume I.

Dominic Heilig

THE PORTUGUESE LEFT: THE STORY OF A SEPARATION

Preface

This paper is a description of the Portuguese parties of the left, from the overthrow of the Salazar-Caetano dictatorship in 1974 to the parliamentary elections of June 2011. It firstly examines the latest election and the relevant issues raised in that context by the Portuguese left; and secondly the history of the parties to the left of the Social Democrats. ; Since 1999, Portugal has had two parties to the left of the Social Democrats represented in its national Parliament, both of which have participated in shaping the party system from the left to an equal degree, this is rare in the context of other EU member countries. The parties are: the Communist Party of Portugal (PCP); and the Portuguese Left Block (BE). Another peculiarity of the Portuguese party system is the fact that the social democrats in Portugal call themselves the Socialist Party (PS), while the conservatives have chosen the name Social Democratic Party (PSD). In addition to the PSD, there is another right-conservative/right-populist party which holds parliamentary seats, the Democratic and Social Centre/People's Party (CDS-PP).

The parliamentary elections of 2011

The snap parliamentary elections called for June 5, 2011 became necessary when the minority government of Socialist Premier José Socrates failed for the third time in Parliament to win a majority for the third stage of its austerity programme. Not only the Left Block and the PCP voted against the third stage, as they had against the previous two stages, but the left-wing of the socialist parliamentary group had also voted against all three austerity packages. So Socrates only managed to pass its program in 2010 with the support of the largest opposition party, the conservative PSD. However, in March 2011, the parties of the right withdrew their support, and the government resigned on March 24, 2011, and President Aníbal Cavaco Silva (PSP)

called elections for June 5, 2011. The reason for this refusal of support by the PSD was however not any change of position or conflict with the ruling PS, but simply the steady rise of the PSD in the polls, and the concurrent drop in Socrates' popularity, which promised a conservative electoral victory.

On June 5, 2011, 9.6 million eligible voters were called upon to elect a new parliament, with 17 political parties and associations to choose from. Only five parties sat in the previous parliament, and the same five were elected again to the new one; the Communist Party (PCP), the Left Block (BE), the Socialist Party (PS), the conservative «Social Democratic Party» (PSD), and the right-wing populist Democratic and Social Centre (CDS/PP).

In the weeks before the election, the pollsters were unable to make any certain or accurate predictions as to the electoral preferences of the voters. For a long time, a neck-and-neck race between the PS and the PSD was predicted. Just before election day, the PSD was polled at 37% of the vote, just slightly ahead of the PS, which was seen as getting 35%; the two leftist parties, the BE and the PCP, fluctuated between 5 and 9%, with the values shifting almost daily. Both in the electoral campaign and in terms of their positions on issues, the two large parties could hardly be distinguished. Both had supported two or even three austerity programmes for Portugal, the primary features of the austerity programmes were:

- A halt to public investments in major projects, including a bridge over the Tagus, improvement of the rail line to Madrid, and modernisation of the infrastructure,
- a freeze on pensions and wages in the public service,
- a reduction of the minimum wage and minimum pensions to €300 per month,
- an increase in VAT by 2% (currently 23%; interim tax rate 13%),
- a halt to all investments in public services, especially education and health, and,
- massive privatisation of state enterprises in the coming three years, amounting to a total of €5 billion

Both parties (PS and PSD) thus ran campaigns based less on content than on strategy regarding the future of the country, and hence called for a clear majority for themselves. Both accepted the agreement reached with the Troika (the EU, the IMF and the ECB), and therefore the austerity measures agreed to in that agreement. Due to this fuzzy line of division between the parties of the centre, both naturally sought to mobilize support from their respective edges of the party system. The PS called upon traditionally left-wing voters not to waste their vote, and thus to vote for the PS, rather than for the BE or the PCP; of which the latter once again stood together with the Greens under the label «Democratic Unity Coalition» (CDU) in the election.

Responses and strategies of the Portuguese Left in 2011

The Left Block

The BE offered three answers to the strategic and political challenges of the electoral campaign:

Cooperation among the parties of the Left

Even though the PCP and the BE have since the foundation of the latter been virtually irreconcilable opponents,³⁶⁵ they came together – to the great interest of the media – in early April 2011 to discuss possible coalitions and cooperative efforts. Although there was no pre-electoral cooperation arrangement, there was agreement to meet shortly after the election to at least discuss post-electoral alliances in Parliament. Although both parties had in the previous legislative term voted together 80% of the time, they continued to be separated by a cultural, historical and programmatic gap of vast proportions. Parts of the BE (which was not founded until 1999) consist of former PCP members who had left the party due to its very strong degree of «democratic centralism». The media followed this first official meeting after twelve years between these two parties with great interest; it made the front pages of all national newspapers.

A «responsible left»

The core concept of the BE's electoral strategy was to position itself as part of the «responsible left». Going into the 2011 elections, the party saw no possibility of post-electoral cooperation with the then ruling Socialist Party. Nonetheless, it wanted to counter the prejudice that it was interested in being in opposition and thus avoid having to assume government responsibility after the election. Using this concept of a «responsible left», the party developed an interesting political strategy: BE chair Francisco Louça went on the offensive and called for a leftist majority in the Portuguese Parliament, thus raising the possibility of cooperation of his party with the PCP and the left-wing of the PS, which had refused to support Premier Socrates' austerity packages. In January 2011, the BE had supported the Socialist presidential candidate and national poet Manuel Alegre in his election campaign, who is considered a prominent representative of the SP's left-wing of the Socialist Party. In addition, the Left Block openly approached the trade unions in order to recruit a broad left potential for its «responsible left». With this strategy, which was not easy to communicate, the party attempted to counter the PS's «don't-waste-your-vote» campaign.

365 More on that below.

Democratisation and Europeanisation

Ultimately however, the Block depended on Portuguese young people who, like their Spanish counterparts in the run-up to the regional elections there in May, used social networks to mobilize a demonstration for March 13, 2011. It was the biggest demo in Portugal since the May Day rally in 1974, after the Carnation Revolution – and it was organised with no help from either the parties or the unions. Many of these young people had never yet voted, since they were sceptical of, or totally rejected, the political system and all its political parties. The BE saw this milieu as most promising for a political turn to the left in Portugal. It had since its founding seen itself not only as a party or part of a social movement, but as a movement in and of itself. It took this occasion to demand a comprehensive systemic transformation of the country, on the basis of radical democratisation; in effect, a second Carnation Revolution.

At the same time, the BE rejected all tendencies to call for greater renationalisation of the economy and politics. Rather, it called for a «re-foundation of the European Union» and the European economic regime.

The Communist Party of Portugal

The PCP placed two demands at the centre of its electoral campaign:

Renationalisation and a debate about withdrawal from the EU and the Euro Zone

Unlike the BE, the PCP tied its demand for a halt to the privatisation of public services to the demand for the renationalisation of key domestic industries. Here, the party referred to the demands which it had raised at the constitutional convention after the Carnation Revolution of 1975. At the same time, the party, like the Communist Party of Greece (KKE), called the country's continued membership in the EU into question. This position was due primarily to Portugal's negotiations with the Troika which was a result of the extremely negative repercussions on Portugal of the economic and financial crisis.

Democratisation vs. the class state

The PCP too saw great potential for itself as a party in the emerging youth protests. However, it rejected the political content of their movement, and criticised the lack of any political or class specific orientation of these protests. In its view, the demonstrations were decidedly not comparable to those of 1974 and '75. Instead, the PCP demanded a radical systemic transformation, and called on the youth to take up that demand. It was probably precisely this vanguardist attitude that prevented the PCP from winning any friends among the protesting young people. The party strongly rejected any idea of coalition with the PS or support for its minority government.

Common demands of the PCP and the BE

In spite of all differences in strategy and political substance, a few central demands common to both parties in the 2011 electoral campaign can be identified, including:

1. Job creation and re-nationalisation of key industries (here, the PCP went much further than the BE).
2. A halt to social cutbacks.
3. A halt to privatisation, and increased state investments.
4. Rejection of the agreement negotiated with the troika.
5. The struggle against nepotism and corruption in Portugal.

The electoral results

In the 2011 elections, voter participation was only around 55 %, in an electorate of 9.6 million 4% less than in the previous election in 2009. In some small southern communities, farmers protesting against cutbacks even blocked the polling stations, and in one case even opened up beehives to interrupt the voting. Around 4% of the votes cast were invalid «blank ballots». The main loser of the snap election was clearly the ruling Socialist Party under Premier José Socrates, which received nearly 28% of the vote. However the Left Block was also among the losers, dropping from 9.8 to only 5%, while the CDU, the alliance of the PCP and the Greens, managed to hold its 8% of the vote. The Left Block thus fell back to the level it had received in the 2005 elections. The clear winner was the previous main opposition party, the conservative PSD. Under its leader, and now Premier, Pedro Passos Coelho, it won 38% of the vote. The second winner was the right-wing populist CDS-PP, which was able to increase its result to eleven.74%, and is now part of the governing coalition.

*Table 1: Results*³⁶⁶

Party	Results 2011, in %	Results 2009, in %	Gains/ losses in %	Seats 2011 (2009)
Socialists (PS)	28.05	36.56	-8.5	73 (97)
Conservative «Social Democrats» (PSD)	38.66	29.eleven	+9.6	105 (81)
Democratic and Social Centre/People's Party (CDS-PP) (right-populists)	eleven.71	10.43	+1.3	24 (21)
Democratic Unity Coalition (CDU) (Communists/PCP and Greens/PEV)	7.90	7.86	+0.0	16 (15)
Left Block (BE)	5.17	9.81	-4.6	8 (16)

366 Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Portuguese_legislative_election,_2011

Table 2: Preliminary results of the BE and the PCP, by province³⁶⁷

Districts	BE in %	CDU (PCP-PEV) in %
Azores	4.39	2.53
Aveiro	5.03	4.09
Beja	5.19	25.39
Braga	4.22	4.89
Bragança	2.30	2.59
Castelo Branco	4.19	4.89
Coimbra	5.75	6.22
Évora	4.91	22.06
Faro	8.16	8.57
Guarda	3.34	3.48
Leiria	5.37	4.97
Lisbon	5.71	9.55
Madeira	4.00	3.67
Portalegre	4.45	12.81
Porto	5.13	6.23
Santarém	5.79	9.02
Setúbal	7.03	19.65
Viana do Castelo	4.39	4.93
Vila Real	2.32	3.07
Viseu	2.85	2.87
TOTAL	5.19	7.94

The election virtually split the country in half. While the conservatives and the right-wing populists have their strongholds in the north of the country, the Socialists were ahead in the South. The South was also the stronghold of the PCP, especially Alentejo, Évora, Beja and Setúbal, was also the stronghold of the PCP, where it won 20% or more, while the BE had its strongest support in urban centres, surpassing 5% in Porto and Lisbon.

³⁶⁷ Source: <http://www0.rtp.pt/noticias/eleicoes/legislativas2011/index.php?ano=2011&candidato=B.E.> & <http://www0.rtp.pt/noticias/eleicoes/legislativas2011/index.php?ano=2011&candidato=PCP-PEV>, accessed on June 6 2011, based on the 99.91% of the vote counted.

Intermediate conclusions

Taking stock of the 2011 elections, the radical left was clearly not only unable to profit from the snap elections, but was even weakened, especially due to the poor results of the Left Block. The question as to why the mass protests in the country did not have a positive affect either on electoral participation or on the results achieved by the radical left is one which will require further analysis. Like Spain, Is Portugal's youth so weakly integrated into the entire political establishment, including the left? If so what are the strategies of the left parties for garnering this potential and are they the right ones?

Neither the BE's strategy of calling for a «responsible left», and thus staking out a position somewhere between the option of governing and that of unwavering opposition, nor that of the PCP, with its call for renationalisation, were effective. The people in Portugal, at least those who bothered to vote at all, wanted a stable majority. That is the only explanation for the coincidence of mass protest on the one hand and the election victory of precisely those forces responsible for the state deficit and the radical cutbacks in social spending on the other. The strategies of the two large mass parties of fishing at the political fringes were thus successful, and damaged the radical left. Hence the radical left was unable to automatically profit from the budding and strong protests of young people, or from the phenomena of the crisis following the financial crash of 2009/2010.

It seems whether the radical left fights against the political system, places itself outside it, or presents itself as a political alternative, it is seen as part of the political spectrum, and therefore more as part of the problem than as part of the solution, no matter what political demands it raises. Many protesters preferred not to vote than to vote for a left political alternative, of either of the two parties which had consistently agitated and voted against the government's austerity package.

One interesting factor will be the question as to how resilient the radical left parties will prove to be internally after this election result, and on the other hand how resilient the publicly proclaimed desire for closer cooperation between the BE and the PCP will be in view of the setback. The only barrier to the development of a strong left alongside the Socialist Party will be the division and the mutual animosity between these two radical left parties. The reasons for the long and persistent separation can be found in the history of the two parties themselves. For this reason, let us take a closer look at the BE and the PCP.

On the history of the Portuguese Left: Between revolution and reform

Despite all the differences, conflicts and unfulfilled hopes for great electoral successes in 2011, the Portuguese left as a whole, is still among the strongest leftist forces in Europe. Even after this disappointing election Combined they have been able to attract 13% of the vote. Many leftists in Europe are both fascinated and mystified by Portugal, the land of the revolution of 1974, the land of the underground struggle

of the Communist Party against the fascist Salazar dictatorship, the land of the sweet promise of «socialism» beyond the Iron Curtain, all things now long past. Thousands of members and sympathizers of small Trotskyist, Maoist and pro-Albanian communist groups and circles travelled to the «Socialist Republic of Portugal» during the early years, seeking to help clear away the old power structures after the Carnation Revolution, and nonetheless found themselves in the ever unchanging intra-leftist disputes from which they fled their homelands for a romanticised Portugal. For 1974 was not just liberation, it was the dawn of a new era, and the radical left was marching in the first ranks. Why could the left nonetheless not gain the upper hand, why is it now stuck into little niches with 5 and 8 % popular support, respectively? A look back is necessary in order to look forward.

The Communist Party of Portugal (PCP)

Thirty-seven years ago, the fascist Salazar/Caetano dictatorship was swept away by a revolt of young junior officers calling themselves the MFA. At that time, Portugal was not only geographically on the margin of the community of European countries. The corporatist, authoritarian model of the *Estado Novo*, based strongly on traditional and church structures of the country which rejected education and industrialisation in favour of such traditional values as family, order, discipline, work and modesty, isolated the country socially, politically and economically for decades. The propaganda which proclaimed an empire of multinational cultures, evoking the heroic myths of the navigator nation, still kept the country rooted in the 19th century as late as 1974. In order to maintain this isolation, the authoritarian fascist state used tough censorship, a one-party system, and a ban on all political organisations. It introduced an inflexible, controlled cultural policy, meticulously kept the borders tight, banned trade unions, and used such instruments as torture, exile and murder. Freedom of opinion, the press and assembly were nonexistent. Social life in Portugal was thus completely depoliticised for decades. Unlike many other authoritarian states, Portugal completely dispensed with any attempt to mobilize the masses. Everything proceeded in a quiet and orderly fashion.

And then came the spring of 1974, bringing a storm of renewal. Democratic socialism, emancipation and freedom were, by all indications, at hand. In the months after the overthrow of the authoritarian fascist dictatorship, every variety of communist and socialist movement and ideology ran riot in the awakening country. Anarchists, Maoists, left radicals and syndicalist organisations and parties unleashed a «storm of activity»³⁶⁸ during the days of the April revolution and in the following weeks and months.

There was a political cartoon that accurately showed the situation of the radical left at that time: a map on the wall shows the outline of Portugal. In front of it, pencils

368 Cf. Frank Bochow: *Revolution und Konterrevolution. Zum 30. Jahrestag der April revolution in Portugal*, in: *Junge welt*, April 24 2004.

and notebooks in hand, are all the revolutionaries and thinkers of the socialist and communist world movement: Marx and Engels, Lenin and Mao, Stalin and Ho Chi Minh, Gramsci and Luxemburg, Castro and Che. The cartoon by João Abel Manta published in Portugal on July eleven, 1975 with the caption «Um problema difícil» shows no movement whatsoever. The left – but not only the left – was looking intently at Portugal.

This little country also drew much interest from corporations, western governments, and conservative and social democratic parties. And they didn't just look they rapidly got active, since they too had been kept at bay by the dictatorship. Some were, however, not caught by surprise. As the regime began noticeably to totter during the early 1970s, the Socialist International, for example, girded up for the battle over the spoils. On April 19, 1973, in the wine tavern «An der Rauschen' in the small German town of Bad Münstereifel south of Bonn, the Socialist Party of Portugal was founded with the help of the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, which is close to it. They wanted to be prepared. But what about the radical left?

The Leftists' relationship to one another, and also their relationship to the strongest leftist force, the Communist Party, was more marked by delimitation than by cooperation and solidarity. Many of the micro-parties active after 1974 soon disintegrated, and barely survived the post-revolutionary months as organisations. But the PCP is still there today, and, in spite of decades in opposition, it has a great influence on politics and especially on the culture of the country.

The PCP was founded on March 6, 1921 as the Portuguese section of the Communist International. The party had its roots in the trade union and workers' movement of the First Republic, which was abolished after a coup d'état in 1926, and replaced by a dictatorship. Thus, the revolution of April 1974 meant for the PCP the end of an almost 50 year period of illegality and the party's General Secretary Álvaro Cunhal returned to Lisbon from his exile in Moscow and Prague to be greeted by a cheering crowd of thousands of people and party sympathizers. In the first PCP's public event on May 1, 1974, half a million Portuguese gathered to enthusiastically applaud Cunhal's first speech.

With its emergence from the illegality which had forced the party to operate clandestinely and relatively uniformly, the party increasingly saw that working legally caused the fracturing of its organisation. This first of all, turned around an evaluation of the revolutionary events of April 1974. For in spite of the time and activity the party had spent in the underground, the so-called Carnation Revolution had not been a PSP revolution alone – not even an uprising under the leadership of that party. Rather, it had two key components: one military and one civilian. And although the party had considerable influence in both areas, it could not claim the role of a vanguard in either. In the days following the revolution, neither the Socialist Party, the young officers who had carried out the coup, nor radical leftists were willing to subordinate

themselves to the leadership role the PCP claimed. Conflicts within the political and radical left were therefore predestined, and weakened the revolutionary left.

Even during the 1960s, the PCP leadership in its Soviet exile had been working on a political programme for the period after the end of the dictatorship. Now, over ten years later, the party took up the task of implementing the programmatic points it had once formulated, without however sufficiently reflecting upon the new era that had dawned. As part of the first transitional government, the PCP leadership primarily pushed for the confiscation and nationalisation of key industries, banks and major estates.

Encouraged by the agitation of the PCP, the workers in many places took matters into their own hands. The «working people» soon occupied 245 confiscated banks, corporations and insurance companies, 33 public corporations and 216 large companies. More than 780 abandoned small businesses were quickly transformed into collectives. However there was one key demand which the PCP could not implement in the first transitional government: the confiscation of the large latifundia in the south of the country, an area in which the Communist Party was traditionally very strongly rooted, even during the era of illegality – and still is today. In the spring of 1975, without waiting for the necessary law to be proclaimed by the government, the party called for occupying the latifundia. Thousands of peasants responded, and within a few weeks, there were 500 peasant collectives, so-called «collective production units», which in a brief period created tens of thousands of paid, socially insured jobs. In so doing however, the Communist Party further isolated itself within the coalition of democratic parties, to which it still belonged in 1975.

A dictatorship which had lasted for almost 50 years, and had had decades to permeate and reshape society, politics and the economy, could not be swept away in a single year, even by the greatest popular movement. Everywhere, gendarmes, police, army officers, administrative employees and officials of the old regime were still in office, and though they pretended to adapt to the new era, they still held their old views. Given the unstable political situation, many supporters of the old regime initially laid low and waited for a favourable moment to, as Klaus Steiniger aptly put it, «to draw their swords once again».

On the one hand, there were the squabbling officers of the MFA, and on the other, strongly conservative circles which, financed from abroad and by the Catholic Church, formed separate political organisations and parties and, under the mantle of democratic party competition, worked to destabilize the revolution. The political pressure on the provisional government was immense. The USA sent a CIA trained ambassadors, NATO warships cruised off the Portuguese coast, and armed units moved up to the Spanish border. The pressure from outside enhanced the PCP's self-isolation; it saw itself cheated of the fruits of its long history of resistance. And, in the months after the revolution, with the fear of a NATO invasion, the disputes between the various leftist forces as to the course the country should take increased.

The radical left, of which the Communist Party could generally be considered a part, reacted in the same way it has for decades in Western Europe – and essentially still does to this day: purity over unity, ideology over logic, rhetoric over politics. While, in view of the difficult situation, one side within the PCP called for a change of course toward the Euro-Communist side of the movement, the other was stuck in its captivity of, and its gratitude toward, the state socialism of the Eastern Bloc. Moreover, it was difficult for the PCP to suddenly open up its organisation, which had operated underground for decades, and develop political patterns of behaviour and organisational habits which might have made the competition of ideas and ideologies – in other words, intraparty democracy – possible within it. The rejection of all organisational and political change, and the fixation of the party on «Moscow» – of which it was accused, not entirely unjustly – did not lead to the hoped-for successes of the PCP in the first free and democratic elections in 1975. The PCP leadership had completely underestimated the reactions of the political competition, which, as the danger of a leftist conflagration in Europe and Africa increased, called for massive support from other Western European countries in order to fight the radical left – and received it. In Spain, Franco lay dying, in Italy, political conflicts were virulent, and the takeover of power by the Communist Party (PCI) was a possibility. Even in France, there was still a deeply rooted and powerful Communist Party (PCF). In the first free elections for the Constitutional Assembly of April 25, 1975, the Communist Party thus achieved a disappointing 12 % of the vote.

In the next elections, the party then improved its showing to 18 %, but it was nonetheless excluded from participation in government, and has been to this very day. By the end of the 1980s however, the Communist Party's star seemed to be setting. In 1991, the CDU electoral alliance, uniting the Greens and the PCP's, received only 8.8 % of the vote, and thus fell below the 10 % mark, which the PCP was never again exceed. After 8.6 % in 1995, 9 % in 1999 and finally 7 % in 2002, the PCP achieved 7.8 % of the vote in 2009 and was able to maintain that result in 2011. Certainly, the drop below the 10 % mark in 1991 was also due to the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the so-called Eastern Bloc. By contrast to many other fraternal communist parties, the PCP was able to stabilize itself at a level acceptable for the situation of the country. However, the events of 1989–'90 in Europe did not lead the party to any substantial reorientation.

After sometimes turbulent debates at a Special Party Congress in 1990, the party's dedication to Marxism-Leninism was reconfirmed, despite all the political changes. The name of the party was retained, and Álvaro Cunhal, the most effective protagonist of sticking to the old positions confirmed in office. In a period when other communist parties in western and northern Europe, whether previously reformist or not, entered onto a path of renewal, and of breaking up of old structures and patterns of thinking, the PCP stubbornly held to its programmatic and structural traditions inherited from its days in illegality. Even today, the PCP in its programme defines it-

self as «a vanguard of the working class»; Marxism-Leninism remains the «theoretical foundation» for its actions and goals.³⁶⁹ And to this day, it draws upon the demands of the Carnation Revolution, and sees the implementation as the goal of its current political activity.

Table 3: Electoral results of the PCP since 1975 in national elections³⁷⁰

Election year	Alliance	Result in per Cent (%)	Seats
1975	Constitutional assembly	12.5	30
1976	PCP	14.5	40
1979	APU	18.9	47
1980	APU	16.8	41
1983	APU	18.2	44
1985	APU	15.5	38
1987	CDU	12.1	31
1991	CDU	8.8	17
1995	CDU	8.6	15
1999	CDU	9.0	17
2002	CDU	7.0	12
2005	CDU	7.6	14
2009	CDU	7.8	15
2011	CDU	7.9	16

The internal structure of the party is even today based on the principle of democratic centralism. In spite of its large membership, national party congresses are only held every four years, and even there, the real decision-making is not in the hands of the delegates.³⁷¹

Nonetheless according to its statute, the Party Congress is the leading body of the party, composed of elected delegates chosen in the territorial sections of the party proportionately to the membership figures. The members of the Central Committee are automatically delegates, as are the members of the Executive Committee of the youth organisation of the party. The delegates elect the Central Committee, which is seen as a collective body which leads the party between party congresses. It consists

369 Cf. PCP Programme: http://www.pcp.pt/pcp_programme. The claim to being the vanguard is announced in Paragraph 4, as is the claim that «the theoretical foundations» of the party are Marxism-Leninism.

370 The first electoral alliance in which the communists participated was called the Alliance of the United People.

371 Shortly after the Carnation Revolution, the party was said to have had more than 150,000 members. Current reports indicate less than 100,000. However, there are no reliable and publicly accessible statistics. The party sends approx. 1200 delegates to its national party Congress, which is held every four years.

of more than 150 members, and meets at least every four months. There is no gender quota. It elects a nine-member Secretariat from amongst its own members, and one of its members as General Secretary, the highest representative of the party.

The politics of the party are today more than ever dominated by a focus on nationalisation of politics and the economy. The PCP completely rejects the current model of European integration, including the euro. In foreign and military policy, the PCP rejects any participation in alliances by Portugal, and thus calls for its withdrawal from NATO. In terms of economic policy, the party certainly has adapted its programmatic content over the past 20 years, and now favours a mixed economic system, in which only the key industries, such as energy, communications and public services would be controlled by the state. The key strongholds of the Communist Party are to this day the peasants of the Alentejo in the south of the country, where since the end of the '80s, large estates once again dominate, and the church has virtually no influence. The other stronghold is among the industrial workers of the country, in the industrial belt around Lisbon,³⁷² even if the latter have been declining sharply in numbers since the 1990s.

In spite of the political isolation experienced by the party, nationally by the time of the first elections in 1975, and internationally amongst many Euro-Communist and other European communist parties during their first reformist phase of the 1970s, but especially after 1990, when it still held fast to Soviet orthodox ideological positions, even then in spite of all that, «the PCP proved to be less an anti-system party than an anti-government party. In a manner similar to the French CP of the 1970s, it performed an important tribune-like function by assuming, in the official political process, the role of the voice of the marginalised and of radical groups, and hence monitored and channelled their system-destabilizing potential. Thus, the PCP paradoxically contributed more to legitimizing the very system that rejected its programme and its rhetoric, than to delegitimizing it.»³⁷³

This assessment would also explain why the current youth protest movement has not moved closer to the Communist Party, but rather sees it as part of the traditional political system. At the end of the 1990s, an additional left party appeared in the country, the Left Block; it has also now become established in the Portuguese political system.

The Left Block

The foundation of the Portuguese Left Block was especially favoured by the real situation of radical left parties in Portugal around the turn of the century. First, the Communist Party of Portugal proved, as described above, unable after more than two decades to have established itself as a genuine political force in the party spectrum of

372 Cf. Joaquim Aguiar: *Partidos, Eleicoes, Dinamica Politica (1975–1991)*, in: *Analise Social*, 1994, 14, p.196.

373 Cf. Thomas C. Bruneau/Alex MacLeod: *Politics in Contemporary Portugal*, Boulder 1986, p56.

the country, leading to its self-isolation at many levels, both externally and internally. Neither its organisational structure, its political programme, nor, its political culture, were able to attract new members or voters. The short but lively phase of new social movements of the late '80s and early '90s, and their political potential and demands went almost completely unnoticed by the PCP. The structural changes labour and the Portuguese working class, especially after EU accession (in the mid-'80s) was not adequately addressed by the PCP. Over the same period, the party also failed to fully represent or incorporate the political interests and demands of the radical left.

Second, since the beginning of the '90s, the smaller and mostly left-wing radical groups and parties had definitely seen their day. They had been marginalised or isolated from the political system and society in general for years, a phenomenon apparent all over Europe for small left-wing radical groups. In view of this history and their own experiences of failure, the veterans who founded the Left Block intended to create a party of a new type which would unite the positive experiences which many of them had had in the new social movements. The traditions of political struggle of the left in Portugal were to be the historical foundation for establishing a new left-wing party, without on the other hand distorting its view of the future. The goal was to provide the Portuguese left with a way out of the domination by the SP and the PCP in the party spectrum of the post-revolutionary period.

In 1999, four parties resolved to concentrate their forces in a new organisation. These were the Revolutionary Socialist Party, a Portuguese section of the Trotskyist IVth International; the Democratic People's Union, a Revolutionary Marxist Party which had historically supported Maoism and later the Albanian model; the Maoist Party for the Reconstruction of the Proletariat; and the movement Política XXI, a group which essentially consisted of former PCP members who had left the party in the late '80s and early '90s. The new organisation, the Left Block, was, in the view of the founding members, not simply a political coalition of the participating groups, but rather a completely new, separate party. In order to differentiate itself especially from the PCP, intraparty democracy was strongly emphasised. The possibility of the cohabitation of various political tendencies and platforms was specifically formulated in its statute and programme.³⁷⁴ Moreover, the party was «not to be the sum of its founding parties», even organisationally.³⁷⁵ Unlike the case of the fusion of the two German left parties, the Alternative for Jobs and Social Justice (WASG) and the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS) which occurred eight years later, The agreement reached at the time of the merger of the four Portuguese parties was that more than half of the members of the leading bodies of the new party would not be former members of any of the four previous organisations. In this way, the continual conflict over the

374 Cf. José Soeiro: *The Left Block and the Re-Foundation of the New Left in Portugal*, in: Cornelia Hildebrandt/Birgit Daiber (eds.): *The Left in Europe*, Berlin 2009, pp. 135ff

375 Cf. *ibid.*

leadership of the party between the original founding groups, which is very visible in the German Left Party, was to be avoided.

In terms of content and programme, the Left Block attempted to close the gap between the new left and the traditional parties, the PCP and the PS. Viewing the Portuguese party spectrum from right to left, one would have to place the Left Block in between the PCP at the left edge of the scale and the PS in its middle. The Left Block expressly attempted, and still attempts, to attract the members of the left-wing of the Socialist Party. Some have reacted positively and have switched to the Block, while others have stayed within the PS, but now see the leftist party as a growing ally inside and outside of Parliament. This has caused the influence of left socialists within the PS to grow, even if they have to this day not become a dominant minority let alone a majority within the Socialist Party. The Left Block attempts to tie the historic workers' struggles to the new struggles against sexual and racial discrimination, and sees itself as an anti-capitalist and ecological formation which understands socialism as being any struggle against oppression of any kind. «The ideological identity of the Block», as José Soeiro puts it, «therefore emerged from a programme for the present, and not from any discussion about the past or about ideological purity».³⁷⁶ This «programme for the present» is manifested in a comprehensive analysis of the globalised financial and economic flows, and their impact upon Portugal and the European Union.

Organisationally and practically, as well as programmatically and culturally, the BE was from the outset a contrast to both the PCP in the PS in equal measure. The fact that it seeks to be a new type of party is shown by the fact that while legally a registered party, it sees itself both as a movement and as a party. Also the four organisations which initiated its founding legally still exist. Strategically, the party is more similar to the renewed left parties or former communist parties of western and northern Europe. In a long essay on the strategy of the reformed left parties of northern Europe several years ago, I described this process as follows: «With the adoption of sustainable, ecological political approaches, the Scandinavian left was able to attract new segments of the population which had hitherto rejected the communist parties. In view of the now socio-structural changes and the increasing dissolution of traditional workers milieus, these segments, which extend far into the liberal bourgeoisie, at least quantitatively compensated for the loss of support for communist parties in the classical proletariat, and even opened up new access to society for them. The intelligentsia and the new social movements were visible subjects for the reforming left parties of Europe.»³⁷⁷

The Left Block also oriented itself to such a strategic approach. The majority of its members are now 40 to 50 years old, and most have received higher education. The

³⁷⁶ Cf., *ibid.*

³⁷⁷ Dominic Heilig: Vereinigte oder vereinte Linke? Vereinigung der Linken stößt an ihre Grenzen [A unified or a united left? Unification of the left reaches its limits], in: «Z» – Zeitschrift Marxistische Erneuerung, No. 75/9, 2008, p. 60.

most common professions among them are; teachers, lawyers, physicians, journalists, artists and college staff. Thus publicly, the party has a reputation of being an intellectuals' party.³⁷⁸

Since its foundation in 1999, the Left Block has experienced rapid growth in voter support, with the results of 2011 being the first setback. Membership growth has however stagnated at approx. 4000 members. The Left Block is thus far and away the party in the Portuguese parliament with the smallest membership. It has several hundred local councillors, and two MEPs,³⁷⁹ – as does the PCP – who are members of the left parliamentary group GUE/NGL. At the same time, the Left Block is a member of both the European Left Party (EL) and of the alliance of the European Anti-Capitalist Left (EAL). In terms of programmatic content and also strategy, this should not be possible, but it is an expression of the equal coexistence of various tendencies within the party. In regard to electoral results, the party has for a decade experienced growing support and a growing share of the vote. At its first participation in national parliamentary elections in 1999, the party reached 2.4% of the vote immediately. Since the Portuguese parliament has no minimum threshold percentage for representation, the party was able to win two seats in the Assembly of the Republic. In 2002, it got 2.8% of the vote, and in 2005 increased this to 6.4%. In the previous parliamentary election in 2009, the Block won 9.8% of the vote, thus for the first time surpassing the PCP, which had received 7.8%. In 2011 however, it experienced a severe setback at the polls, and fell back to a level of support which can probably be considered realistic.

Table 4: Results of the Left Block in national elections since 1999

Election year	Alliance	Result in per Cent (%)	Seats
1999	European election	1.7	0
1999	Parliamentary election	2.4	2
2002	Parliamentary election	2.7	2
2004	European election	4.9	1
2005	Parliamentary election	6.5	8
2009	European election	10.7	2
2009	Parliamentary election	9.8	16
2011	Parliamentary election	5.19	8

378 Cf. Helmut Ettinger: Information über den IV. Kongress des Linksblocks [Information on the IVth Congress of the Left Block], Berlin 2005, p. 2.

379 Originally there were three, but one member left the party in 2011.

The Party Congress, which meets once a year, is the highest body in the party. The 600 delegates, apportioned according to the strength of the respective regional organisations, elect a large executive committee every two years, a small leadership body, and finally a chair, which run the party between party congresses. By contrast to the PCR, the executive committee does not operate as a collective organ, so that minority positions are possible.

The Portuguese party system

In order to be better able to codify the effect and the effectiveness of the two left parties in Portugal, it is useful to examine the electoral and party system in the country. What is especially interesting here is its development after half a century of dictatorship in Portugal. Until the first constitutional change in 1982, the Portuguese parliament was often called a «parliament with no prestige».³⁸⁰ Only with the transition from the semi-presidential system initially introduced after the Carnation Revolution to a full-fledged parliamentary system did the Assembly of the Republic become a true parliament engaged in debate and legislative work. Previously, it and the government had been strongly subjected to the president. In the period between 1976 and 1982, the parties represented in parliament were thus forced to orient their activity more strongly outside of parliament. Here, particularly the Communist Party had an advantage, since even during the time of the first all-party government in 1974, it had seen its main focus of activity as being not in the government, but rather among the Portuguese workers and peasants.

In 1982 with the expansion of the rights of parliament and the cabinet with respect to the president, who soon retained «only» representative functions, the parliamentary work of the parties was also professionalised. Parliamentary elections in Portugal are carried out by proportional representation, with 230 seats in the national parliament, the «Assembly of the Republic». The parliamentary groups in the Assembly coordinate and control their representatives very firmly, and strict party discipline prevails.³⁸¹ There is no minimum threshold. Leaders of the parliamentary groups to this day determine when their members may speak, and even edit their speeches. Under the Constitution, the parliament is elected every four years. However, due to the large number of minority governments that have existed since 1974, hardly any government has lasted an entire legislative term. «Until 1987, Portugal had a relatively high degree of government instability. During this period, there were ten governments with an average life span of 13 months.»³⁸² Some served for only a few weeks.

380 Cf. Bruenau/MacLeod, Op cit.

381 Cf. Wolfgang Merkel/Volker Stiehl: Das politische System Portugals [The political system of Portugal], in: Wolfgang Ismayr (ed.): Die politischen Systeme Westeuropas [The political systems of Western Europe], Opladen 2003, p. 659.

382 Cf., *ibid.*, p. 661.

Only in 1987 was one party, the PSD, able to achieve an absolute majority in election, and to govern alone for an entire legislative term, until 1991. Under Premier Cavaco Silva, the PSD was able to repeat this success in the 1991 elections, and then stay in power for another four-year term until 1995. The instabilities of the political system with regard to the durability of governments are due to the fact that until the end of the 80s, no party was able to achieve an absolute majority or form a stable coalition.

In the Portuguese party system, it was especially the PSD that has assumed a moderating function. This party has on the one hand succeeded in forming sometimes even pre-electoral coalitions or alliances with the CDS, and on the other hand, agreements with the Socialist Party for coalitions or toleration of minority governments. In 1991, when Socialist leader and President Mário Soares ran for re-election, the PSD declined to nominate a candidate of its own, in view of the «good cooperation» between the two parties. A few months later, Silva (PSD) won the parliamentary elections and was re-elected premier. Soares and Silva worked closely together for years, largely without conflict. But the Socialist Party too has formed coalitions with the PSD or depended on its support for minority governments. However, such arrangements between the two parties have never really lasted long, since both parties have since the early '80s been competing for the voters of the so-called political centre.³⁸³ The Socialist Party has always rejected a coalition with or toleration by the PCP, due to the fact that the latter sees itself as an anti-system party.

In spite of the semi-presidential system which prevailed between 1976 and 1982, the parties were assigned a central role in the «representation of societal interests» under the Constitution of 1976. The Portuguese party system as it appears today had already emerged at the time of the elections for the Constitutional Assembly of 1975. The polarisation of the system declined strongly between 1980 and 1990, with the parties on both margins, the PCP and the CDS-PP, continually declining in support. Moreover, despite their respective self-definitions to the contrary, neither party can be considered an anti-system party. In the case of the PCP, arguments supporting this statement have been provided above – and the same largely applies to the CDS-PP. Although at the beginning of the first democratisation phase in Portugal, a number of former supporters of Salazar or of Caetano came together in its ranks, this also had the effect of absorbing the system-destabilizing potential of the old elites to a certain degree.

Unlike its Spanish counterpart however, the Portuguese party system reflects the conflict structure of Portuguese society along socio-economic lines much more strongly than ethno-linguistic lines. Although the social conflict structures are reinforced by regionally specific factors, this is true to a much lesser degree than it is in

383 Cf. Alex MacLeod: The Parties and the Consolidation of Democracy in Portugal. The Emergence of a Dominant Two-Party System, in: Diane Eisher (ed.): Democratic Transition and Consolidation in Southern Europe, Latin America and Southeast Asia, Los Angeles 1990, p. 165.

the neighbouring Iberian country. After the 1974 revolution and during the democratisation process, demands to regionalize the country were rejected; no reform of the *Estado Novo*,³⁸⁴ and hence no regionalisation of Portugal, was carried out, and the country has remained a unitary state.³⁸⁵ Moreover, the conflict of the Catholic Church vs. secularity is much less strongly present than it is in Spain, and is also declining. Nonetheless, its effect on the isolation of the political left in Portugal has not been inconsiderable, and should therefore not be underestimated.

Although the Portuguese party system already had its present structure at the time of the first free elections in 1975, it was not until the end of the '80s that it could be considered consolidated. With regard to fragmentation, polarisation and volatility, the three indicators for the general assessment of a party system, the Portuguese party systems reflects the Western European average in terms of the frequency of early elections and the number of minority governments. In Portugal as elsewhere, the «frozen» party system has been hard to break into – with two exceptions: the first was the protest party called the Democratic Renovator Party founded in 1985 by then-president António Ramalho Eanes, which then achieved a surprising 18 % of the vote and briefly formed a coalition with the PSD. However, it soon disappeared again, dropping to 4.9 % in 1987 and disappearing from parliament entirely in 1991.

The second crack in the «frozen» Portuguese party spectrum occurred with the foundation and the subsequent electoral successes of the Left Block in 1999. Otherwise, at the time of the abandonment of the all-party coalition in 1975, the Portuguese party system took the path of those in most Western European countries, in which, as a rule, there are only four or five parties represented in parliament, spanning the entire range of the political spectrum from far left to far right. The emergence of the Portuguese party system on the Western European model was thus a further step toward rolling back the revolutionary structures and demands of 1974. It particularly favoured the two parties of the centre, the PS and the PSD. Both were however not only the beneficiaries but also the implementers of this process of institutionalisation, which at least in the case of the PS, was supported to a significant degree by its European party family, the Social Democrats. Externally, the emergence of a few new parties and hence the integration, too, of the old elites into the new era was to demonstrate stability, and assured the allies that Portugal was not going to enter on the path of the socialist states.³⁸⁶ Domestically, the emergence and support of precisely

384 Cf. Stefan Reith/Helmut Wittelbürger: Eine Föderation von Nationalisten. Portugals Weg in die EU und seine Position in der Finalitätsdebatte [A federation of nationalists: Portugal's path into the EU, and its position in the finality debate], in: *Auslandsinformationen der Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS)*, 3,2003, p. 36

385 Although the regionalisation law was passed in 1991, it has never been implemented. A referendum on this issue failed in 1998 due to insufficient participation. Both the PSD and the CDS-PP mobilised against the regionalisation law. The PS and the PCP supported it, in order to increase the political effect of their regional strongholds.

386 For instance, the German news weekly *Der Spiegel* on June 2, 1979 carried a story with the title: «NATO nation Portugal communist?»

this political system, with the abolition of the Revolutionary Council and the breadth of coalition options between the parties, along with the isolation of the left political edge, emphasised that the achievements and the numerous leftist ideas regarding the future of Portugal which had come into being during the revolution were not to be carried over into the new era. The political system is thus not only stabilizing itself, but also normalizing itself. The small organisations primarily located at the left fringe of the party spectrum soon disappeared, and others were permanently denied the possibility of political participation. This too is an aspect of the «frozen» nature of the party system.

Two parties and no strong Left

In response to the call for the foundation of the Left Block (BE), the Communist Party of Portugal attempted to portray the protagonists as non-credible. The fact that the founders of the new party included former PCP members was not the least of the factors reinforcing the mutual animosity between the two parties. That was also enhanced by the Left Block itself, in that it explicitly referred in its delimitation from the PCP to its own democratic forms of organisation. In the eyes of the PCP leadership, it was particularly the democratic socialist approach of the Left Block and its purported basic societal conditions which were a deviation from the ideals of the communist resistance struggle and of the Carnation Revolution. For years, cooperation between the two parties was virtually out of the question. The PCP's mistrust of the Left Block was due not only to the emergence of a possible competitor at the left edge of the party spectrum, but also to the openness of the BE toward the Socialist Party. In his study of the party, Soeiro describes this as follows: «The definition of the intervention strategy of the Block was ... With regard to concrete issues characterised by a policy of merger with those who were dissatisfied with the Socialist Party and with the neo-liberal policies of José Socrates, and who were critical of the absolute majority of the Socialist Party.»³⁸⁷

While the BE has consistently refused to enter into a coalition with the PS unless it changes its course, there have repeatedly been voices heard within the party who could imagine tolerating a PS minority government.³⁸⁸ Moreover, the direct support of the BE for the left-wing of the PS has also led to wild speculations and denunciations, which are completely off the mark. In fact, the Left Block is pursuing a strategy of breaking off the left-wing of the PS with the goal of strengthening its own party. And, until the elections of June 5, 2011, the chances of doing so did not appear that bad. All attempts at cooperation between left PS members and the Left Block can be

387 Cf. José Soeiro, *op. cit.*, p. 136.

388 Cf. Dominic Heilig: Sozialisten auf Partnersuche [Socialists seeking partners], in: Neues Deutschland, September 30 2009.

connected with the name of PS leftist Manuel Alegre.³⁸⁹ After the disastrous defeat of the Left Block and the PS in the last parliamentary elections however, all such ideas have apparently been put on hold. As paradoxical as it may appear, the defeat of the socialist minority government under Premier Socrates also weakened the left-wing of the PS, which now has only a few members of Parliament.

The positioning of a reform oriented leftist party alongside the revolutionary Communist Party on the one hand and the social democratic Socialist Party on the other can, for the time being, be considered to have failed. Apparently, the voters have lost all confidence in the reform of the country from the left, a fact which is probably primarily due to the actions of the Socialist Party. Such experiences are all too familiar to such left socialist or democratic socialist parties as those in Germany or Italy.

Nonetheless, with respect to the relationship between the Communist Party and the Left Block, there were positive changes in the months leading up to the 2011 elections. Although the Left Block is still extremely critical of the leadership of the PCP, it has intensified its contacts to the «reform communist» wing of the party, which definitely exists. For instance, the Block organised a forum on the question of public services in Portugal in which, along with Alegre and his tendency, Mário Carvalho da Silva, leader of the largest Portuguese trade union association, the CGTP, and a member of the PCP, participated. Carvalho himself is very critical of the Orthodox leadership and the political style of his party.³⁹⁰ Such activities underpin the statements of the leadership of the Left Block to the effect that they are concerned with a «deep process of a new definition of the political landscape and in a reorientation of the left».³⁹¹

Thus, in spite of all reservations, left PS members, the Left Block and the PCP were able to mobilize together for the Europe-wide protests against the NATO summit in Lisbon in the fall of 2010, and to cooperate in alliances. Nonetheless, the rejection of the strategy and politics of the Left Block by the PCP on the one hand, and the criticism by the Left Block of the orthodox politics of the PCP on the other have manifestly remained unchanged. On the other hand, the left-wing of the PS has so far not been willing to abandon its party in favour of a new left socialist party project. At the same time, the PS leadership has vehemently rejected any cooperation with the Left Block based on the premise of a political change of course on its own part. Hence, the tragedy of the Portuguese left parties is primarily manifested in the lack of solidarity and willingness to cooperate with one another. Although the PCP and the BE together account for almost 13 % of the vote for the Portuguese parliament – and prior to the recent elections, over 20 % – deeper cooperation between these two

389 Cf. Dominic Heilig: Portugal erwartet heißen Herbst [Portugal awaits hot autumn], in: Neues Deutschland, 7, September 7, 2010.

390 Cf. José Soeiro, op. cit., p. 137.

391 Cf., ibid.

parties is out of the question. A common left parliamentary alliance on this order of magnitude might much more effectively challenge, and put much greater pressure on, the new right-wing government than has previously been the case. The attacks of the PCP and the BE on each other caused by their supposed competition for votes appears completely unnecessary and unjustified, in view of the fact that the PCP's electoral results have in the past not been reduced at all by the foundation of the Left Block. Since 1991, the PCP has maintained a relatively steady level of voter support, both in terms of percentage and in terms of absolute numbers. The Block, on the other hand, has succeeded in attracting and retaining new, left and left-liberal urban voter groups, which, for the reasons mentioned above, are completely inaccessible to the PCP. However, the left's conflicts and infighting not only reduce the pressure on the PS to change its policies and move away from any ideas of a theoretical coalition with the right, but also in the long term tend to destabilize the protests and strikes of working people and the youth in Portugal.³⁹²

As a result of this senseless debate, the radical left may continue to be worn out, and have trouble taking up the struggle against neo-liberalism, the dismantling of the social state, and an unjust economic and social policy. It may also have difficulty of surviving within that struggle, and of successfully implementing alternative perspectives for Portugal. Once again, the left is giving up opportunities for political and cultural hegemony, in spite of its societal and electoral strength. Its failure in the years after the Carnation Revolution is multifaceted, and cannot be described in simple terms. Nonetheless, three main causes can be identified: first, the reasons for the weakness of the radical left in Portugal can be found in itself, as has been described above with respect to the PCP. Second, Portugal became, after the events of 1974, the substitute location for systemic struggle, and was subject to much influence from abroad. Thirdly, the institutionalisation of the «frozen» Western European style political system, which is dominant to this day, and which first channelled and then killed the popular movement character of the revolutionary era, as well as pulverizing the «revolutionary constitution» of 1976, prevented the establishment of a Socialist Republic of Portugal, and hence of a strengthened left. The numerous constitutional amendments have executed and legitimised the political and economic decisions of the '80s already arrived at by the parties of the centre in alliance with the organisations of the old elite of the dictatorship. Particularly the constitutional amendment of 1989 delegated state sovereignty to a few hands in the neo-liberal economic elite.

392 Cf. Dominic Heilig: Einsam, zweisam, dreisam? [Alone, a couple, or a crowd of three?], in: Neues Deutschland, weekend special section on the Red-Red-Green Crossover of October 9, 2010.

Dominic Heilig

THE SPANISH UNITED LEFT

Preface

This paper describes not a party but an alliance of parties, the Spanish leftist alliance known as the United Left (Izquierda Unida/IU). Although it has been an officially registered Spanish party since 1992, it is «only» a nationwide umbrella group for a large number of leftist, communist and ecological parties in the country's regions. This constellation makes a scientific analysis of the left in Spain very difficult.

Within the IU, the Communist Party of Spain (PCE) is the only relevant organisation with a nationwide base the other member parties are regionally rooted. For this reason, the present analysis will examine the following aspects: first, the PCE, as the largest constituent and nationally organised force in the IU; second, the structures and recent developments, and the electoral results of the IU as a so-called umbrella organisation; third, the history of the country; and fourth, the Spanish electoral system, which affects the IU and its position within the parliamentary system to a peculiar degree.

Moreover, it is necessary to take into account the Spanish political landscape which emerged from the fascist Franco dictatorship that lasted until 1975, and which, since then and following the first free elections in 1977, has been marked by a large degree of regionalisation and ultimately also of polarisation between the two major political blocs. One of these is the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE), the other, the conservative and staunchly Catholic People's Party (PP). Between them, and on their respective political margins, there are also a number of smaller political formations and parties. However, the extreme political, administrative, economic and social regionalisation of Spain has to this day particularly favoured the emergence of regional parties on the left and right of the party spectrum. Nonetheless, since the national elections at the turn of the millennium, there has been a clear concentration in, and juxtaposition of the two blocs, leading toward the emergence of a two-party system. This juxtaposition was reinforced by the recent elections of November 2011.

The Communist Party of Spain: A historical overview

The history of the PCE began, as did that of the parties in many other European countries, during the 1920s, as a result of internal disputes within the social democratic and workers' parties. On April 15, 1920, the Communist Party of Spain was founded from the youth organisation of the Socialist Workers' Party. At the same time, some members of that party attempted to move it toward association with the Communist International – unsuccessfully however, for the PSOE joined the international Working Union of Socialist Parties, a group intermediate between the Socialist and Communist Internationals. The supporters of the Communist International thereupon withdrew, and on April 13, 1921 founded the Spanish Communist Workers' Party (PCOE). Both of these new communist parties, the PCE and the PCOE, then merged on November 14, 1921, to form the Communist Party of Spain (PCE).

At the end of the 1920s, a pro-Soviet orientation gained the upper hand in the still very small party, resulting in further split-offs and resignations. When the Second Spanish Republic was proclaimed in 1931, the party was in a desolate state; its internal conflicts had driven it to the brink of collapse. Nonetheless, the Communists were able two years later to win seats in the Spanish Parliament.

In the following period, the PCE participated actively in the workers' uprisings in the provinces which began in 1934, and in 1936 joined the Popular Front to contest the elections. The left-leaning FP won a parliamentary majority in the ensuing elections, but only by a very narrow margin. In the Spanish Civil War of 1936 to 1939, the PCE attracted many new members, with its membership rising to 200,000,³⁹³ most fighting on the side of the Soviet-dominated Popular Front. With the crushing of the Republic, the PCE was banned and its members and sympathizers persecuted, tortured and murdered under the Franco dictatorship. Many went into exile, especially to the Soviet Union and France. Until its legalisation on April 9, 1977, the party operated illegally from headquarters abroad.³⁹⁴

In the first free elections in 1977, the PCE, which by now once again had 200,000 members, achieved 9.4% of the vote, and won 20 seats in the Congress of Deputies. At that time, the party was still in alliance with the Socialist Workers' Party in the so-called Democratic Coordination, confronting the representatives of the old regime. At the next election in 1979, the PCE increased its vote to 10.8% of the vote and 24 seats.

393 Cf. Andreas Baumer: *Jenseits der Pyrenäen. Parteiensysteme und gesellschaftliche Konflikte in Spanien und Portugal* [Beyond the Pyrenees: Party systems and societal conflicts in Spain and Portugal], in: Ulrich Eith/Gerd Mielke (eds.): *Gesellschaftliche Konflikte und Parteiensysteme, Länder- und Regionalstudien* [Societal conflicts in party systems, country and regional studies], Wiesbaden 2001, p. 144.

394 *Ibid.*

The history of the Communist Party of Spain is here broken down into five phases, a modification of the classification by Rainer Schultz, who identifies four phases³⁹⁵:

- First phase: From the split-off from the PSOE to the founding of the PCE.
- Second phase: The Spanish Civil War and the establishment of the PCE.
- Third phase: Illegality and orientation towards the CPSU.
- Fourth phase: Legalisation and acceptance of the constitutional monarchy.
- Fifth phase: The Socialist Turn and the establishment of new alliances.

Since the 1960s, the Communist Party has presented itself as increasingly moderate, due largely to the prospects of possible legalisation which was in fact realised in 1977.³⁹⁶ The modern strategy, while it did yield some successes, as reflected in the elections of 1979, also generated intraparty disputes, especially with regard to the relationship to the Soviet Union and the CPSU. Ultimately, the party cut itself loose from the CPSU, turned toward the Euro-Communist model and accepted the democratic parliamentary system in Spain.³⁹⁷ In the elections in 1982 however, it dropped to only 4.1 % of the vote, and won four seats. The party's centralistic structures continued to stand in the way of its political and programmatic opening, and of its reorientation toward Euro-Communism. However, one explanation for the loss in voter support in 1982 was certainly the polarisation of the political contest between the PSOE and the PP.

The socialist turn of 1982

At the end of the 1970s, the PSOE established itself as a strong alternative to the hitherto ruling Union of the Democratic Centre (UCD), a centre-right bourgeois party. By raising Spain's unpopular entry into NATO in 1982 as a campaign issue, and promising a referendum on withdrawal from the alliance in case of a victory in the elections, the PSOE aggravated the crisis of the UCD government. In the October elections, the socialists won an absolute majority, and were able to rule without interruption until 1996. With the entry into the European Community in 1986, Spain experienced a major spurt of economic growth, which is often compared in the literature to Germany's post-war «economic miracle». This Spanish economic miracle brought major changes in political orientation, social behaviour and cultural orientation with it.

The radical left, in other words those parties and movements to the left of the social democratic PSOE, had few answers to the increasing globalisation of economic and

395 Cf. A study for the RLS – Rainer Schultz: *Linksdemokratische Parteien in Spanien. Facetten und Entwicklung* [Left-democratic parties in Spain: Facets and development], January 2003, p. 4.

396 Cf. Fred Lopez III: *Bourgeois State and the Rise of Social Democracy in Spain*, in: Ronald H. Chilcote et al. (eds.): *Transition from Dictatorship to Democracy. Comparative Studies of Spain, Portugal and Greece*, New York 1990, pp. 17–72, 53–54.

397 Cf. Marita Müller: *Politische Parteien in Spanien (1977–1982). Interne Konflikte und Wahlverhalten* (Political parties in Spain: Internal conflicts and electoral behaviour), Saarbrücken 1994, pp. 46 ff.

financial developments. Especially the structural fund subsidies from the EC (later the EU) led to the far-reaching dissolution of the classic proletariat in Spain, causing the PCE to lose a major part of its base. The increasingly neo-liberal privatisation policies of the ruling PSOE, part of its strategy of «new social democracy», and the continuing protests against NATO membership led to a reorientation of the party; and the radical left too, now reconstituted itself anew. Just before the 1982 elections, the PSOE had changed its position regarding Spain's NATO membership. After Spain joined the EEC in 1986, the referendum on NATO membership promised in the 1982 electoral campaign was indeed held, but suddenly the PSOE was in favour of staying in the alliance. In the referendum, a bare majority of the electorate – 52% – voted in favour of the Atlantic Pact.

NATO protests and the founding of the United Left

The United Left is today the most important radical left party in Spain. It started not as a party but rather as a loose electoral alliance, brought together around the question of Spain's membership in NATO. Although Spain had since 1950 provided military bases to the United States, and was thus able to free itself from the international isolation imposed on the dictatorship due to its ties to the defeated Axis powers, Spain's entry into NATO in 1982, at the time of the renewed flare-up of the Cold War due to the nuclear rearmament offensive of the Reagan administration, was a qualitative change for the young Spanish democracy. After the 1982 election, many voters were disappointed by the PSOE, turned away from it, and were thereafter active in citizens' movements and other left parties opposed to NATO membership. Although the broad left alliance lost the referendum of 1986, a new political alliance to the left of the PSOE was able to establish itself around the NATO issue. From the Citizens' Platform for the Withdrawal of Spain from NATO, there developed a left electoral alliance for the 1986 parliamentary elections known as the United Left Platform, which won 4.6% of the vote and seven seats.³⁹⁸ In the local elections of 1987, the electoral alliance increased its vote to 7.18%, and boosted that to 9.07% in the 1989 national elections, which translated into 17 seats in the Congress of Deputies. Finally, in 1992, the IU was officially registered as a party.

398 Cf. Juan J. Linz, José Ramón Montero: The party systems of Spain. Old cleavages and new challenges, in: Lauri Karvonen, Stein Kuhnle (eds.): Party Systems and Voter Alignments Revisited, London and New York 2001, pp. 163 ff.

The eight founding member parties of the IU were³⁹⁹:

- The Communist Party of Spain (PCE),
- the Communist Party of the Peoples of Spain (PCPE),
- the Socialist Action Party (PASOC),
- the Republican Left (IR),
- the Progressive Federation (FP),
- the Carlist Party,
- the Humanist Party, and,
- the Unity Collective of the Workers of Andalusia/Andalusian Leftist Bloc.

Thus, the IU is primarily an alliance of parties, for in spite of the fact that it is registered as a political party in its own right, and is publicly active, the constituent member organisations and parties retain their formal, legal, organisational and political autonomy. This fact has repeatedly led to tension among the member organisations, especially with regard to nominating electoral lists, managing the financial resources of the IU, and determining the programmatic orientation of the alliance.

The supreme body of the IU is the Federal Assembly (party congress), which elects the Federal Political Council, the 100-member body that runs the organisation between party congresses. It in turn elects the Executive Bureau, chaired by the coordinator general, who serves as spokesperson for the IU. Moreover, the party is broken down into 17 regional organisations, which carry out its politics locally, parallel to the regional organisations of the IU member parties in the respective areas. Since its foundation, the IU has tried to strengthen its pluralistic profile, to open itself up to new, globalisation-critics and social movements, and to be active as part of the globalisation-critical movement of Spain in the various social forums at the regional, national, European and global levels. In a report of the VIIth Federal Assembly of the IU in December 2003, it is clearly stated that the IU explicitly calls for socialism, and wants a society characterised by being «participatory, critical and an alternative to the dominant model».⁴⁰⁰

In the view of the members, this includes pacifism, ecological positions and feminism. The party is moreover in favour of a minimum wage of € 1100 per month, a 35-hour week, a tax on banks of 35 %, a minimum pension of € 800 per month, a term-based abortion law, and electoral reform.⁴⁰¹

399 However, all the founding members except the PCE and the Unity Collective withdrew from the IU again between 1987 and 2001. Since then however, many small regional and local groups have joined, including the Catalan United and Alternative Left, the left-alternative-Trotskyist Alternative Space, the Unity Collective, and the small Trotskyist groups Fourth International, New Clarity, Revolutionary Workers Party and Revolutionary Party of the Workers/Revolutionary Left.

400 Izquierda Unida: Resolution of the VIIth Federal Assembly of the IU, December 2003, p. 3, <http://www1.izquierda-unida.es>, accessed January 19, 2009.

401 Cf. Paola Giaculli: Parlamentswahl in Spanien (Parliamentary elections in Spain), in: DIE LINKE International, July 2008.

The ties of the party to the unions are maintained primarily by the PCE, which is traditionally closely connected to the country's largest union, the Workers' Commissions (CC. OO.). The influence of the PCE on the unions, which decreased sharply around the turn of the century, has been revived since the trade union congress of December 2008, at which Ignacio Fernández Toxo was elected as the union's leader. Although the Executive Committee of the CC.OO. consists of 90 % members of the PCE, only 50 % of the 300,000 trade union members are supporters or voters of the party or of the IU.⁴⁰²

The fact that the PCE decided as early as 1986 to cooperate in the formation of the IU as an electoral alliance, and ultimately to transform that alliance into a party, softened the blow of the collapse of the Eastern Bloc for the party. Indeed, the very good results of the electoral alliance in the parliamentary elections of 1989 was surpassed in 1993 with 9.55 % of the votes and 18 seats, and in 1996, the IU won 10.54 % of the votes and 21 seats in the Congress of Deputies. However, this excellent result could not be maintained in the ensuing national elections in 2000, 2004 and 2008; only in 2011 was the party once again able to increase its vote. But more on that later.

Table 1: Electoral results of the United Left: European Parliament and Congress of Deputies, 1986 to 2009⁴⁰³

Election	Votes	Percentage
Congress of Deputies, 1986	935,504	4.63
European Parliament, 1987	1,110,830	5.25
Congress of Deputies, 1989	1,858,588	9.07
European Parliament, 1989	961,742	6.06
Congress of Deputies, 1993	2,253,722	9.55
European Parliament, 1994	2,497,671	13.44
Congress of Deputies, 1996	2,639,774	10.54
European Parliament, 1999	1,221,566	5.77
Congress of Deputies, 2000	1,263,043	5.45
Congress of Deputies, 2004	1,284,081	4.96
European Parliament, 2004	643,136	4.15
Congress of Deputies, 2008	969,946	3.77
European Parliament, 2009 ⁴⁰⁴	588,248	3.71

402 Cf. Harald Barrios: Das politische System Spaniens [The political system of Spain], in: Wolfgang Ismayr (ed.): Die politischen Systeme Westeuropas [The political systems of Western Europe] 3rd Ed., Opladen 2003, p. 634.

403 Source: e.g. Elecciones a Cortes Generales, in: <http://www.generales2008.mir.es>, accessed January 19, 2009, and supplemented.

404 In the 2009 European elections, the IU again stood together in an alliance with the Catalan party Initiative for Catalonia/The Greens, and won two parliamentary seats. One of these MEPs, IU member Willy Meyer-Pleite sits with the left parliamentary group GUE/NGL in the EP; the other, and IC-V member, traditionally sits with the Green Group in the EP.

Parallel to the lack of electoral success of the party until 2011, political, strategic and programmatic disputes increased within the IU. After the disappointing national parliamentary elections of 2008, the PCE, which had long been on the defensive within the party alliance, and had been somewhat reticent, began to once again claim greater influence in the leading bodies of the IU. During the 2004 to 2008 parliamentary term, the IU supported the PSOE minority government of José Zapatero, but was hardly able to push through any of its own policies. The fact that on a number of key issues important to the IU, the PSOE aligned with the opposition PP was a particular factor in the poor electoral results for the IU in 2008 and 2009; another factor was the PSOE's electoral strategy of calling for voters to «not waste their vote», or to «vote their fears» of a right-wing victory.

Even before the Federal Assembly of November 15–16, 2008, IU Coordinator General Gaspar Llamazares announced his withdrawal from the party leadership due to divergent strategic concepts within the IU and continuous disputes. That Assembly, which was marked by forceful political conflicts, was able to elect a new Executive Bureau, but could not unite upon a new coordinator general. Finally, on December 14, the IU Executive Bureau elected PCE member Cayo Lara as the new coordinator general of the IU. He then dissolved the strategic alliance which his predecessor Llamazares had entered into with the ruling PSOE, and began to emphasize the autonomy of the IU once again. The IU's success in the regional and parliamentary elections of 2011 seems to have confirmed the correctness of this strategy. Lara was thus able to reinforce his position in the IU, and he is now more than ever the unchallenged leader of the party.

International activities of the United Left

Even during its initial phase, the IU was internationally active, and involved in the formation of various European structures of the radical left. Since the European elections of 1989, the IU has held seats in the European Parliament, and was a founding member of the GUE/NGL parliamentary group. The IU is also one of the founding parties of the Forum of the New European Left, which was founded in Madrid in 1991 as a space for discourse and exchange of opinion between left parties. In 2004, the IU also became a founding member of the European Left Party (EL) in Rome. In addition to the IU, its member parties, the United and Alternative Left of Catalonia and the Spanish Communist Party are EL members in their own right. Moreover, the IU itself, and several of its member parties, are also members of the European Anti-Capitalist Left (EAL).⁴⁰⁵ Programmatically, the IU views the process of European integration positively, and sees the European level as an extended area of action for left politics. However, the party views the current structure

⁴⁰⁵ The Spanish member parties of the EAL include the United Left (IU), the United and Alternative Left (EUiA) and the Alternative Space (EA).

of the European Union critically, particularly due to the massive social, democratic, ecological and economic deficits of current EU policy. The IU therefore calls for an expansion of the rights of the European Parliament. Moreover, it favoured the European Constitution, but then strongly rejected ratification of the Lisbon Treaty. In the magazine *Europarot*, former IU MEP Pedro Marset wrote, «We are convinced that the neo-liberal Europe of the Maastricht Treaty must be revised. At the same time, social contracts with the goal of reaching full employment and strengthening public services must be incorporated into the treaties. This would require the abolition of the autonomy of the European Central Bank, and the cancellation of the stability pact. We believe that the future European Constitution must protect the democratic rights of the citizens.»⁴⁰⁶

Lines of conflict within the IU after the elections of 2008 and 2009

The sobering results of the Congress of Deputies election of 2008 caused long-simmering conflicts within the IU to break out into the open. The major protagonists in the strategic power struggle within the party were the PCE and IU Coordinator General Gaspar Llamazares. The PCE primarily criticised Llamazares' strategy of moving close to the PSOE during Prime Minister Zapatero's first minority government. During the months between the election in March 2008 and the IU Congress in November of that year, the conflict hinged primarily on the election of the 800 delegates to the Federal Assembly of the alliance. The accusation was raised that membership figures were manipulated in the regions in order to provide more delegates for the 2008 Federal Assembly.⁴⁰⁷ For the first time in the history of the IU, membership statistics were examined under the supervision of the Executive Bureau, and were brought up to date. The first figures revealed the miserable condition of the party. In 2007, the IU had prior to its VIIIth Federal Assembly officially still had 78,000 members; now, in 2008, the figure was barely 50,000. Various tendencies of the parties now accused each other of manipulation. The fact was that since the end of the Franco dictatorship, the party had suffered a massive loss of members. In 1977, the PCE had, according to its own statistics had 200,000 members, of which less than one third remained in 2008. Again according to its own figures, the PCE in 2008 accounted for 20,000 of the 50,000 members of the IU. There were no detailed membership statistics with such information as the proportion of women or the professional or educational status of the members. There were also no reliable figures regarding the membership development of the PCE or the IU between the legalisation of the former in 1977 and 2010. The only

406 Pedro Marset: Die Vereinte Linke Spaniens [The United Left in Spain], in: *Europarot*, 15/2003, October 2003, p. 7.

407 Cf. Juanma Romero: El cierre de los censos de IU acaba en pelea interna [The completion of the membership count in the IU ends in infighting], in: *Publico*, July 26 2008.

figures now available are a few provided by Elorza in his paper «Communism in Spain: Reconstruction behind a Mask», in Patrick Moreau’s book «Communist and Post-Communist Parties in Europe»; however, since he quotes no sources, even these must be treated with caution.

*Table 2: Membership development of the PCE according to Antonio Elorza*⁴⁰⁸

Year	Membership figures for the PCE
1977–1978	201,000
1979	153,000
1980	132,000
1981	eleven2,000
1984	68,000
1987	62,500
1991	37,000
1994	34,000

⁴⁰⁸ In German: Antonio Elorza: Kommunismus in Spanien: Wiederaufbau hinter einer Maske, in: Patrick Moreau (ed.): Der Kommunismus in Westeuropa. Niedergang oder Mutation, Hans-Seidel-Stiftung, Olzog-Verlag, Landsberg am Lech, 1998, p. 179, Table 2

Table 3: Membership statistics and Federal Assembly delegates, November 2008⁴⁰⁹

Region	Members	Delegates
Galicia	697	18
Asturias	4602	66
Cantabria	178	15
Basque Country	1877	39
Castille and Leon	2001	32
La Rioja	132	13
Navarre	550	21
Catalonia	3.704	70
Extremadura	465	21
Madrid	10264	eleven0
Aragon	897	23
Valencia	3413	46
Andalusia	16429	160
Castille-La Mancha	1.299	28
Murcia	852	23
Ceuta	100	5
Melilla	2383	10
Canaries	481	14
Balearics	477	20
Foreign delegates		
Natos		40
Belgium		5
France		5
Luxemburg		5
Sweden		5
Switzerland		5
Total	50,801	799

409 Cf. Romero, op. cit.

The number of delegates of regional organisations at the Federal Assembly are determined by a very complicated system, under which 50 % of the seats are accorded to a regional organisation according to the number of their organised and registered members, and the other 50 % according to the vote achieved by the party at the preceding Congress of Deputies election. Each regional organisation participates equally in the bodies at the Federal Assembly. For this purpose, the delegates of each regional organisation elect a delegation chair, send one member each to the Assembly Presidium, and one member to the Mandate Examination Commission of the Federal Assembly. With the election of the new and currently serving Executive Bureau under the leadership of Cayo Lara at the IXth Federal Assembly in November 2008, the IU started on the path of the «re-foundation of the alliance of parties». The first step was to implement a continual system of membership recruitment and membership recording based on the example of the trade union cc.OO., which is close to the IU. Under a resolution of the Executive Bureau of the IU of October 10, 2009, the recording of membership data was to be continued permanently, and the results presented to the Executive Bureau at its meeting in June 2010. The goal was to expand participatory democracy within the party, and to improve the very poor dues payment behaviour of the membership. Furthermore, new membership cards were to be issued in the course of the confirmation of the actual number of members. This process was for the first time carried out jointly by the regional organisations and the national Executive Bureau, in order to avoid conflicts over such matters as the calculation of delegates' mandates for the Federal Assembly in 2010.

Parallel to the restructuring of the party organisation, forums for party reform of the regional organisations were carried out between October 2009 and May 2010. The issues included the positioning of the alliance in the areas of ecology, feminism, world development, the defence of the social state and overcoming the crisis; linked to the development of programmes for the reduction of unemployment and the solution of the urgent questions of migration and the defence of civil liberties. At the end of May 2010, the first results of the regional consultations were discussed in a nationwide forum. The results of the discussion processes, which were designed to clear up organisational political and strategic questions regarding the future of the IU, were finally presented at the Federal Assembly in 2010. On the basis of this debate and of restructuring progress, the party intended to contest the regional and national elections in 2011. The goal of Lara and his party leadership was to conclude this two-year «process of re-foundation» in time for the 2011 regional elections, and they achieved it. The decision to continue this re-foundation process, which had then just begun, after the European election of 2009, in which the IU achieved very modest results, and not to torpedo the process with new in-fighting, proved to be a wise decision. The extreme unlikelihood of an immediate success in the European elections so soon after the severe defeat in the parliamentary elections of 2008 had been clear to all participants. Indeed, the party was happy about the fact that, by making an alliance

with the Catalan Greens (IC-V), it proved possible to at least hold onto the result of the parliamentary elections of 2008.

The challenge to the party and its leadership in this entire process particularly involved overcoming internal, structural and deeper political issues. How different the strategic concepts of the participating groups and parties within the IU with regard to the strategy for regaining the alliance's old strength were, is shown by the evaluations of the 2009 European elections within the PCE and within the IU, respectively.

While Coordinator General Lara, himself a member of the PCE, saw the weakness of the IU as being primarily due to internal conflicts, and called for further opening of the party toward the social movements, the NGOs and additional trade union organisations beyond the CC.OO., such as the UGT, the CGT and the USO⁴¹⁰ the then newly elected Secretary-General of the PCE, José Luis Centella, favoured a strategy of concentration upon the CC.OO. Although the PCE, too, called for a re-foundation of the IU, and wanted to be its strongest and most dominating pillar, the various political concepts 'regarding the path and the goal of the re-formation process were far apart. Thus, the PCE Executive Committee was confronted at its Party Congress of November 6–7, 2009, with motions from the membership calling for withdrawal both from the IU and from the European Left Party.⁴¹¹ Although they were rejected by large majorities, many members of the PCE sought to once again exert strong influence upon the orientation of the IU. With the election of IU Coordinator General Cayo Lara in 2008, this desire had indeed already been accommodated, but not to the extent that many PCE members wished. A political strategic opening of the IU towards other trade union organisations in addition to the CC.OO. was therefore rejected by a majority of over 70 % of the delegates at the PCE party Congress.

However, if the IU is to continue to operate as a nationwide party, it will require not only a societal but also a parliamentary base. Until 2011, it had only one deputy in Parliament, and it has one MEP, Willy Meyer-Pleite, who sits with the left parliamentary group GUE/NGL in the EP, while the other MEP elected on the joint list with the Green-aligned Catalan IC-LV sits with the Green Group,. Moreover, until 2011, the party was represented in only nine of the 17 legislative assemblies of the regions, with a total of 38 seats. Moreover, the IU and its allies held only some 2000 seats in municipal councils nationwide, which rose considerably with the regional elections of 2011.

410 Cf. Political report of the IU national coordinator, in: DIE LINKE International, 2/2009, June 27, 2009, pp. 40 ff.

411 Cf. Willy van Oyen: Ein harmonischer Parteitag (A harmonious party congress), in: DIE LINKE International 1/2010), November 2009, pp. 35 ff.

The disadvantage for the United Left under the Spanish electoral on party system

The Spanish Parliament, the Cortes, consists of two chambers, the Congress of Deputies and the Senate. The latter, elected by majority vote, has considerably less powerful. The seats in the Congress of Deputies are apportioned by proportional representation for a term of four years.⁴¹² For electoral purposes, Spain is broken down into 52 districts, the fifty provinces plus the autonomous cities of Ceuta and Melilla on the Moroccan coast. The apportionment of seats to the districts is carried out prior to each election: each province gets two base seats, and the two cities one each; the other 248 seats are apportioned among the provinces in accordance with their population, for a total of 350 seats. The base seats clearly give a bonus to provinces with fewer inhabitants, since they differ greatly in size and population; Barcelona for instance has 31 seats while Valencia has only 16. The system therefore greatly disadvantages small parties with a nationwide constituency, since, in the small electoral districts with less than ten seats to be apportioned, they have hardly any chance to win seats at all, so that votes cast for them there are wasted; only in the few large electoral districts can they even hope to win anything.

This has a twofold effect for the IU: since the IU is primarily rooted in the urban centres such as Madrid, it is difficult for the IU to win seats there, even with a strong electoral showing. Moreover, due to fact that the votes cast in other electoral districts are lost, the IU has to achieve a higher percentage of the vote per seat obtained than then do, for instance, small regional parties. For example, in the 2000 election, the IU was the third strongest nationally operating party, winning 969,871 votes (approx. 4%), but only two seats in the Congress – less than 1%. By contrast, the Catalanian regional party Convergence and Unity (CiU) won ten seats with only 779,425 votes. In 2004, the IU needed an average of 254,000 votes for each seat it won, while the PSOE needed only 66,000 votes for each of its seats. Under a pure proportional representation system the IU's result would have entitled it to 18 seats instead of only five. The Spanish electoral system thus structurally decimates the parliamentary representation of the radical left. The IU has for years constantly criticised and has demanded that it be change.

Spanish society and the Spanish party system are moreover dominated by clientelism and paternalism. This authoritarian political tradition, which stems from the period of the Franco dictatorship, is reflected to this day in the strong personalisation of the parties and in meagre political participation⁴¹³; compared with other European countries, Spain has a very low level of party membership.⁴¹⁴ Moreover at the end of

412 Cf. Harald Barrios: op. cit., pp. 613 ff.

413 Cf. Rafael Arias-Salgado: Entstehung und Struktur des spanischen Parteiensystems [Emergence and structure of the Spanish party system], in: Zeitschrift für Parlamentsfragen, Berlin 1988, p. 379.

414 Cf. Jonathan Hopkin: Spain: Political Parties in Young Democracy, in: David Broughton, Mark Donovan (eds.): Changing Party Systems in Western Europe, London and New York 1999, pp. 224–225.

the 1970s, the parties were assigned a role within the country's institutional structure, from which point of departure they have only with great difficulty been able to develop as societal forces of mobilisation. While the emergence of the modern mass media has changed communications between social subsystems and between parties and voters⁴¹⁵ this has not led to any increased mobilisation of voters by the parties between elections.

Finally, the transition from the fascist dictatorship to a constitutional monarchy was accompanied by the emergence of a regionalism which has to this day dominated a large part of the political discourse. Regional parties not only dominate the party landscapes in their areas, but also have a strong parliamentary representation in the Congress of Deputies.⁴¹⁶ The typically Spanish lines of conflict between the state and the church, the parties and the institutional structure, and the centre and the periphery have to this day prevented national parties such as the IU from being able to build and expand a national party base. The IU has a hard time offering the electorate a continuous, programmatic and uniform political concept. The overshadowing of class conflicts by the issue of regionalisation has particularly enhanced the problems of establishing radical left parties and positions aiming to act effectively in the national context. As a result, the party entered completely unexplored territory when it began to develop an electoral programme for the parliamentary elections of 2011, and brought citizens into an internal party programmatic process in a manner hitherto unknown. And it did so with success.

The 2011 regional elections: A strengthened Spanish Left

Prime Minister Zapatero's social democratic PSOE, which was voted out of office at the end of 2011, had already suffered a painful and crushing defeat in the regional elections of May 2011, in which regional and municipal parliaments were elected in 13 of the 17 regions. Compared with the 2007 regional elections, the party dropped from 35 % to 27.8 %, losing such strongholds as Seville and Barcelona for the first time in many years. The right wing conservative opposition party, the PP, was the primary beneficiary of the PSOE's weakness, winning 38 % of the vote nationwide, and entered almost all the regional governments. Electoral participation was a surprisingly high 66 %, compared with 64 % in 2007. Nonetheless, many Spaniards this time marked their ballots invalid, an expression of the «May 15 Movement» mass protests which have continued since May 15, 2011 –at the Puerto del Sol in Madrid. For the United Left, the regional elections provided an initial glimmer of hope after the continually dropping electoral results of the previous decade. By attracting disappointed PSOE

415 Cf. Melanie Haas: Das Parteiensystem Spaniens (The party system of Spain), in: Oskar Niedermayer, Richard Stöss (eds.): Die Parteiensysteme Westeuropas [The party systems of Western Europe], Wiesbaden 2006, p. 427.

416 Cf. Dieter Nohlen: Wahlrecht und Parteiensystem [Electoral law and the party system] 3rd ed., Opladen 2000, pp. 332 ff.

voters, the IU increased its vote to 6.3% nationwide, having won only 3.7% in the European elections of 2009, and thus regained its status as Spain's third strongest party. The leftist party also profited from the mass social protests in the country against the government's cutback programme, the dismantling of social services, and poverty. Thus the political centre of gravity had already moved to the right in May 2011 with the victory of the PP. The Basque Country was an exception. There, both the PSOE and the PP lost support, and the Basque left alliance Bildu became the strongest political force in the region. After the regional elections however, the IU too had greater political weight. The Spanish leftist party now had 58 mayors at the local level elected with absolute majorities, and 53 elected by pluralities. In the regional parliaments too, the IU was able to increase its number of seats.⁴¹⁷ Hence, both the radical left and the right-wing conservatives entered the parliamentary elections in November of that year with a good starting position, while the PSOE bore the burden of a loser's image.

Table 4: Nationwide municipal electoral results,⁴¹⁸ May 2011

Party	Council seats	Votes
People's Party (PP)	37.53 %	8,474,031
Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE)	27.79 %	6,276,087
United Left (IU)	6.31 %	1,424,eleven9
Convergence and Unity (CiU)	3.45 %	778,679
Progressive Democratic Union (UPyD)	2.06 %	465,125
Basque Nationalist Party (EAJ-PNV)	1.45 %	327,100
Bildu-EA (Basque left)	1.39 %	313,231

Spain: A crisis-torn country

Shortly after the disappointing regional elections, Prime Minister Zapatero called for early elections on November 20, 2011, and at the same time announced that he would not stand as his party's candidate for the office of Prime Minister.⁴¹⁹ Spain thus followed Ireland and Portugal as the third EU member state to call early elections in 2011 in face of the world economic and financial crisis; Greece, the fourth «crisis country», saw a change of government without elections, which are scheduled for April 2012.

⁴¹⁷ Cf. Heilig, Dominic: Ein Hoffnungsschimmer für die Linke. Eine kurze Einschätzung der Regionalwahlen in Spanien aus linker Sicht [A glimmer of hope for the left: A brief assessment of the regional elections in Spain, from a left perspective], in: <http://dominic.linkeblogs.de/2011/05/26/eine-kurze-einschätzung-der-regionalwahlen-in-spanien-aus-linker-sicht/>

⁴¹⁸ Cf. El País: <http://resultados.elpais.com/elecciones/2011/municipales/>, May 22, 2011

⁴¹⁹ The snap elections were held, by coincidence, on the 36th anniversary of the death of dictator Franco.

Spain was especially badly hit by the worldwide crisis. The «boom» of the preceding years was long past; and, it had in any case stood on feet of clay. The construction and real estate sectors especially had profited from the surge on the financial and stock markets around the turn of the century. Around the peripheries of major Spanish cities, new satellite towns had grown up, with residential units burdened by debts of up to 120%. The result of the popping of the real estate bubble in Spain had especially alarming results. 700,000 unsold residential units were on the market, waiting for purchasers and, according to the Spanish Central Bank, there were €176 billion in shaky mortgages outstanding. Many unemployed people could no longer pay the interest on these mortgages; as a result, some 300,000 Spaniards were affected by evictions in 2008. Parallel to the economic and financial crisis, the unemployment rate in Spain rose to a record European level. In 2008, 2 million unemployed were officially registered; this rose to 3.6 million the next year, to 4 million at the beginning of 2010 and was finally to 4.4 million in 2011 – a 22% rate. Among young people, almost half – officially 45.8% – are unemployed.

As a result of the PSOE's austerity policies, the number of unemployed who had to make do without state support increased to 1.7 million; 21.8% of the population lives below the poverty line, including many pensioners.⁴²⁰ The retirement age has been raised to 67, and in September 2011, Parliament, with the votes of the then largest opposition party, the PP, voted for a constitutional amendment providing for a mandatory debt limit, on the German model. The Zapatero government's recipes for solving the crisis is the same useless ones supported by the socialists in Greece and Portugal: spending cuts at the expense of the population in education, health, pensions and public service wages. In addition, the public coffers were to be filled by privatizing public services. That ended in a failure of enormous portions, and did not even provide state revenue over the short term. By contrast, credit supports for banks and tax breaks for corporations amounting to billions were adopted.

The lukewarm parliamentary electoral campaign of 2011

In the parliamentary elections of November 20, 2011, a total of 350 seats in the Congress of deputies and 208 seats in the Senate were up for election. However even by election day, hardly any of the 36 million eligible voters knew which policies they were voting for or against. As in Portugal and Greece, the two big parties in Spain displayed hardly any strategic or programmatic differences from one another, and both had very vague election platforms. With Prime Minister Zapatero's announcement not to seek another term, the PSOE nominated former Minister of the Interior Alfredo Pérez Rubalcaba as its candidate, and attempted by means of a shift to the left to ward off the defeat predicted by the polls. However, those polling results seemed

⁴²⁰ In the report of the National Statistics Institute, the poverty line is defined as €7500 for single persons, and €eleven,300 for two-person households.

frozen in place for months, the conservative People's Party maintaining a steady lead of 15 % over the socialists, who remain stuck at the 30 % level.

The PP's candidate for prime minister, Mariano Rajoy (PP), projected a very pale image in terms of content during the election, and remained a puzzle for many voters. The 56-year-old conservative from Galicia in northern Spain is neither a skilful, emotional speaker nor a visionary politician. Both candidates equally called for a policy of cutbacks, although front-runner Rajoy was notably vague in terms of concrete policies. His only electoral message was a call for change⁴²¹; what kind of change that was to be was not specified. Rajoy vaguely announced during the electoral campaign that he wanted to reduce the budget deficit to 3 % of GDP by 2013, from 4.4 % in 2012, without saying how he planned to do that. His political programme ultimately merely consisted of the promise of a «leaner state», lower taxes, loosening of labour market laws, and dismantling bureaucracy. The translation was apparently: privatisation of public services, tax breaks for the rich and for companies, cutbacks in education, health and social spending, and further opening of the market to foreign investment.

The United Left on the other hand was considered capable of profiting both from the losses of the PSOE and from the emergence of the new protest movement, the May 15th Movement, and of entering Parliament with a stronger group than had been the case in the catastrophic election of 2008 (3.77 % and two seats). In this election, it was supported by the largest Spanish union, the Workers' Commissions (CC.OO). Coordinator General Lara appeared in the campaign as a «parliamentary *indignado*», and called on people not to boycott the elections, but to vote for IU, in order to be able to «confront the neo-liberal policies head on». This was not just cheap campaign publicizing, but rather included a serious involvement of the Spanish protest movement by the parliamentary left, as was shown by the process of drafting the party's electoral programme. In the strict sense, it was not an electoral programme at all, but rather a call to the voters by the IU to «struggle against the crisis and mobilize for a social alternative and for true democracy».⁴²² Moreover, it was the result of a broad consensus amongst those who constitute «an alternative and social block against neo-liberal hegemony».

The drafting process to which the party invited the public, ultimately involved 200 associations and organisations nationwide. Some 15,000 members and sympathizers of the IU took part in more than 500 public meetings and numerous open debates on the Internet. This method of work is one which the party would like to retain as an instrument of participation and democratisation, even beyond the elections: «It is a permanent instrument of communicatory participation», as the Call says.⁴²³ The results of the consultation are compiled in the Seven Revolutions of the United Left:

⁴²¹ The election posters of the PP contain such calls as: «Become part of the change».

⁴²² Cf. Convocatoria Social para 7 Revoluciones (Social Compact for Seven Revolutions), http://www.convocatoria-social.org/sites/default/files/documentos/7_revoluciones_0.pdf

⁴²³ Cf. *ibid.*

The seven revolutions of the United Left:

1. For an economic revolution

The economic revolution is seen as the basis for a global alternative to capitalism: «The crisis in which we are living is a global crisis of the capitalist system. Its global character is manifested as a multifaceted crisis of the economy, the financial system, the environment, raw materials, food, energy and, ultimately, of politics, culture and ideology. ... The resistance [to this] must have an objective goal: overcoming the currently dominant social, political and cultural model of neo-liberalism, and the creation of the conditions for doing away with capitalism. ... Resistance is alternative. Resistance is offensive. Resistance is the order of the day. Resistance is revolution.»

2. For a democratic revolution

«A force of the alternative left must have the goal of implementing an advanced democracy in the context of the federal, republican and solidarity-based state which expands the limits of freedom and participation, and guarantees economic, social and cultural well-being to its citizens.» Democratisation of society and its decision-making structures are for the IU the point of departure for a socio-ecological and sustainable development of Spain.

3. For an ecological revolution

«We must change the tendency toward the growing consumption of natural resources [and] the increase in emissions ... By promoting socially and ecologically sustainable development. We need a society which promotes human development ... and a relationship between human beings and nature which guarantees the integrity of ecosystems.»

4. For a revolution in public services

«The left faces the task, on the one hand of defending social welfare systems and on the other of building ... the model of an advanced social state. ... Education, care for children, the infirm and the aged, healthcare, provision of drinking water and sewage services, energy, public transport, postal service, sports and culture are not merchandise, but rather public services dependent on the responsibility of the state.» The IU demands universal access to these and other services, which must be oriented toward the citizens' needs, not toward economic interests, and strongly rejects privatisation in these areas.

5. For an equality revolution

Feminism is a philosophy for the IU, it determines the party's language, actions and political practice. Feminism is thus the backbone of the IU's policies for the transformation of society. The IU stands for equality of homosexual and heterosexual part-

nerships and is opposed to all forms of discrimination or domination based on sexual preference.

6. For a cultural revolution

Moreover, the IU supports a cultural revolution, and seeks to support cultural work more strongly and make access to culture independent of income. Like education, cultural work should no longer be subject to market mechanisms. In this context, the IU calls for a new political culture in Spain.

7. For a revolution for peace

In the view of the IU, the «crisis of humankind» is the result of the capitalist system and of imperialism, which have damaged international institutions and democracy. The use of violence, the violation of international law, the delays in achieving the Millennium Goals, and the growth in the international arms trade are, in the view of the Spanish left, tools in the struggle for resources. This struggle is hindering the development of numerous countries and exposing millions of people worldwide to death, hunger and poverty. The party calls for a comprehensive reform of the United Nations, and criticizes the democratic deficits of the European Union.

Furthermore, in its forums and debates, the party has agreed with the citizens on a 20-point immediate programme, in which the most urgent and central demands of the United Left are included, such as:

- A minimum wage of €eleven00
- a guaranteed basic income of, initially, €586
- a cap on high incomes
- a system of public banks
- an end to the privatisation of public services
- reform of the electoral system
- more direct democracy, e.g. popular legislation at all levels
- democratisation of culture and communications, e.g. through free access to software
- closing all NATO bases in Spain
- withdrawal Spanish troops from Afghanistan and Libya
- lowering the retirement age, first to 65 and over the long term to 60.

Election results and initial conclusions

Table 5: Electoral results 2011, compared with 2008⁴²⁴

Party	Orientation	Votes 2011		Deputies 2011	Deputies 2008	Votes 2008	
People's Party (PP)	Conserva-tives	10,866,566	44.63 %	186	154	10,278,010	39.94 %
Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE)	Social democrats	7,003,5eleven	28.76 %	eleven0	169	eleven,289,335	43.87 %
Convergence and Unity (CiU)	Catalan liberals	1,015,691	4.17 %	16	10	779,425	3.03 %
United Left/Green List (IU-LV)	Radical leftists/ Catalan greens	1,685,991	6.92 %	eleven	2	969,946	3.77 %
Amaiur*	Basque leftists	334,498	1.37 %	7			
Progressive Democratic Union (UPyD)	Liberals	1,143,225	4.70 %	5	1	306,079	1.19 %
Basque Nationalist Party (EAJ-PNV)	Basque conser-vatives	324,317	1.33 %	5	6	306,128	1.19 %
Republican Left of Catalonia (ERC)	Catalan left nationalists	256,393	1.05 %	3	3	298,139	1.16 %
Galician Nationalist Block (BNG)	Galician left nationalists	184,037	0.75 %	2	2	212,543	0.83 %
Canaries Coalition (CC-NC-PNC)	Canarian centrist regionalists	143,881	0.59 %	2	2	174,629	0.68 %
Commitment Coalition (COMPROMÍS-Q)	Valencian left regionalists	125,306	0.51 %	1		29,760	0.12 %
Asturian Citizens' Forum (FAC)	Asturian right regionalists	99,473	0.40 %	1			
Geroa Bai** (GBAI)	Navarre Basque conservatives	42,415	0.17 %	1			

* Name of a historic site in the Basque Country. This combined list includes the group Bildu («gathering»), under which label these forces stood in the Basque regional election in May 2011.

** Basque for «Yes to the Future»

424 Cf. Spanish Ministry of the Interior: http://www.generales2011.mir.es/99CG/DCG99999TO_L1.htm

The conservative People's Party won over 44 % of the vote, compared with 39.94 % in 2008, winning 186 seats for an absolute majority. That should permit them to implement their policies in the coming years with no problem, for they also rule in the majority of Spain's regions. After a number of years, Spain thus once again has a clear political majority, and is not ruled by a minority government. The hitherto ruling Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE) has only eleven seats and some 28 % of the vote (2008: 43.87 %), its worst electoral result since the democratisation of Spain at the end of the 1970s. However the conservative victory was really more like a socialist defeat, for the PSOE lost some 4 million votes compared with the previous election, while the PP gained only 600,000. Post-election polling revealed that some 2 million former PSOE voters simply stayed away from the polls. And the PP's absolute majority has a further blemish: its total amounted to 1.2 million votes less than the PSOE had won in 2008 – as a result of which it had merely been able to form a minority government.

Spain has now followed Portugal in replacing a socialist-led with a conservative-led government; only Greece seems unlikely follow in 2012. Nonetheless, the election must also be seen as a victory for the Spanish left, since the United Left was able to increase its vote by 3.2 %, following the «glimmer of hope» provided by the regional elections in May. Compared with the last election, the IU almost doubled its vote, and is now once again one of the strongest parties of the radical left in the European Union, regaining the position it held during the 1990s. The IU was able to gain votes both from disappointed PSOE voters and from the protest movement. By incorporating broad social groups in the drafting of its political and programmatic goals, the party has once again re-established its ties to society, thus restoring the position it had during the 1980s, when the IU emerged as a political project from the peace and anti-NATO movement. The interesting thing about the development of the IU in recent years is that a party on the brink of a split or dissolution has developed into one with a high degree of self-confidence in 2011, a transformation based primarily on internal reforms. Coordinator General Cayo Lara has persistently pushed through his programme of «re-foundation and democratisation», and has finally achieved success. The party is thus still, or, once again, one of the substantively and programmatically most modern and most progressive among the parties of the radical left in Europe. It has succeeded in combining both the extra-parliamentary and the parliamentary levels, and at the same time sharpened its programmatic profile as a red-green alliance of parties.

Michael Müller

THE LEFT IN BULGARIA

The political situation in Bulgaria

Bulgaria has been an EU member since 2007, where, together with Romania, it is at the very bottom in terms of its economic strength and its social situation. The Eastern Balkan nation has existed as a modern state since 1878; having previously, been one of the interior provinces of the Ottoman Empire for some 500 years. From 1944 to 1990, the People's Republic of Bulgaria was one of the countries ruled by «really-existing socialism», and was a founding member of the Council for Mutual Economic Cooperation (CMEC or COMECON), and of the Warsaw Pact. During this period, the Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP) was the dominant ruling party, albeit not the only one. At its head, from 1954 to 1989, was Todor Zhivkov⁴²⁵. Statistically, as well as in the opinion of the majority of the Bulgarians to this day, these decades were economically and socio-politically the most successful the Bulgarian people had ever experienced.⁴²⁶

The development of liberal democratic parliamentaryism since 1990 has been marked by instability of the party system and sharp turnabouts of government coalitions. The most recent parliamentary elections on July 5, 2009 gave the country its

425 Todor Zhivkov (1911–1998), was Bulgaria's head of state and Communist Party leader from March 4, 1954 until his forced resignation on November 10, 1989. Shortly after the political change led by his former close associate, ex-Foreign Minister Petr Mladenov, he was arrested in 1992 for malfeasance of office and embezzlement, and sentenced to seven years in prison; due to his age, he was held under house arrest, and in 1996 was acquitted on appeal. With regard to his tenure in office, he always insisted: «I gave the instructions for everything; I accept full responsibility for everything.»

426 Unfortunately, this is only mentioned in academic texts; the dominant «western» view sees only the «communist dictatorship»; the best one finds is ignorance. Until recently, the German Wikipedia had no section on this era: the section on the «Kingdom of Bulgaria» was followed by one on «Bulgaria after the political change» (de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bulgarien, accessed February 13 2009). A separate article on the People's Republic, de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Volksrepublik_Bulgarien, is a five-line stub, accessed November 1, 2011.

eleventh prime minister since February 1990 – Boiko Borisov. Never has a parliamentary election confirmed a sitting coalition government or re-elected a premier. There have been five cabinets under the leadership of the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP), three of them headed by a BSP premier, and the other two by non-party heads of government.⁴²⁷ The BSP emerged from the old Bulgarian Communist Party in 1989/90. Organisationally, structurally and in terms of influence, it is far and away the most important left force in the country. The elections in 2009 were exemplary for the stubbornness with which Bulgarian voters switch back and forth between parties. The clear winner was the Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria (GERB), a party which had only been founded in 2006, and took 39.7% of the vote. It is a populist party strongly oriented toward its founder and leader, former Sophia Mayor and current Premier Boiko Borisov; in terms of the bourgeois-democratic spectrum, it can be considered centre-right. The BSP, which had previously named the premier, won only 17.7%, down from 31% in 2005 – its worst electoral results since 1990. The 2009 election showed, first, a clear rejection by voters of the previous left dominated governing coalition, and second, yet another sharp switch in both the ideological and the «intuitive» political direction of the electorate.

In the context of normal Western European electoral behaviour, such a turnabout in just four years would be considered a sensation; for Bulgaria, however, it is in fact a multiple electoral *déjà vu* experience. The punishment Bulgaria's voters meted out to the BSP in 2009 was much like what they had done in 2001 to the conservative Union of Democratic Forces (SPS), which dropped from 52.3% in 1997 to 18.2%: As they now rewarded the brand-new GERB, sending Borisov to the Premier's office, as it were, from 0 to 100 in a few seconds, voters had in 2001 given a 42.7% score to the «Simon II National Movement» (NDSV), and thus elected ex-Czar Simeon Saksokoburggotski («of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha»). And yet, in 2005, he was returned to the side-lines – according to pollsters, by almost the same segments of the electorate which had previously supported him. In his place, they elected the Socialists, now headed by the new Premier Sergei Stanishev, who then, in 2009, in turn fell victim to a shift of electoral mood that now favoured the newly founded GERB. The GERB, which won 39.7% of the vote and 116 direct seats, of 240, rules with a minority government with the support or toleration of three small right-wing groups: the ultra-nationalistic Ataka (9.4%; 21 seats), the Blue Coalition (SDS/DSB: 6.8%; 15 seats) and the Party for Order, Safety and Justice (RSS:– 4.1%; 10 seats).

How contradictory this variable voter behaviour has been during the past eight years is illustrated by the personalities of these three most important leaders, the last three heads of government: First, the conservative, right-liberal Simeon Saksokoburggotski, who had succeeded to the throne in 1943 at the age of six, and returned from

427 Andrei Lukanov (February 3, 1990 to December 7, 1990), Zhan Videnov (January 25, 1995 to February 13, 1997), Sergei Stanishev (August 17, 2005 to July 27, 2009).

exile in Spain in 1996; second, the Socialist Sergei Stanishev, born in the Ukraine of a Russian mother, who was seen as a model cadre of that majority of the old BCP which in 1989 undertook the turn of the BSP; and last, the conservative populist Boiko Borisov, a dazzling, fast-rising chameleon who once performed the same services for the communist regime as he later would for the outspokenly anti-communist Sakskoburggotski.⁴²⁸

Figure 1: Parliamentary elections in Bulgaria, 2005 and 2009

Party/Coalition	Percentage		Seats	
	2009	2005	2009	2005
GERB	39.72		eleven6 (90+26)	
Coalition for Bulgaria	17.70	30.95	40	82
DPS	14.45	12.81	38 (33+5)	34
Ataka	9.36	8.14	21	21
Blue Coalition	6.76	14.12	15	37
RSS	4.13		10	
NDSW	19.88		53	
BNS	5.19		13	

Participation: 2009: 60.4% (4.23 million), 2005: 54.3% (3.7 million).

Since 1991, elections for the 240 seat parliament have been held by a pure proportional representation, with a 4% threshold. The 2009 election included majority voting in 31 constituencies, in addition to proportional representation according to the d'Hondt procedure.

GERB: Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria

Coalition for Bulgaria: Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) and several leftist splinter parties

DSP: Movement for Rights and Freedoms («the party of the Bulgarian Turks»)

Ataka: Ataka National Movement

Blue Coalition: Union of Democratic Forces (SDS), Democrats for a Strong Bulgaria (DSB)

RSS: Party for Order, Safety and Justice

NDSV: Simon II National Movement

BNS: Bulgarian People's Union

428 Michael Müller: Populisten ohne Programm. Eine Analyse der politischen Situation Bulgariens [Populists without a programme: An analysis of the political situation in Bulgaria], 2009, accessed at <http://www.rosalux.de/index.php?id=19691>, April 10 2010. Grigor Lilov: «The Secret Project of Boiko Borisov», Sophia 2010 (brochure in Bulgarian).

By the spring of 2010, just nine months after the parliamentary election, the opposition, led by the BSP, began to raise the issue of early elections. Former BSP Minister of the Interior Rumen Petkov even raised the perspective that the GERB «is itself the most interested in early elections, since it is otherwise threatened with a political disaster.»⁴²⁹

Around the same time, Premier Borisov gave himself 18 months to begin to solve the most urgent problems facing Bulgaria. Apparently, Bulgaria's problems are on the way to being solved, for no snap election was called. Rather, the regular presidential election was held in 2011, which indicated that the GERB's days are not yet numbered. In the October election, the ruling party's candidate Rosen Plevneliev defeated BSP candidate Ivaylo Kalfin in the race to succeed out-going Socialist President Georgi Prvanov, and took office at New Year's.⁴³⁰

One of the campaign promises of the GERB had been to move with determination against corruption, a promise that always strikes a positive note with the Bulgarian public, but which no one believes for very long. On the other hand, the government is increasingly pointing the finger in a very populist manner not at the national and international economic and financial mafias, but rather at past governments. At the end of March 2010, an investigation was launched into the activities of responsible persons in 13 ministries in the former Stanishev cabinet, including ministers and deputy ministers, who are accused of having concluded some 150 government contracts for a total of 2 billion leva between 2007 and 2009, without the necessary financial security.⁴³¹

According to political science Professor Antoni Todorov, the scandalous political situation in the country includes the fact that the GERB is ever more openly adopting the nationalistic slogans of the Ataka party, the key force upon which the GERB can rely for its parliamentary majority. In Todorov's view, the GERB has so far engaged only in «soft nationalism», but in the long term, it is targeting those strata, which support Ataka – radical nationalists who attack the Turks and the Roma, and especially «people who lost their jobs and their status during and after the political change, and are seeking vengeance for that.» These people shout «Bulgaria for the Bulgarians!» Without considering that these Turks and Roma living in Bulgaria are the big losers of the political change.»⁴³²

Left parties and groups, and other left-wing potential

Since 1990, some 200 political parties have been registered. Perhaps a quarter of them are at least not directly right-wing or centrist, and hence, to stay within this

429 In: *Noviyat Glas* of March 24 2010.

430 See www.cafebabel.de/article, January 2010.

431 In: *Duma* of March 13, 2010.

432 In: *Duma* of March 18, 2010.

rough categorisation, can be considered left-oriented. Most of them, whether right, left or whatever, are parties formed by certain people for certain people – either for themselves, or for an interested constituency. In most cases, moreover, this has not been done for any exalted democratic parliamentary purpose, but rather for the sole purpose of getting elected somewhere in a district or county, or best of all to the national parliament, in order to take advantage of the far-reaching, virtually immunizing privileges which the Bulgarian party and election law grants its elected officials at all levels.⁴³³

The Bulgarian Socialist Party

The strongest and most influential left political party is the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP). According to its own figures, it today has 120,000 members, a 40% drop over the past ten years. In Parliament, it is currently the strongest opposition party, with 41 of the 240 seats. In terms of content, the BSP, under its programme adopted in 2008, has an orientation comparable to the Hamburg Programme of the German Social Democratic Party (SPD; 2007). In terms of practical politics, it has behaved and continues to behave just as criminally neo-liberally as the SPD. Within the European spectrum of the Socialist International, to which it belongs, the BSP can be considered on the far right edge.

The BSP not only emerged directly from the Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP) in 1989-'90, but also placed itself at the head of the so-called transformation process – albeit now renamed, and having turned away from Marxism-Leninism, which it now labelled Stalinism. Nonetheless, it still had the same leadership personnel as it had had under the People's Republic. This transformation was carried out in Bulgaria without any really notable or long-lasting internal opposition, or even major demonstrations. With one major exception: Between 1984 and 1989, there was unrest among the Turkish minority due to the state-imposed Bulgarianisation of Turkish names. After several bombings, some of which were even fatal, (in Plovdiv and Varna), the moderate Turkish National Liberation Movement of Bulgaria took control of the underground movement, and called for passive resistance. This was the only significant large-scale action directed against the socialist state; however, due to the anti-Turkish attitudes of large parts of the majority population, it was unable to gain any political mass base.⁴³⁴

Essentially, this was merely a pragmatic change in policy on the part of the previously ruling political class, not overly different from the situation in Romania, albeit

433 Although such behaviour is not fundamentally different from that in Western countries, its appearance is coarser and more transparent than western links between politicians, lobbyists, businessmen, and brokers. And less effective. Consider, only in Germany, the corruption scandals running into the billions in recent years, involving Siemens, VW, MAN or Daimler.

434 See e.g.: *Das erste Loch in Richtung Westen (The first crack toward the West)*, in: *Neues Deutschland*, May 25, 2009.

more moderate and without bloodshed. In a process more or less comparable to the palace coup in East Germany which brought about the switch from Erich Honecker to Egon Krenz on October 18, 1989, the decades long BCP party boss Todor Zhivkov was forced to resign on November 10, 1989, and was replaced by Petr Mladenov, a member of the tight inner leadership circle in Zhivkov's Politburo of the Central Committee (CC) of the BCP. The BCP surrendered its constitutionally guaranteed right to leadership, and called for the establishment of a «democratic, law-abiding state». As the first former communist party in a formerly socialist state, it won the absolute majority in the post-transformation parliamentary elections in mid-1990, with 2eleven of 400 seats.

The disastrous electoral defeat of 2009 brought the intraparty debate about its future political course to a head. Initially, the broad centre prevailed, which meant there was no change, either in terms of programme or of personnel. Former premier Sergei Stanishev, the loser of the election, was re-elected as party chief on October 18, 2009 with 455 of 779 votes. The causes of the defeat in the election were sought and found amongst the two smaller coalition partners, whose semi-legal and corrupt constituencies had supposedly lain like a cover over the entire ruling coalition, and thus placed the leader of that coalition, the BSP, in a bad light before the public.⁴³⁵ The real cause of this loss of trust amongst voters is deeper, however. First, the entire party system in Bulgaria has lost all credibility with the majority of the citizenry due to its generally perceived incompetence, clientelism, and personal enrichment at the expense of society. Second, the BSP, which continues to be viewed as leftist and socially oriented, is to a considerable degree associated with these failings. With the transition from a communist state party to a transformed socialist/social democratic BSP, a major portion of socialist state property at home and abroad was transferred to the personal control of numerous top and mid-level BSP cadre – and later, to their political protégés, or their children. The second-generation leadership strata of the BSP too, is, according to current public opinion in Bulgaria, more of a caste than a group of people one might call leftists. However, it should be noted that the BSP people after the transformation in Bulgaria were no worse than others who were seeking a place in the sun; they were just starting from better positions – positions they had evidently prepared for long in advance.⁴³⁶

435 The Movement for Rights and Freedoms (DPS), also known as the party of the Bulgarian Turks, and the National Movement for Stability and Progress of ex-Czar Simeon Saksoburggotski (NDSV; the acronym is short for both this new name and the old name stated above, «Simon II National Movement»).

436 The struggle to secure all privileges and acquire new ones assumed increasingly mafia-like forms starting in 1989. A bloody climax was reached with the murder of the first post-transformation Prime Minister Andrei Lukanov (58) on October 2, 1996, in broad daylight in front of his house. He had served from Feb. 3 to Dec. 7, 1990, and had under the communist regime been minister for foreign trade since 1973, vice premier since 1979 and a candidate member of the Politburo of the CC of the BCP. With the backing of Gorbachev, he had largely managed the overthrow of Zhivkov in the autumn of 1989. Prior to his murder, he had publicly threatened to publicize his knowledge about corporate connections and the sell-out of Bulgaria.

In addition, the BSP has to date lacked any really future oriented project. Even now, in view of the populist, even mob-like nationalistic shift to the right since the parliamentary elections of 2009, the impression is inescapable that the leadership strata, which has been able to massively and fundamentally reinforce its privileges in 20 years of free democratic self-service from the coffers of the state, has merely gone into hibernation, hoping for a disaster of the existing GERB government at the next elections that will bring them back to power, and that that disaster will be as painful as possible; whether or not that means «painful» for the people, too, is of little interest. That is a strategy which, moreover, in view of the long-term vote switching behaviour of the Bulgarian electorate since 1990, is not an entirely unrealistic perspective.

The BSP has a nationwide daily newspaper, the *Duma*, the transformed *Rabotničesko Delo*, the old central organ of the BCP under the communist regime; it is now subtitled «leftist newspaper». It is available both at newsstands and by subscription, but its print run of 30,000 is far below that of Bulgarian newspapers owned by Western European corporations, such as *24 Chasa* or *Standart*.

Since 2006, the left-wing of the BSP has tried to move to the fore.⁴³⁷ Its patriarch is the octogenarian Alexander Lilov, hardly a credible figure for the identification of new leftist forces in the country, since he has long since been a symbol of traditionalism.⁴³⁸ After the electoral defeat of 2009, the left-wing around such figures as Yanaki Stoilov, Pavel Pisarev, Dimitr Genchev, Krasimir Premyanov, Tatyana Dontcheva and others felt that their time had come. They pushed for a new election of delegates at a special Party Congress, so as to be able to remove the party chair and ex-premier Stanishev, and, as they put it in their slogan, «renew the party from within». But nothing came of that, at least in the short run.

The regular Party Congress in the autumn of 2009, confirmed Stanishev in office. In the run-up to the next Party Congress in mid-October 2010, he announced, «I'm not clinging to any leadership position, but I'm also not going to shirk my responsibility.» However, if a «renewal from within» is indeed to come about, it will, according not only to many outsiders, but also to many BSP members at the grassroots, have to come primarily from «above». And the jobholders there have too much to lose: not only within the party, but also with regard to their private networks, where many of

437 Unlike the leftist Democratic Left Forum 21 (formerly the Frankfurt Circle) of the German SPD, who were accorded a number of seats both on the party's Executive Committee and in parliament, the left-wing of the BSP is subject to direct attacks by the right-wing party leadership.

438 Alexander Lilov was a member of the Politburo and Secretary of the CC of the BCP (for Ideology); he was long Zhivkov's right-hand man. He played that part to the fullest; his essay commemorating the hundredth birthday of Georgi Dimitrov is a gem of ideological kitsch (in: *Novo Vreme*, no. 6, June 1982). An eloquent speaker, he was a political and an apparently also a personal partner of Zhivkov's daughter Lyudmila Zhivkova (1942–1981; Minister of Culture). Not long thereafter, Lilov fell into disfavour with Zhivkov, and was banished to the provinces. In 1989, he was able to assume the aura of a dissident, and took over control of the BSP. In 1991, he proclaimed then 32-year-old Zhan Videnov as his successor; Videnov served as premier from January 25, 1995 to February 13, 1997).

them have not only achieved relative prosperity by Bulgarian standards as businessmen and entrepreneurs, or as speculators, but have even come into real wealth. The BSP as described above has since its foundation experienced factional battles and split-offs, some selfish, some honest, but all virtually without effect.

Communist parties

Since 1990, nine different parties have born the name «Bulgarian Communist Party» or something very similar to that. One of them, probably the strongest in terms of membership, is the «Communist Party of Bulgaria» under the leadership of Alexander Paunov, which stood in the 2009 parliamentary elections as part of the BSP-led «coalition for Bulgaria». The electoral support even for this biggest «CPB» can be measured in tenths of a percent. It publishes a bimonthly newspaper, *Rabotničeski Vestnik*. Another grouping is the Party of Bulgarian Communists led by Vasil Kolarov und Mincho Minchev, which stood in the 2009 election as part of an electoral alliance called the Bulgarian Left Coalition; its support too was in the range of tenths of a percent. No serious membership figures are available from either party.

Social democrats

Social democratic split-offs from the BCP included the party of Bulgarian Social Democrats, an associate member of the European Social Democrats, and the Political Movement of Social Democrats, which has observer status at the Socialist International.

Like the communists, these social democratic groupings are small to microscopic circles; many analysts warn that the harmful splintering of the Bulgarian left is being continued to the point of absurdity. But even if it could be organisationally overcome, the result would hardly be a particularly large whole.

In early 2010, there were reports in the media that out-going President Prvanov planned a new party project when his term expired at the end of 2011. Prvanov was under severe pressure from the GERB-led government, which even tried to get him removed from office by Parliament, a procedure which requires a two-thirds majority; that attempt failed on March 31, 2010. In the summer of 2011, he in fact set up an exploratory committee called simply «ABC» (or rather ABG, in the Bulgarian alphabet), apparently with the goal of running for re-election. However, this project went nowhere, and he seems to have dropped it, and plans to return to the BSP.⁴³⁹

⁴³⁹ Many believed that Prvanov was aiming for a party modelled after United Russia, i.e., a centralistic party designed primarily to hold on to power. BSP activists repeatedly denied these rumours (e.g. MEP Iliyana Yotova, in Duma. March 29, 2010), admitting however that «Prvanov is the only alternative to the current government».

Bulgarien Left (BL)

One interesting and promising new foundation seems to be the Bulgarian Left (BL), which was formed in April 2009 (prior to the electoral disaster of the BSP), around former leftist BSP cadres and MPs Iliya Boshinov, Klara Marinova, Boyan Kirkov, Petko Todorov and Ivan Genov. The founding conference in Sofia was attended by 500 people; total membership probably did not exceed 10,000. The BL joined in the leftist splinter association Bulgarian Left Coalition for the 2009 elections, of course with no notable success.⁴⁴⁰ It has since then engaged in building and expanding its regional structures. The founding statement of the BL includes human rights and freedom of opinion among the positive changes since the transformation of 1989, but at the same time emphasizes that Bulgaria has in all other social policy areas «been thrown back by decades». For this reason, the BL focused on «the struggle against poverty and social exclusion» and the rejection of «the neo-liberal privatisation and deregulation policies of the BSP». Its list of demands includes increased minimum wages and pensions, abolition of the uniform 10 % rate tax rates introduced under the BSP government, which is the same for both the poorest and richest households, the reintroduction of a tax-free minimum income, the rededication of military expenditures to infrastructural measures, etc.⁴⁴¹ The BL is not against Bulgaria's EU membership, but is very much for the further democratisation and a greater social orientation of the EU.

Ivan Genov, one of the three co-chairs of the BL, formulated its foreign and security policy approaches very clearly in the spring of 2010.⁴⁴² The BL, he said, was engaged in forming alliances of citizens' organisations in order to carry out «a referendum on peace and war» in the country. After a detailed political analysis, Genov identified five points which the referendum should target and with which it wished to address to broad circles of the population:

- No foreign military bases in Bulgaria and termination prior to term of the troop stationing treaty with the USA signed on April 28, 2006 by BSP Premier Stanishev
- No stationing of American ABM systems in Bulgaria; for uniform and equal security for all countries
- No Bulgarian participation in foreign military intervention; immediate withdrawal of the Bulgarian contingents from Afghanistan
- Withdrawal of Bulgaria from NATO; for a European system of collective security and defence
- No militarisation of the EU; for a peaceful and non-violent EU.

⁴⁴⁰ After the 2009 election, the BL immediately joined the ranks of those who claimed to have been cheated in the election, claiming it to have won not 0.2, but rather 1.2%. That is important, since parties scoring more than 1% receive state party funding.

⁴⁴¹ In: *Sega*, April 6 2009; also: *Junge Welt*, August 5 2009.

⁴⁴² «We need a Referendum on peace and war», full-page essay in: *Duma*, March 25 2010.

In its arguments for such a referendum, the BL is trying to connect with popular ideas and feelings of the Bulgarian population. For example, it states that prior to the current US bases, «there have never been foreign bases [on Bulgarian soil] throughout the entire history of the third [i.e., modern] Bulgarian state.» Or it appeals to traditional Russophile sentiments in Bulgaria, stating that the intention of stationing an ABM system is a «disguised action directed against Russia,» which would make Bulgaria a «spearhead against Russia»; Bulgarians should, «like the Czechs,» oppose that stationing; the BL, he said, feels at one with public opinion in this respect, and also with the national organisations and forums «Russophilia», «Bulgaria – Russia» and the «Slavic Association in Bulgaria». ⁴⁴³

Here, a statement on Bulgarian-Russian relations is appropriate. The BL is the clearest in its pro-Russian position, which certainly corresponds to the feelings of broad strata of the population in Bulgaria. But the BSP too – particularly ex-Premier Stanishev, and also out-going President Georgi Prvanov – have been eager for good relations, and for a positive climate in this regard. However, since 1990, a clear preference for the West has always dominated in terms of practical politics, regardless of whether or not there was a BSP premier or president. The ideological position behind that was recently made clear, for example, by ex-President Zhelju Zhelev of the Union of Democratic Forces (SDS), who said that Bulgarian Russophilia «has historically always played an ominous role», except in two instances, «during the Russo-Turkish war of 1877–78, from which Bulgaria emerged as a modern state, and at the time of the Perestroika/Glasnost period of Gorbachev, which to open the way to a gentle revolution for Bulgaria as well». ⁴⁴⁴

This thesis is certainly historically one-sided, and therefore wrong, and moreover ideologically narrow-minded. However, in today's Bulgaria, it is presented to the public every day by way of the media in varying contexts. Moreover, it is accompanied just as consistently by another equally wrong, one-sided and narrow minded thesis: that the fortune of the country stems from the EU and the United States alone, and that consequently turning toward the West and turning ones back on the east is the way of the future. ⁴⁴⁵ How ahistorical and how distorted from the point of view of national psychology this is can be seen very well by looking at the Christian Orthodox, Slavic, and especially Islamic cultural history of this region, and how these are reflected in the thoughts and feelings of modern Bulgarians.

⁴⁴³ *ibid.*

⁴⁴⁴ Presentation at the Bulgarian Embassy in Berlin, October 2009, quoted from the Bulgarian manuscript.

⁴⁴⁵ The German Left Party and the BL face completely different conditions. In Bulgaria, the BL is a split-off from the successor party of the old ruling communist party, which almost certainly has very little money, no media, no notable political mandate, and only minimal structures. It is thus a new foundation, starting from nil. The German Left Party is the result of a merger in 2007 of (1) the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS), the reformed SED, the former ruling East German communist party, with deep roots in eastern German society and its parliaments; and (2) a broad left alliance based primarily in western Germany called the Electoral Alternative for Jobs and Social Justice (WASG).

Since September 28, 2010, the BL has been an official member of the European Left Party. Some of its founding activities indicate that the party takes the Left Party in Germany as an example for its own foundation and for its social role – extending even to the name of the BL, which would correctly be translated not as «Bulgarian Left», but rather as «The Bulgarian Left» (Blgarskata Levitsa). As far as the societal bases of the parties are concerned, however, parallels are much fewer, which precludes any premature hopes for any comparable political successes.⁴⁴⁶

At the beginning of 2010, there were reports in the Bulgarian media according to which the now out-going Socialist President Georgi Prvanov planned a new party project when his term expired, which it did in late 2011. Prvanov was under severe pressure from the GERB-led government, which even tried to get him removed from office by Parliament, (a procedure which requires a two thirds majority) an attempt that failed on March 31, 2010. In the October 2011 election however, the GERB candidate Rosen Plevneliev defeated BSP candidate Ivaylo Kalfin in the race to succeed Prvanov. Whether there is any substance to these rumours of founding a party, and whether it is to be a left project or not is currently difficult to assess.⁴⁴⁷

Small left groups

Bulgaria also has numerous left projects outside the party spectrum. However, they have to date had little effect on the public. To name a few:

- Club Che Guevara Plovdiv: This is an informal association that meets regularly, approximately weekly except during the summer, to discuss political and cultural issues. The participants are primarily students, but also young people working in companies in the city. The Internet page is managed by club leader Pavel Ivanov, who is close to the BCP and works for the Plovdiv city administration.
- Bulgaria of Solidarity: This is a working group that emerged from the BSP, whose members were gradually marginalised there as troublemakers. According to Ivo Petkov, one of the initiators, about 300 people are active in the group, especially via the Internet, but in and around Sophia, in the media and at events. According to Petkov, «We have long since passed dealing with the question of property; we are trying to leave selfishness and the existing consumer ethic behind us.»
- Social Alternative Forum: This group of approx. 20 people, many of them also young former BSP members, wants a kind of forum for ideas and discussions. They have «nothing more to do with the discredited BSP», says co-organizer Illya Markov. «The BSP is much too far removed from leftist values, and is an oligar-

⁴⁴⁶ BSP activists have repeatedly denied such rumours (e.g. MEP Iliyana Yotova, in Duma. March 29, 2010). Nonetheless, Yotova did admit that «Prvanov is the only alternative to the current government» – which would mean a rejection of another future candidacy by ex-Premier and still party chair Stanishev. Many believe however, that Prvanov is aiming for a party modelled after United Russia, i.e., a centralistic party designed primarily to hold on to power.

⁴⁴⁷ See www.cafebabel.de/article, January 2010.

chic party. There, power is linked to money and nepotism. Of course, its leaders are responsible for that, but the membership is too, since they support them blindly, regardless of what the party says or does.» If there were to be a new party, Markov says, it would have to be «a pragmatic left social democratic party». At issue is not the revolution, but simply attaining (Western) European standards for the country.⁴⁴⁸

Greens

The two green parties in Bulgaria worth mentioning are the Green Party/Bulgarian Greens (since 1990), and The Greens (since 2008). In terms of electoral support at the national level, both are far below the 1% mark. Green politics in Bulgaria has from the start been primarily an attempt to merely initiate ecological politics in the first place. Explicit left programmatic points are, unlike in Western Europe, hardly anywhere to be found. For example, the Green Party/Bulgarian Greens prior to the parliamentary election even called on their members and sympathizers to vote for the populist GERB, the current ruling party.

Other organisations

Similar pragmatism can be found in the Bulgarian trade unions. The Confederation of Independent Unions in Bulgaria (KNSB) has some 350,000 members, and is hence the largest association of unions; it emerged during the 1990s out of the old single union of the communist era. The second-largest union by far is the Confederation, with some 80,000 members. It was created around the middle of 1989 parallel to the KNSB, and now sees itself as a largely Christian union. Both unions from the outset called for mass privatisation, arguing that that would secure jobs; undaunted by the disastrous effects of the first wave of privatisation, they in 1999 supported a second wave, also giving unqualified support to worker-management privatisation. Hence, those Bulgarians who lay part of the blame for the current economic and social situation at the door of the unions are not all wrong. Bulgarian unions are hardly left oriented, but rather close to the government and full of understanding for business.

Like the unions, most Bulgarian women's organisations in the strict sense are not particularly politically leftist. However, if there is one thing that characterizes Bulgarian women, it is their self-consciousness and their self-determined position, which Bulgarian society has traditionally respected. That can be seen clearly today, too. On the other hand, the family and social situation of Bulgarian Turkish women has been «set back 100 years» since 1990. The BSP has indeed been somewhat reticent on

⁴⁴⁸ According to Party Chair Alexander Karakachanov, this was not for ideological reasons, but rather because of the chance, «however slight», that the GERB would put an end to the sell-out of urban and rural land to private speculators (interview with the author, July 2009).

women's issues by Bulgarian standards – by contrast to the current GERB government, which, thanks to its electoral programme and its female candidates, received many women's votes.⁴⁴⁹

A retrospective, and expectations for the future

The history of leftist thought and leftist politics in Bulgaria is, as elsewhere, historically tied to the foundation of socialist parties at the end of the 19th century, although Bulgaria does have some special features which, taken together, constitute the basis for a specific leftist pattern of thought and action in Bulgaria, to this very day.

The first socialist party in Bulgaria, i.e. the first party largely oriented toward the Communist Manifesto, was the Bulgarian Social Democratic Party founded on July 20, 1891⁴⁵⁰ – relatively early for eastern Europe: the Russian Social Democratic and Labour Party, for instance, was not founded until 1898.

The tradition of socialist, i.e. leftist thought and action was very sketchy in Bulgaria at that time, both in terms of content and in terms of personnel. At the end of the 19th century, Bulgaria was to a large extent a purely agricultural country which not only had virtually no working-class, and hence no trade union movement, but also no entrepreneurial bourgeoisie to speak of, although there was an intellectual middle-class. Moreover, the country had not experienced the Western European Enlightenment, let alone anything like the French Revolution or the revolution of 1848/49. As late as 1900, the Bulgarian census reported that 76% of the population was illiterate.

The founding initiator of the party in 1891 was Dimitr Blagoyev (1856–1924), who translated a number of writings of Russian leftists, as well as those of Marx and Engels. In the fall of 1891, shortly after the foundation of the party, he published the lengthy essay «What Is Socialism and Does It Have a Basis in Our Country?» Officially, and among left parties, this is considered the «first Bulgarian Marxist work».

Here too, as so often later in the Bulgarian left, the popular basis for socialism in Bulgaria was largely seen in the context of a specific national, social revolutionary movement, which had begun in the European regions of the Ottoman Empire during the 18th century; the so-called national renaissance, with its militant resistance against the dying Ottoman Empire. Blagoyev's Socialists saw themselves very much in the tradition of this renaissance. The early Bulgarian socialists, conscious of symbolism, met in 1891 to found their party at the place where one of the early heroes, Haji Dimityr, the leader of a band of *Hajduks*, had been killed in 1868.

As noble as these Renaissance thinkers and fighters may have been, their ideas about the renaissance of things Bulgarian for the sake of which they fought against the Ot-

449 According to Tatyana Kmetova, director of the Women's Research and Policy Foundation in «Noch brennt Licht» (the light is still burning), in: Neues Deutschland of July 30, 2009, and «Bulgaria's women get a push from a patron» in: The New York Times, March 8, 2010.

450 According to the Gregorian calendar; on August 2, according to the then applicable Julian calendar

tomans, were full of ebullient patriotism, which was hard to justify in terms of the Marxism that Blagoyev and his comrades professed, and which would later evolve rapidly into Leninism and then Stalinism. After all, this Renaissance included Greater Bulgarian dreams of power, and pan-Slavic plans. Since leftist movements are not removed from popular feelings, such patriotism/nationalism has never been entirely abandoned by the Bulgarian left. Under the Communist Party regime, it was largely exhibited in the form of Russophile professions of friendship to the Soviet Union and internationalistic slogans. After 1990, the young BSP was willing to enter into electoral alliances with strongly nationalistic forces such as the Patriotic Party of Labour. Currently, that is not the case; there are no practical political points of contact with Ataka. Moreover, the Republic of Bulgaria under BSP leadership was able, even in times of bloody nationalistic conflicts in the neighbouring states of the former Yugoslavia, to temper local nationalistic tendencies, particularly regarding Macedonia. Further tests of this type may face the left in Bulgaria in coming years, particularly with regard to the debate about EU membership for Turkey.

Bulgarians have since attaining independence at the end of the 19th century seen the Turks and Pomaks (Bulgarian-speaking Muslims) who today, together account for approx. 10 % of the population, as a menace, or at least as a cause for concern. The campaign launched by the BCP between 1984 and 1989, under which all Turkish family names were to be Bulgarianised, ultimately caused the departure of almost 350,000 people to Turkey. While that caused an international political uproar against Bulgaria, it was largely tolerated by the majority of the ethnic Bulgarian population. After 1989, the «Turks' party», the DSP, did make the Turkish element in Bulgaria an accepted parliamentary and democratic factor, but it has been unable to do much to change the prejudices; in fact, it has even strengthened them, since now, a few Turks also have access to the political pork-barrel, and of course use it.

Since its electoral defeat in the summer of 2009, the BSP has picked its old coalition partner, the DSP, as a scapegoat, often accusing it in an unbridled manner of creating a negative image for the governing coalition in general, and of its leading force, the BSP, in particular. It has repeatedly used such terms as enrichment, corruption and nepotism. While that may not always be unjustified, it nonetheless feeds the basic anti-Turkish sentiments of the Bulgarians. In other words, in their position on minorities in the country – and here, the Roma people must not be forgotten – the Bulgarian left has plenty of room to improve its position.

The Stalinist phase of the BCP lasted until long after 1956. Not until November 1962 was the main actor and one of his most willing executioners in the very bloody process of Bulgarian Stalinisation removed from office for «activity damaging to the party». Vlko Chervenkov and Anton Yugov until that time held top level party and

state functions.⁴⁵¹ Chervenkov was primarily responsible for the trials of former Vice Premier and Vice Party Chairman Traicho Kostov, a member of the CC since 1924, and one of the few true heroes of the Bulgarian partisan struggle.⁴⁵² Chervenkov conspired in the matter for almost two years, often directly with Stalin,⁴⁵³ with the result that Kostov was executed at the end of 1949 as the «leader of an espionage group of the Tito fascist clique». A number of subsequent trials also resulted in death sentences or long prison terms for CC members.⁴⁵⁴ During the subsequent decades, the perpetrators were half-heartedly morally condemned, and the victims half-heartedly rehabilitated. The state and party leader, Todor Zhivkov, had already risen to the position of first secretary of the CC of the BCP in 1954, and was thus closely involved in all these atrocities, but he retained his number one position until the autumn of 1989.

Certainly, the Bulgarian people are not any more receptive to doctrinaire state structures than others with comparable historical traditions. On the other hand, they have a very heavy legacy. During its 1300 year history, with the exception of a brief episode from 1919 to 1923 under Premier Alexander Stamboliski's Peasants Party, Bulgarians never had a non-doctrinaire state until 20 years ago. The predilection for centralist solutions is strongly present in the people, even today. As the election of current premier Borisov shows, much leeway is given to such desires. The left in Bulgaria will increasingly be confronted with such tendencies toward a «strongman», and be forced to make decisions regarding alliances and coalitions which stand up against a slide toward totalitarian structures in its future practical politics. In this context, it should explicitly be stated that the Bulgarian people are fundamentally neither anti-communist nor anti-Semitic. The first is shown by the rapidity with which the rigid anti-Communist phase was ended, which was associated with the government of Philip Dimitrov (November 8, 1991 to December 30, 1992) of the Union of Democratic Forces (SDS). The second is shown in the behaviour of Bulgaria during the period of its alliance with Nazi Germany, when it successfully resisted delivering its Jews to the Nazis.⁴⁵⁵ These two sentiments in the people are something for the left to consider, promote and make use of in its programme and practice.

451 Vlko Chervenkov (1900–1980), General Secretary of the BCP, premier, after Stalin's death vice premier, and brother-in-law of Georgi Dimitrov. His speech at the CC Plenary Session of January 16/17, 1950 is a grisly document of the Stalin-inspired paranoia among the communists: «On the lessons of the exposure and the struggle to smash the Traicho-Kostov gang», Sophia, 1950 (blg.). Anton Yugov (1904–1999), minister of the interior until 1949.

452 Traicho Kostov (1897–1949, executed), vice premier. As a hero of the partisan struggle, he enjoyed great authority in the People's Republic after 1944, but he was then accused in the party of anti-Soviet beliefs and intellectual individualism. In June 1949, he was removed from all positions for supposed economic sabotage and then condemned to death in a show trial.

453 Compilation of documents (in Bulgarian) – Bulgaria in Stalin's Secret Archives, Sophia 2005.

454 This deadly Kostov trial was part of a series in other «people's democracies» as well, e.g., Koci Xoxe (Tirana, August 8, 1949), László Raik (Budapest, October 15, 1949), and Rudolf Slánský (Prague, December 3, 1952). Paul Merker (Berlin, March 1955) was condemned to ten years' imprisonment as a «Zionist agent».

455 A fact that is unique among Hitler's vassals, and which is specifically honoured at the Israeli Holocaust memorial site Yad Vashem.

In conclusion, a remark about another facet of the Bulgarian popular soul; the writer Aleko Konstantinov, satirised it in the first sentence of his «Bay Ganyo» cycle, in 1893: «They helped Bay Ganyo throw off the old cape from his shoulders, and to don a Belgian paletot, and everybody said that Bay Ganyo was now a real European.»⁴⁵⁶ In other words, Konstantinov's *typicus bulgaricus* is, though slightly whiny, very convinced of himself, and in spite of a lack of understanding, stubborn, and self-complacent; finally, although he constantly sees himself on the losing side, he has a peasant's slyness and is always on the go.

The above quote can certainly be adapted to the present, especially to the members of the current Bulgarian political class: «They helped Bay Ganyo throw off the old socialist cape from his shoulders, and to don an Adidas anorak, and everybody – especially Bay Ganyo himself – was certain that he was now a real Western European.» The left in Bulgaria on the other hand, is ever more strongly aware that this is a deceptive feeling of self-worth. After all, the sole historical and culturally specific feature of Bulgaria, and of the Bulgarian left, is its position at the crossroads, as a bridge between eastern and southern Slavs. Certainly, Bulgarians are Europeans, but they are not Western Europeans. Just as – as I would like to say in the text and not in a footnote – the Germans, including the German left are not, but they are rather central Europeans, in a unique, but unfortunately not well developed central position and role.

Bibliography

Hatschikjan, Margaditsch/Troebst, Stefan (eds.): Südosteuropa, ein Handbuch, Munich 1999.

Weithmann, Michael W.: Balkan-Chronik, Darmstadt 1997.

Knaus, Gerald: Bulgarien, Munich 2002, 328 pp.

Angelow, Dimitar: Entstehung des bulgarischen Volkes, Berlin 1980.

Bulgaria – history, politics, economics, culture, Sophia 1988, 522 pp. (Blg.).

The Balkans – A political-economic outline, Sophia, 1987, 274 pp. (Blg.).

Various Bulgarian newspapers and magazines:

<http://www.slavistik-portal.de/>

<http://staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/osteuropa-abteilung>

<http://staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/osteuropa-abteilung/service-und-benutzung/lesesaal.html>

http://www.bg-berlin.com/modules.php?name=Web_Links&cid=15

http://www.mfa.bg/berlin/index.php?option=com_content&task=category§ionid=21&id=88&Itemid=412

<http://www.mediapool.bg/>

<http://www.novinar.net/>

www.duma.bg

<http://www.newspapersglobal.com/>

⁴⁵⁶ Aleko Konstantinov: To Chicago and back– Baj Ganjo, Sofia 1983.

Julian Marioulas

THE GREEK LEFT

Greece and the Left since 1974

In 1974, after the end of the Greek military regime which had come to power in 1967 through a coup d'état, the Greek people voted to abolish the monarchy. Constantine Karamanlis, who had held the premiership several times during the '50s and '60s, and his conservative party, New Democracy (ND), won the election. He initiated a great effort to bring Greece into the EC, and won re-election in 1977. At the same time, the Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) emerged as the main opposition force, and succeeded four years later in winning a plurality of 48%, so that it headed the government for almost a decade. The PASOK implemented far-reaching social reform projects, although its policies never achieved the dimensions which its Prime Minister Andreas Papandreou had promised in his rhetoric.

1989, was the year of political change and a year of great significance to the Greek left which still reverberates to this day, though the reasons for that are not to be found in Berlin, but rather in Athens. At the beginning of that fateful year, the pro-Soviet Communist Party of Greece (KKE) and the Euro-Communist Greek Left came together to form the Coalition of the Left and Progress (SYN – for *Synaspismos*, «coalition»). The alliance was fragile from the start, yet its effect was visible at the polls: in June, it won 13.1% in the parliamentary election, for 28 of the 300 seats in Parliament; neither of the two large parties won an absolute majority. What followed is to this day seen as one of the great historical errors of the Greek left, even the view, of the later chairs of the KKE and the SYN. In order to strip Prime Minister Andreas Papandreou of his immunity and put him on trial for his part in a scandal, the conservative ND and the SYN formed a coalition government. After new elections in November, which again failed to provide the ND with the majority it needed to rule alone, the SYN supported a transitional government, which ruled until fresh elections in April 1990. This participation in a conservative government caused deep dissatisfaction on

the Greek left, and particularly burdened SYN's relationship to PASOK for many years. This interregnum was followed by single party rule by the ND, which failed to get the country's economic house in order, upon which it was voted out of office.

Soon, international developments caught up with the left alliance. The 13th Party Congress of the KKE in February 1991 demanded that in view of the collapse of the Soviet Union, a decision be made as to the direction that the party was to take. After the much respected long-time General Secretary Charilaos Florakis announced his intention not to stand again, Aleka Papariga was elected to the office under controversial circumstances, and by a very narrow majority. That was a victory for the dogmatic wing of the party, which thereupon proceeded to expel reformers from the Central Committee, and in June terminated its participation in the SYN. With the KKE thus purged of its dissidents, reform-communists and the remaining members of the SYN in June 1992 transformed that coalition into a fully-fledged party. A final split in the leadership body of the KKE occurred in 2000, when the former vice president of the Greek Parliament and a member of the European Parliament was expelled.

The second PASOK reign, which began in 1993, was marked by an economic policy with the goal of meeting the Maastricht criteria. Prime Minister Constantine Simitis implemented budget cuts and was able to point to good growth figures, and thus win two further elections, but his government shied away from cutting the ballooning bureaucratic apparatus, and was also unable to get a grip on the rampant political patronage in the country. In 2004, the PASOK went into the election under its new Chair George Papandreou, Andreas' son, showing clear signs of fatigue after its long period of rule, and lost to the ND under its new leader, Constantine Karamanlis, nephew of his above-mentioned namesake. The following five years saw the dissipation of the scant remnants of public trust enjoyed by the Greek political class through a series of scandals at the highest state levels, robust neo-liberalism and no trace of crisis management. In 2009, came the big break, as PASOK won a landslide victory using leftist rhetoric, only to shortly thereafter bury all hopes of social progress in the face of the devastating budget situation.

In addition to PASOK, the Greek social democrats, the country has a wide range of leftist forces, of which the KKE, the SYN and its 2010 split-off, DIMAR (see below), are far and away the most significant. Besides these groups, there are many parties and organisations which see themselves as part of the left spectrum. Their ideological orientation ranges from moderate socialists through Marxist, all the way to various conspiracy theorists. Five of them stood in the last parliamentary elections in October 2009, three under the communist banner: the Communist Party of Greece/Marxist-Leninist (KKE-ML) and the Marxist-Leninist Communist Party of Greece (ML-KKE) are Maoist; the smaller Organisation for the Reconstruction of the Communist Party of Greece (OAKKE) holds the peculiar worldview that Russia is now under the leadership of a neo-Nazi clique, and is responsible for all present evil. In addition, there was the Trotskyist Revolutionary Workers' Party and the Anti-

capitalist Left for the Overthrow (ANTARSYA, which means «mutiny»), an alliance of left-wing radical forces from various ideological tendencies. The latter group won 0.36 % of the vote, the most for any of these splinter parties.

Table 1: Results of the 2009 elections in Greece

Party	Percent	Gains/Losses	Seats	Gains/Losses
PASOK	43.92	+5.82	160	58
ND	33.48	-8.38	91	-61
KKE	7.54	-0.61	21	-1
LA.O.S	5.63	+1.83	15	5
SYRIZA	4.6	-0.44	13	-1
Ecol. Greens	2.53	+1.48	0	-

Synaspismos

Introduction: Social Structure And Political Environment Of The Party

The Coalition of the Left of Movements and Ecology (*Synaspismos*/SYN), is Greece's fourth-largest party, with a membership of 16,124 as of March 2009, many of whom were however lost when DIMAR split from it in 2010. Most of its active members were already members of SYN when it was still in an alliance with the KKE. Only 5 % of the 12eleven delegates at the 5th Party Congress, which took place in January 2008, had joined the party during the previous four years. The average age of the delegates was 51; most of them were in the 45 to 54 age group, and had a high level of education – they were from the so-called Polytechneon generation, which had been in school or university at the time of the student uprising of 1973. However these academics are still underrepresented at Party Congresses with respect to their proportion of the overall membership. Most members are employed in the public sector, with school and kindergarten teachers and university instructors accounting for the largest share. The next largest group is that of the employers and the self-employed, followed in third place by employees in the private sector. Only 50 % of the delegates were not members of any other party or organisation prior to joining the SYN, and 91 % of them are at the same time socially active elsewhere, in organisations, citizens' initiatives and other groups.

Approx. a quarter of the members are women. This also corresponds to the share of approx. 26 % of female delegates at the fifth Party Congress. Many bodies within the party have a women's quota which corresponds to the share of women in the membership of the SYN; the exception being the Political Secretariat. This top leadership body currently has 17 members, only one of whom is a woman. Thanks to the quota, the picture is different in the Central Political Committee, the enlarged Executive

Committee, which has 125 members, 40 % of whom are women. People of non-Greek heritage only seldom join the SYN. Although the statute explicitly states that immigrants have a right to join, their degree of societal organisation is low, even in the case of native minorities such as the Turks in the Thrace area, who rarely join any parliamentary party.

Position of the party in society and in the political system

In the Greek party system, SYN occupies a position between the KKE and the PASOK. While the KKE is generally seen as the furthest left parliamentary force, the SYN contends that the Communists, since they hold fast to dogmatic Marxism Leninism and state socialism, would be more accurately described as right-wing.

Ideologically, the history of the SYN can be traced back to 1968, when at the Budapest Party Congress of the KKE; those Central Committee members who were critical of the Soviet Union were expelled. The dissidents, many of whom had been active in the battle against the regime of the colonels, founded the KKE-Interior, and increasingly moved towards reform-communist positions. In 1986, the KKE-Interior split, with the larger wing dropping the most important communist symbols, the hammer and sickle, and founding the Greek Left.

Both parties, the KKE-Interior and the Greek Left, enjoyed a low but stable level of support in Greece, in the range between 1.5 and 3 %. Coming out of this tradition, the SYN was able after 1991 to maintain its position within the Greek party spectrum. Its solid support from its core voters before the current upheaval amounted to between 2 and 2.5 % of the electorate, and included primarily academics and well-educated public servants. Among swing voters for the party, the SYN has had its greatest success among first-time voters in the age group between 20 and 30. During the first half of 2008, many polls saw SYRIZA, the coalition of the radical left, at 15 % and the general view was that the radical left had great potential; that was confirmed by developments in response to the deep economic crisis in late 2011, when each of the SYN faction independently reached that level in the opinion polls. Until 2012, the best result ever achieved was the 6.3 % of the vote in the European election of 1994.

SYN/SYRIZA receive their strongest support from school pupils and students, who give the party twice its overall average result. It is also strongly represented among self-employed and the staff of the private sector. Among employers and big business people, too, support is considerable, at 6 %. On the other hand, it is weak in the traditional base of left parties, among workers in industry and in small business, where SYRIZA won below-average support in the last election. Its lowest level of support is amongst pensioners and housewives. Taking into account other factors, it is evident that the average SYN voter has a university degree or is still in university, comes from a family that lives in Athens and Thessaloniki, and is self-employed.

Table 2: Voters for the parties in percent

Party	PASOK	ND	KKE	SYRIZA	LA.O.S.
Gender					
Men	43	32	8	5	7
Women	45	35	7	4	4
Age					
18–24	40	26	8	9	8
25–34	39	24	eleven	6	9
35–44	43	27	7	6	9
45–54	46	28	9	7	5
55–64	48	34	8	4	4
65 and older	42	48	5	1	3
Education					
Low	48	39	6	1	3
Medium	44	33	7	4	7
High	39	29	10	8	6
Status of employment					
Employed	43	28	8	6	7
Unemployed	43	26	eleven	6	8
Not in the workforce	45	40	7	3	4
Type of employment					
Employer/businessperson	38	40	4	6	4
Self-employed/agriculture	47	37	6	3	5
Self-employed/professional	39	26	6	9	10
Self-employed/worker/ industrial worker	43	30	8	4	8
Public service employee	48	28	7	7	4
Private sector employee	40	24	eleven	8	9
Unemployed	43	26	eleven	6	8
Housewife	47	42	4	2	4
Pensioner/public sector	42	47	4	2	4
Pensioner/private sector	46	38	9	2	4
School pupil/student/ military conscript	39	25	eleven	eleven	6
Residence					
City	44	30	9	6	6
Town	44	37	6	6	5
Rural	44	40	5	3	5

The most important form of incorporation of other left forces in the country takes place under the umbrella of SYRIZA. Starting from the joint protest actions against the Kosovo War and the G8 summit in Genoa, numerous alliances were formed by 2004 for a common electoral platform, with resistance to neo-liberalism within the country the most important link. Shortly after the parliamentary elections, the parties went their own way again, due to internal controversies about the distribution of electoral seats. Under party chair Alekos Alavanos, a supporter of broad left alliances, SYRIZA was brought back from oblivion, and achieved several notable electoral successes. The key factor was disappointed PASOK supporters who were dissatisfied with the work of the Socialists in opposition, and voted for SYRIZA.

SYRIZA is currently a coalition of twelve parties, social movements and organisations, the most prominent, aside from the SYN, being the Renewed Communist and Ecological Left (AKOA, which has observer status in the European Left), the Democratic Social Movement (DIKKI, which held seats of its own in the Greek Parliament during the '90s), and the Active Citizens. The common core of these ideologically very disparate groupings is resistance to the neo-liberal orientation of the key policies of both major parties; their goal is to create greater possibilities for action and public communication, which will benefit the smaller member parties, and – this is especially a goal of the SYN – to push forward the development of a united left.

In the area of the unions, there are several umbrella organisations which are close to the left parties, of which the Militant Front of All Workers (PAME) is the most influential, although it takes second place to the PASOK unions. The SYN has no comparable union organisation, which is not surprising, considering its base of support. Hence, the union that is close to it, Autonomous Intervention, plays a subordinate role behind the KKE and the PASOK unions.

Other organisations affiliated with the SYN are analogous to those of other parties: the Nikos Poulantzas Institute publishes writings on the history of the Greek left and on current issues. Its youth organisation, the SYN Youth, has grown greatly in recent years, and is programmatically close to the party. The party organ *Avgi* is among the smaller of the numerous Greek daily newspapers, and in December 2009 had a weekend press run of approx. 5500. By contrast, *Rizospastis*, the KKE party paper, had 24,000, and *Eleftherotypia*, the largest left-wing daily paper, 120,000.

The strategic orientation of the party

According to the SYN party programme, the present situation is dominated by neo-liberal capitalist globalisation and the predominance of the USA. The consequences of this development are the dismantlement of democratic and social gains, disregard for international law and the UN, sharpening of existing contradictions in the capitalist system, and its expansion into all realms of life. While social democracy has surrendered and the media recite the inevitability of globalisation all the way to the dogma of the end of history, new forms of protest and resistance are emerging. These, accord-

ing to the party programme, are manifesting themselves from «the Zapatistas to Seattle to Geneva, from the European demos to the counter summits, from Porto Alegre to Florence, from the World Social Forums and their European counterparts to the peace movement, incorporating the popular disadvantaged classes and suppressed minorities, and forming social movements with various goals.» In the face of globalised capital, it sees the emergence of a new globalised and multifaceted left – and hence the hope for a different world in which people come before profits.

In the concrete design of the counter-model, there are very great differences within the party, especially regarding the question of allies. The dispute primarily revolved around the question of cooperation with the PASOK; that dispute has now been «resolved» by the split-off of the latter faction, the present DIMAR (see below). Prior to the 2009 election, the SYN was in the comfortable position that the PASOK was fundamentally willing to cooperate. Interestingly, PASOK Vice Premier Theodore Pangalos in 2008 expressed the wish that SYN enter the government as a kind of corrective. He was thinking less of policy positions than of the inevitable corruption that befalls single-party governments in Greece. The strong lead in the polls during the first half of 2008 was due both to the initially very great popularity of Party Chair Alexis Tsipras and to the perspective of government participation alongside the PASOK.

The list of demands made by SYRIZA to the Social Democrats rapidly stifled the possibility of cooperation. For instance, leading representatives demanded the rejection of the treaty of Lisbon. The left-wing faction devoted considerable energy to pursuing the goal of an alliance with the KKE, which however the Communists have steadfastly rejected, a position they justified with the claim that SYRIZA was not a genuine left party, but merely another branch of the Social Democrats. Moreover, the SYN did not see itself structurally or programmatically sufficiently prepared for a potential role as a governing party which, as Tasos Kourakis pointed out, so that the good results achieved in the polls would not result in any long-term strengthening of the party. Especially disappointed PASOK supporters returned to the Social Democratic fold in the 2009 election after having abandoned it the previous year, so that the PASOK was able to consolidate its support to a much greater degree. The important factor here however was not the strategy of the SYN, but rather a desire to get the ND government out of office.

On a number of key issues, there is a broad consensus within the SYN which deviates from majority opinion in Greek society. These include the separation of church and state, secular baptisms and funerals, homosexual marriage, the status of immigrants, the rejection of security cameras in public places and in non-government educational facilities, the decriminalisation of soft drugs and the position on the conflict over the name of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Especially on «national issues», it has a reputation for reticence, which has an effect on voter behaviour not reserved for only those segments of society with lower educational levels. On the other

hand, the party is the only one that carries these issues into the parliamentary agenda. Its convinced stand for progressive positions also helps it maintain its independence.

Critical discourse in the debate around political theories and various «Marxisms» are an important factor in this party dominated by academics. This applies not only to the SYN, but also to the fractured Greek left as a whole. It is impossible to identify any dominant ideological tendency, but the writings of Luxemburg, Gramsci, Poulantzas, and more recently, those of Hardt and Negri are widely respected.

The party majority holds fast to the project of the creation of a «third pole» in society, in order to achieve fundamental change. While SYRIZA initially provided the framework for that, an additional point of fracture has appeared in the alliance. Alekos Alavanos in 2009 distanced himself from his successor Tsipras, and together with other representatives of the radical left called for transforming SYRIZA – an alliance which already appears dysfunctional due to the divergent policies of its smaller members in a difficult balance of internal proportional representation – into a full-fledged party. This conflict was eclipsed by the protests against the cutbacks of the PASOK government, and ultimately by the split-off of the DIMAR from the SYN.

Apart from the inglorious *intermezzo* at the end of the '80s, SYN has never participated in government. The current economic policy positions of the party can basically be described as anti-neo-liberal. At the time of the last election, there were a number of core proposals in the area of financial and social policy. The demand was for a tax system in which especially indirect taxes would be drastically reduced, and the well-to-do forced to bear a greater burden. All privatisations of recent years were to be repealed, and military expenditures immediately cut by half. Another focus of the party is the democratisation of society and the strengthening of the rights of immigrants. Thus for instance the SYN is the only opposition party to support the bill recently introduced by the PASOK government to extend Greek citizenship to immigrants and their children; moreover, SYN demands further liberalisation of the right to residence. The long-term goal of its environmental policy is a switch to renewable energies in Greece. The infrastructure required for that should be decentralised and structured in accordance with local municipalities, so as to take regional interests into account.

Even now, the SYN is engaged in the area of social movements and citizens initiatives. In the years of the ND government, civil resistance to privatisation and environmental destruction grew. The commercialisation of public space was indeed prevented in several cases, the most famous example being that of Elliniko Beach, where residents defended their interests and won wide support in society. A more recent initiative is a protest against the redirection of the Acheleos River in Epirus. The regular occupations of schools and universities, and in fact all forms of youth protest, have won great sympathy, so that other parties have found a welcome point of attack against the SYN. This was especially true during the unrest in December 2008, when the KKE secretary-general accused the SYN of patting the «hooded ones» – s – on the backs,

which provoked a strong reaction. The SYN was at that time the only parliamentary party to show any understanding, and in some cases even sympathy, for the protests, which have since then become a central feature of Greek politics.

Many SYN positions correspond to those of other European left parties. However, the fundamental structural problems of the Greek state now threatened by bankruptcy cannot be resolved simply through higher tax revenues and more hiring, given an inefficient public sector bloated by years of patronage politics under both the ND and the PASOK. Within SYRIZA, the ideas regarding the future character of the state, ranging from the post-materialist emancipatory to state socialist, proved unbridgeable and contributed to the split in the SYN in 2010.

Left ideas for European politics

In Greece, the parties of the left have since 1980 always succeeded in winning more than 50% of the vote together, but due to an electoral system that favours the strongest party, the question of cooperation between the Social Democrats and the Communists has never arisen. The PASOK has moved ever closer to the European mainstream, while the KKE has remained true to its dogma, even after the end of the Soviet Union. This was the environment in which the Eurocommunist Greek left had to operate during the '80s. Since then SYN has found itself causing many alliances to be concluded that often failed to meet the expectations of those who had built them: in 1988, the alliance with the KKE; in 1989, the brief governing coalition with the ND, which proved to be a catastrophe for the SYN; the consideration of power options with the PASOK; the collection of left splinter groups in SYRIZA; and the renewed approaches to the KKE. For this reason, it can be said that the SYN can bring in the rich theoretical and practical experience of a reform-communist party. At the same time, the party, like others, faces unresolved questions, and particularly that of where this process can and will ultimately lead.

The SYN is one of the driving forces within the party of the European left, and was the host of its founding congress. It has no major problem sharing the basic consensus of the EL, and the majority of its members support transnational involvement; however the same is not true of its allies. Within SYRIZA, there are a number of Euro-sceptical parties, including the official Maoist Communist Organisation of Greece (KOE). The very sobering result of the European election is the result of a controversy over the European policy course of the SYN, since the previous EP member, Dimitris Papadimoulis, who was close to the Reformers, and was highly respected for his work in the European Parliament, was dropped to third place on the SYN list by a membership vote, behind Nikos Hountis of the Left Tendency, and a representative of the KOE. As a result of the strife between the three groupings and other member parties of the alliance, who came out empty-handed, SYRIZA presented a picture of strife and intrigue. The result was 4.7% of the vote and only one seat in the European Parliament; Tsipras had stated four seats as the goal.

There is a strong overlap of personnel between ATTAC and SYN; both are involved in the Greek social forums. They were also major participants in organizing the European Social Forum of 2006 in Athens, and have sent delegations to the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre.

Self-Image and organisation

SYN's name – meaning «coalition» – is also its programme, for the party's self-image is that of a broad spectrum of today's left. Its most important members are hence radical democratic, movement oriented and ecological forces which want to overcome capitalism, but also progressive people in the country who demand democracy and self-determination. It does not see itself as a workers' party, although it has its origins in the worker's movement. Post-material values are more important than they are for other parties. Their own goal of forming a broad alliance of the left evaded both the SYN and SYRIZA, as they remained only the third force in their political camp, behind the PASOK and the KKE. The target of replacing the KKE as the third strongest party seemed doomed to failure during the unit decade, and they even fell behind the nationalistic LA.O.S. As the Greek economic crisis came to a head in 2011, however, the two successor-parties of the SYN each seemed poised to each surpass both the PASOK and the KKE.

The SYN sees itself as a pluralistic and decentralised party. It has a three level structure, the central political committee, the provincial level and the grassroots organisations. The issues are decided by nationwide membership votes. As regards issues, the SYN has succeeded in establishing a consensus process, using the usual instruments of working groups and the right to propose amendments to programmatic drafts. As regards personal and strategic issues, the difficulties are greater.

The split and the crisis: SYN and DIMAR

The debate about the further development of SYRIZA also continued at the Alliance Congress in November 2009, aggravated by the dispute between its two most important factions. These were effectively the two SYN tendencies, the Left Tendency under Alexis Tsipras and the Renewal Wing under Photis Kouvelis; like all Greek parties, the SYN is strongly dominated by key individuals. By early 2010, more than 60% of SYN members were close to the Left Tendency, and 30% to the Renewal Wing. In addition, the Red-Green Network, which emphasizes ecological positions, and the Radical Initiatives for Left Reconstruction were organised caucuses, but had no notable influence; intraparty elections being dominated by the two main factions.

The Renewal Wing often criticised the fact that the Left Tendency attempted to occupy the most important party offices with its own people. This was clear in the European election and thereafter in the election of a new general secretary. When Tsipras attempted, prior to the parliamentary election of 2009, he was stopped by the resistance of the Renewal Wing and by opposing votes from within SYRIZA.

The feared showdown within the leftist alliance was however postponed, since the electoral results exceeded the low expectations, and the most important candidates did win seats in Parliament; moreover, the question of cooperation with the PASOK no longer arose. Nonetheless, in June 2010, as the deepening financial crisis polarised opinion on the left, the SYN split, with the Renewal Wing, including four MPs, initiating a process of founding the Independent Democratic Left (*DIMAR*), which moved to fill the gap between the PASOK and the SYN. As the crisis worsened, these two rival factions rose to an unprecedented position in Greek politics.

The Communist Party of Greece (KKE)

Introduction: The social structure and political environment of the party

The KKE has traditionally been the third biggest party in Greece, after the two large political blocs PASOK, with 350,000 members, and New Democracy with 370,000 members; however it does not provide any exact figures as to its membership. Its peak membership was around 50,000 during the '80s, judging by the readership of the party newspaper *Rizospastis*; today, it is probably stands around 30,000. The party's political environment is much more strongly connected to the working class than that of the SYN, although the most important party functionaries mostly have a university education. The lead places on the list for the parliamentary election in 2009 were for the most part filled by permanent party employees: teachers, lawyers and doctors. Nonetheless, it is also true that workers and trade unionists are more strongly represented in the rural regions. Of the 21 members of Parliament, five are women. By profession, they break down as follows: three are full-time party functionaries, two are doctors, two are lawyers, two are public officials, two are farmers, two are economists, one is an actor, one a university professor, one a journalist, one an agricultural engineer, and one a construction contractor; one is self-employed, one is a sailor and one is a store clerk. For the past 20 years, the KKE has been led by Aleka Papariga, which has however not affected the male dominance of the party. The central committee elected in February 2005 consists of 77 members, of which 14 are women. The Politburo, which leads the party between meetings of the Central Committee, had eleven members, including two women.

Position of the party in society and in the political system

The KKE strongly criticizes or even rejects all organisations, parties and movements which are not affiliated or friendly to it. At the same time, it is an established force in Greek politics. It is not a pariah like the communist, and especially Marxist-Leninist, parties in other countries. The highest representatives of the state, the parties and the church attended the funeral of its former General Secretary Florakis. It invites representatives of New Democracy, PASOK and other parties to its party congresses – but never those of the SYN. Reformist communist parties who seek greater dialogue with

society are seen as opportunistic, and, in the view of the KKE, do not support the path to socialism initiated by the October Revolution.

The KKE publishes a daily newspaper, *Rizospastis*, the Sunday edition of which had a press run of 24,550 in March 2008. Other important print media include the theoretical organ of the Central Committee, the *International Communist Review*, which appears in several languages. Through the centre for Marxist research in Athens, the party engages in scientific work in Marxism-Leninism. In addition, the party has a radio station and a TV channel; the latter carries advertising. Its youth organisation, the Communist Youth of Greece (KNE), is very closely tied to the party, and carries out its programme. Its monthly magazine is called *Odigitis*. In the area of unions, the KKE has its own organisation, the Militant Front of All Workers (PAME), which according to its own figures has 410,000 members. PAME closely follows the guidelines of the party, and is one of the most important representatives of the interest of the workers in Greece. Its strike actions, which extend all the way to the occupation of government ministries, are often staged in a very media effective manner, and consciously convey the image of unity and strength.

The strategic orientation of the party

Two major splits, after both of which the dogmatic wing remained in the party, have forged a party which is «loyal to Moscow», even if the Soviet Union has long since ceased to exist. While other communists the world over are seeking new paths, the KKE holds fast to scientific Marxism-Leninism as the most powerful weapon of revolutionary class struggle. Recently, Manos Kopsidis, who was the party's press spokesman until 2002, put it this way: «For decades, the KKE has treated Marxism as a religious dogma, and continues to do so today.» The KKE's statements on the 90th anniversary of the October Revolution provided a good sample of its view of history: the development of the Soviet Union until *Perestroika* is viewed as positive, with virtually no exceptions. While some criticisms are indeed made with regard to the period prior to *Perestroika*, the latter is seen as having had a strongly revisionist character. For instance, the fact that too much effort was dedicated to armaments rather than to infrastructure is seen as unfortunate. However, it is seen as more significant that after the 20th Party Congress of the CPSU in 1956, opportunistic tendencies in the party gained influence, and the socialist system was slowly weakened by capitalist mechanisms. Other than Lenin, no other individual leader of the Soviet Union is either praised or condemned; rather, the character of the CPSU is the focus of attention. The task and goal of the KKE is to build a socialist society as a preliminary step to communism in Greece, in the form that once existed in the USSR.

In the 2009 elections, the KKE trusted in widespread resentment against the major parties, and in demands for such key measures as a minimum wage of €1300 a month, minimum pensions of €1050 a month, and retirement at 55 for women and 60 for men – those were the retirement ages in the former Soviet Union – unemployment

pay equal to 80% of the minimum wage, free child care and free public services, a 35 hour work week, tax-free income of €30,000 for a family of four, no indirect taxation for basic necessities and food, a public housing construction programme and the right to sports, tourism and culture through state programmes. The KKE does not yet have any well-developed environmental policies. It wants to put all forests under state control, create a large number of environmental monitoring agencies and abolish emissions trading. In addition, it calls for unspecified measures to reduce the actual level of greenhouse gas emissions.

An understanding of the KKE requires more than simply a description of the ideological base of the party. Supporters of these positions are in fact genuinely convinced of their correctness, and sympathy for state socialism is considerably higher in Greek society than it is in other countries in Europe. But it should not be overlooked that the KKE is characterised by stubbornness and unwillingness to compromise, and thanks to its extensive party apparatus has in recent decades been the strongest oppositional force against social cutbacks. Its voter support comes from many political camps, especially those dissatisfied with the «two-party system» – the revolving-door sequence of PASOK and ND governments. For good reason, all election campaigns are conducted under the slogan of sending a message to the big parties. The KKE depends primarily on centrally coordinated protest actions and strikes for its fight against social evils. The PAME is the largest of the associations affiliated with a party. It has many sympathizers in the university and cultural areas, and party base organisations can be found wherever several communists are active. Solid institutional rooting provides it with great influence in Greek society, and a much larger core voter support than the SYN. Of the voters who voted for the KKE in 2007, 80% did so again in the 2009 parliamentary elections; in the case of the SYN, that figure was only 55%.

Left ideas for European politics

The KKE is totally opposed to the EU, which it sees as an imperialist construct. For this reason, it distances itself strongly from the European Left Party and its members, whom it accuses of working within that framework. The question as to whether the KKE, through its participation, does not accept the EU as a component of existing capitalist reality, and hence as a field of action, is one that they do not address. Its last European electoral campaign ran under the standard slogan that support for the KKE equalled settling accounts with the EU and the other parties. The only alternative to the existing incorporation of Greece under capitalism and imperialism in the form of the EU and NATO is, in the party's view, an anti-monopolist anti-imperialist democratic front of struggle under the leadership of the KKE, in order to provide the classes of society with a perspective. Greece should, it believes, withdraw from both organisations, as only the liberation from these constructs of imperialism can permit the construction of a socialist society at the national level to proceed. Some KKE politicians even go so far to connect their criticism of the West with nationalistic posi-

tions. This is especially true of journalist and MP Liana Kanelli, editor-in-chief of the magazine *Nemesis*, which is the organ of this tendency.

Self-Image and organisation

At its 15th Party Congress in 1996, the KKE adopted a new programme, which is still in effect. According to its own self image, the party remains a revolutionary organisation and vanguard of the working class. In the statutes of the party, the organisation is dedicated to the principles of democratic centralism. Important programmatic decisions are made either by the Central Committee – and more likely the Politburo – or by the Party Congresses, which take place once every five years. Creation of factions is not permitted, and regional structures hardly have any possibilities for publishing their own materials, although they are generously provided with such materials by the party headquarters.

The KKE rejects the designation of the capitalism of our day as neo-liberalism. It sees imperialism in Lenin's definition as the final stage of capitalist development, and as the stage in which we find ourselves today. Accordingly, globalisation is an aspect of imperialist development. The transition to socialism, which began in 1917, is still in progress, even if the counterrevolution has meant that one battle has been lost. Hence, ideological discussions have little place in the party; after all, the character of the system has already been analysed by Lenin. The language of the party as expressed in its pronouncements is hence very monotonous, and uses vocabulary and terminology which leftists today no longer consider up to date. The KKE makes great efforts to emphasize its own party history and a positive interpretation of state socialism.

Members have various duties, such as the representation of the party at their places of work, participation in base organisations, implementation of the decisions of those organisations and of higher bodies regardless of their own opinion, and expansion of the dissemination of the party newspaper and of other media. Moreover, they are to educate themselves in Marxism-Leninism and defend theory against left-wing and right-wing deviationists and against the bourgeoisie. It's small wonder that things look different in practice. The base organisations are largely concerned with organizing events, poster campaigns, coordination with affiliated associations, and regular resistance against government measures.

Table 3: Best election results of the KKE and SYRIZA

Party	Prefecture	Percent
KKE	Samos	17.86 %
	Lesbos	14.10 %
	B' Piraeus	12.86 %
SYRIZA	A' Athens	7.97 %
	B' Athens	7.40 %
	A' Piraeus	5.84 %

Table 4: Worst election results of the KKE and SYRIZA

Party	Prefecture	Percent
KKE	Rodopi	2.51 %
	Xanthi	2.75 %
	Evritania	3.24 %
SYRIZA	Evros	2.09 %
	Evritania	2.27 %
	Kilkis	2.49 %

The current crisis

Currently, Greece is confronted with an enormous budget deficit and state debt, the extent of which was covered up for years, and which is now rebounding upon the country with such force that it has brought the entire euro zone into an existential crisis. The PASOK government has virtually been forced to surrender part of Greek sovereignty in order to ensure the continued financing of the state. Currently, the process of extreme social cutbacks has only begun; since these are combined with very modest economic perspectives in terms of growth, the country has some difficult years ahead of it. It is little wonder, therefore, that both the KKE and the SYN strongly oppose these measures dictated by the EU and the IMF. Both parties were heavily involved in the recent protests, primarily in the form of demonstrations. Here, the KKE succeeded in a particularly spectacular action by unfurling banners from the Acropolis Hill. Both the Leftists and the Communists reject the use of force in equal measure, and distanced themselves from those demonstrators whose firebombs caused the death of three people in 2011 and destroyed a large part of central Athens in 2012. The KKE sees the «hour of decision» as having arrived, and calls upon people to rise in resistance against the plutocracy, for which purpose its own organisation, it claims, is the only vehicle that makes any sense. Its most recent call ends with the words, «Come with us on the Great March to the final overthrow of the capitalist yoke. In order to

fight it effectively, we have to become stronger. Lend your power to the power of the future, the KKE.»

For the SYN, the government's flight into the arms of the IMF was an inexcusable deed. With these measures, which totally contradict the electoral programme of the PASOK, they have lost their democratic mandate. In the SYN's view, Greece should accept credits only from the ECB; for this purpose, the European treaties should be renegotiated, and the Stability Pact replaced by social supports, secure employment in accord with human dignity, and sustainable development. Strategically, the party intends to engage in protest together with other organisations and institutions, and sharpen societal awareness for its problems through solidarity with locally affected people and by means of large-scale information campaigns.

The view of the future of such leading PASOK politicians as Papandreou and Vice Premier Pangalos formulated even in the midst of the crisis, was a Scandinavian model with a Greek slant; that vision has, however, receded into the distance as the crisis has worsened. The KKE and SYN on the other hand are currently basically defending the achievements of the old system, which is understandable in view of the large number of people who are affected by its demise. However, they have a hard time formulating a societal alternative of their own. The reasons for that in the case of the SYN involve to some extent differences over issues, but even more the fact that the party cannot openly call for the revolution which would be necessary to actually implement its programme. The KKE, too, is not influential enough among the revolutionary elements of Greek society to carry a popular uprising under its own leadership through to the end.

According to polls conducted in May 2010, the KKE had 7.1% support, and SYRIZA 4% – in other words, no more than at the last parliamentary elections. The PASOK too was only at the 28% level, which still placed it far ahead of the ND, which reached only 18.5%. The biggest bloc of voters is the undecided, with 31%.

A year and a half later, all that had changed. Under the impact of the worsening financial crisis, the EU powers in late 2011 forced draconian cutbacks on the PASOK government, which threatened the very substance of Greek society. Papandreou resigned and turned power over to a care-taker cabinet of «experts»; elections were called for April 2012. With the country descending into chaos, the two leaders of the old SYN factions emerged as the national leaders of the two «camps» into which the left polarised: Kouvelis and DIMAR now replaced the disintegrating PASOK as the key force of the left favouring an arrangement with the EU powers, while Tsipras and the SYN emerged as the most powerful voices of resistance in Greece.

As the election neared, the left as a whole was retaining its majority, and DIMAR and SYN seemed poised to emerge as the two strongest parties, after the conservative ND, while the right – especially the far right – seemed unable to profit from the situation. The same, however, seemed to be true of the KKE, which was still stuck around the 10% mark. That was still better than what remained of the once-mighty PASOK.

Bibliography

Basic documents of SYN/SYRIZA

- SYN: Programmatikes Katevthynseis [Programmatic Directions], Athens 2003.
- SYN: Katastatiko tou Synaspismou tis Aristeras ton Kinimatou kai tis Oikologias [Statutes of the Coalition of the Left, the Movements and Ecology], Athens 2005.
- SYN: I Politiki Apofasi tou 1ou Synedriou tou SYN [Political Resolution of the First Congress of the SYN], Athens 1992.
- SYRIZA: O SYRIZA kai i politiki sygkyria [SYRIZA and the political Situation] Athens 2008.

Basic documents of the KKE

- KKE: To Programma tou KKE [The Programme of the KKE], Athens 1996.
- KKE: To Katastatiko tou KKE [The Statute of the KKE], Athens 1996.
- KKE: Diakiryxi tis Kentrikis Epitropis tou KKE gia ta 90 chronia tis Oktobrianis Sosialistikis Epanastasis [Statements of the CC of the KKE at the 90th Anniversary of the Socialist October Revolution, Athens 2007.
- KKE: Apofasi tou 18ou Synedriou tou KKE gia to Sosialismo [Resolution of the 18th Party Congress of the KKE on Socialism], Athens 2009

Secondary literature

- Nikos Marantzidis: To KKE meta to 1991: Apo ton proletariako diethnismo ston ethnolaikismo [The KKE after 1991: From proletarian internationalism to populism], in: G. Konstantinidis/N. Marantzidis/T. S. Pappas (eds.): Kommata kai politiki stin Ellada – Oi sygchrones exelixeis, EKDOSEIS KRITIKI [translation], Athens 2009, pp. 259–270.
- Alexandros Bistis/Vasilis Fillipos: Analsi tis Ereunas tou 5ou Synedriou tou SYN [Analysis of the Study of the 5th Party Congress of the SYN], in: Aygi, edition of July 13, 2008.
- Myrto Tsakatika/Giorgos Xezonakis/Alexandros Bistis: Ananiosi politikou prosopikou kai metaylistikes axes ston SYN [Renewal of the political personell and post-materialist values in the SYN], in: Konstantinidis/Marantzidis/Pappas (eds.): Kommata kai politiki stin Ellada, pp. 271–306.

On current politics

- Hier ist an erster Stelle die Tageszeitung Eleutherotypia (<http://www.enet.gr/>) zu nennen, in der täglich über SYN und KKE und häufig auch über die Splitterparteien berichtet wird und die mit exzellenten Kommentaren und Analysen zur griechischen Linken aufwarten kann. Darüber hinaus berichten die PASOK-nahen Zeitungen TO BIMA (<http://www.enet.gr/>) und ETHNOS (www.tovima.gr/) ausführlich über die das linke Politikspektrum.

Die Materialien von SYN und KKE zur Parlamentswahl 2009 wurden ebenfalls zu Rate gezogen.

Sources for the election results and statistics

The daily newspaper Eleutherotypia (<http://www.enet.gr/>) which reports daily on the KKE and the SYN, and frequently on the splinter parties, is the primary source here; it also provides excellent commentary and analysis of the Greek Left. In addition, report the PASOK-affiliated newspapers To Bima (<http://www.enet.gr/>) and Ethnos (www.tovima.gr/) carry detailed reporting on the left political spectrum. The materials of the KKE and SYN on parliamentary elections in 2009 were also consulted.

Sources for the election results and statistics

Greek Home Ministry: <http://ekloges.yypes.gr/pages/index.html>

VPRC public opinion research institute: http://www.vprc.gr/uplds/File/vouleytikos_Prozent20ekloges_Prozent202009/Graphs_VoteAnalysis_WeightedBasedOnFinalResults.pdf

Boris Kanzleiter/Đorđe Tomić

THE LEFT IN THE POST-YUGOSLAV AREA

There is probably no other region in Europe where the past and present of the left are so severely out of sync with one another as they are in former Yugoslavia. A look at the history of the area reveals a strong presence of the socialist and communist movement. Prior to the First World War, such socialists as Svetozar Marković were able to lay the foundations of a revolutionary movement. At the beginning of the 1920s, the newly founded Communist Party of Yugoslavia (KPJ) was able to achieve the breakthrough of becoming a mass party. After the German invasion of Yugoslavia in April 1941, the anti-fascist partisans were able not only to mobilize hundreds of thousands of fighters, but also, then, to overthrow the monarchy and establish a new socialist state. The break with Moscow in 1948 initiated the experiment of «workers' self-management» and «the non-aligned movement», which attracted worldwide attention. State and party leader Josip Broz Tito and the ruling League of Communists of Yugoslavia (SKJ) enjoyed enormous worldwide prestige during the 1960s and '70s. Moreover, such left oriented opposition tendencies critical of Tito such as the Praxis Group, which called for a «humanistic Marxism», were noted worldwide.

This rich history contrasts sharply with the situation of the left at present. At the beginning of the 21st century, the left in former Yugoslavia underwent an existential crisis. The point of departure for the decline was the severe structural, social and political crisis of the late phase of socialism in the 1980s. The erosion of the base of legitimacy of the SKJ was the precondition for the successful mobilisation of nationalist movements which led to the disintegration of Yugoslavia in the wars of the 1990s. The rise of nationalism was connected with the strengthening of right-wing, often right-wing extremist, ideologies as hegemonic identification patterns in the post-Yugoslav societies.

The wars of the 1990s not only cost over 100,000 deaths and created 1 million refugees, but also destroyed large parts of the industry and infrastructure of the coun-

try. Rigid neo-liberal economic policies led not only to the privatisation of large parts of industry, but also to the dismantling of the support structures of the welfare state. The long-term results of the disintegration of the state, war and neo-liberal structural reform are apparent in the areas of the political power structure such as; widespread corruption and populist authoritarian models of politics. Even ten years after the end of the armed conflicts, the countries of former Yugoslavia must in many respects be considered «post-war societies», in which many of the structures which developed during the war, such as the close connection between organised crime and the state apparatus, continue to be strongly in evidence. On the social level, a small elite of privatisation profiteers is juxtaposed to large parts of the population who live in marginalised communities without any future or opportunities. If, during the 1970s, the standard of living in Yugoslavia was comparable to that of Italy, today, broad segments of the population live in extreme poverty that is in many cases reminiscent of countries of the Third World. The left has to this day hardly addressed its historical defeat at all. The new formulation of a left oriented perspective is the task of the future.

Our purpose here is to analyze the existing left in light of the socio-political constellation in the post-Yugoslav area, as roughly outlined above. For this purpose, we will examine the left oriented parties, organisations and social movements that exist, and in addition identify the major tendencies and the political location of these forces. In so doing, we will examine all relevant forces defining themselves as «left», and describe, first, the disintegration of the SKJ into its social democratic successor parties, and second, the initiatives of the anti-nationalist, civil society-oriented left. Third and finally, we will examine the trade union and student movements.

In structuring this examination, we have decided in favour of a presentation based on political criteria, rather than on countries. The reason for this decision is that, in spite of the national differences, a certain symmetry can often be ascertained in the development of the left in the various post-Yugoslav countries, which could better be presented in the structure we have selected. In view of the complexity of the topic however, it is clear that the following overview can only briefly touch on a number of aspects which deserve a more detailed analysis.

The disintegration of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia into social democratic successor parties

The causes of the destruction of Yugoslavia are the subject of controversy.⁴⁵⁷ It is however a hardly disputable fact that one of the major domestic political causes for the disintegration of Yugoslavia was the existential crisis of the League of Communists

⁴⁵⁷ In academic research, institutional, foreign-policy, economic and political-cultural factors are discussed as the cause of the disintegration and destruction of Yugoslavia. This paper cannot examine in detail this, in some cases highly, controversial debate. One examination which provides insight is – Ramet, Sabrina P: Thinking about Yugoslavia. Scholarly Debates about the Yugoslav Breakup and the Wars in Bosnia and Kosovo, Cambridge 2005.

of Yugoslavia (SKJ). During the second half of the 1980s, the party leaderships in the six republics – Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro and Macedonia – and in the two autonomous provinces of Vojvodina and Kosovo on the territory of Serbia, developed completely contrary political strategies to address the severe social crises of that time.

The leadership of the Serbian republic under Slobodan Milošević had since 1987 demanded a stronger centralisation of the competences of the Federation, and the strengthening of the Serbian republic. This amounted to a reversal of the (con)-federalisation of Yugoslavia, which had been implemented under the Constitution of 1974. By contrast, especially the leadership of the Slovenian Republic demanded even greater decentralisation, and found allies especially among the Kosovo-Albanian communists, and in the party organisations of Vojvodina, Croatia and Macedonia. The SKJ became increasingly incapacitated. At its 14th Congress in January 1990 in Belgrade, the conflict escalated to a final break. The party disintegrated at the federal level, leaving behind its component parts in the republics; this was at the same time the beginning of the process of the disintegration of the state, which occurred a year later with the declarations of independence of Slovenia and Croatia, followed by the war.⁴⁵⁸

The anatomy of the disintegration of the SKJ is of great importance for an understanding of the current party system in the region. For most of the «post-communist» socialist or social democratic parties in the countries of former Yugoslavia emerged from the products of disintegration of the former state party; in most of the successor republics, they hold important, and to some extent dominant influence on political life.⁴⁵⁹

This is mostly obvious in the tendencies in Serbia, Macedonia and Montenegro. In Serbia, the Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS), founded in 1990 as the successor party of the League of Communists, ruled without interruption until the fall of Slobodan Milošević in October 2000.⁴⁶⁰ The support for the SPS has melted away during the ensuing years; in the parliamentary elections of May 2008, the electoral alliance led by the SPS obtained only 7.8% of the vote. Nonetheless, the SPS remains an impor-

458 Any analysis of the disintegration of the SKJ must stress that the party had been federalised since the Second World War. It consisted of eight party organisations, having its own leadership and Central Committee. As Othmar Nikola Haberl has shown, the Republic party organisations had far-reaching competences by the mid-'60s. After the 9th Congress of the SKJ in 1969, the congresses of the Republic parties were held first, and that of the SKJ at the federal level only afterwards. Cf. Haberl, Othmar Nikola: *Parteiorganisation und nationale Frage in Jugoslawien* (Party organisation of the national question Yugoslavia), Berlin 1976.

459 At the same time, it should be noted that immediately after the «transformation», some non-left parties emerged from the political structures of the SKJ or its youth organisations in the respective areas, or at least their material resources were used for founding these parties. For example, the stronger Slovenian parliamentary party, the Liberal Democrats of Slovenia (LDS), emerged from the Socialist Youth League. Cf. Lukšič, Igor: *Das politische System Sloweniens*, in: Ismayr, Wolfgang (ed.): *Die politischen Systeme Osteuropas* (The political systems of Eastern Europe), Wiesbaden 2006, p. 660.

460 The SPS was formally founded on July 17, 1990 in Belgrade, as a merger of the Serbian League of Communists and the Socialist League of the Working People of Serbia (SSRNS), a «mass organisation» of the SFRJ. Cf. Milošević, Milan: *Die Parteienlandschaft Serbiens* (The Serbian party landscape), Berlin 2000, p. 45.

tant political factor in Serbia. In the summer of 2008, the former Milošević-Socialists became the junior partners in a coalition with the Democratic Party (DS), their main rivals during the '90s.⁴⁶¹

The post-communist Union of Social Democrats of Macedonia (SPSM) held the reins of government for long periods during the 1990s, and is an important political force in the southernmost former Yugoslav Republic. In the parliamentary elections on June 1, 2008, the alliance under the leadership of the SPSM achieved 22.5%. The current government is headed by the conservative VRMO-DPMNE of Premier Nikola Gruevski.⁴⁶²

The clearest example of continuity of power from the post-communists to the present is provided in little Montenegro, with only 600,000 inhabitants. There, the Montenegro Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS), which emerged from the SKJ, has been able to stay in power without interruption for over 20 years now. The dominant figure there is Milo Đukanović, who has determined the country's fate in various functions during this time. Once the youngest member of the Central Committee of the League of Communists, he demonstrated remarkable transformation capabilities; at the beginning of his period in power, he was closely aligned to Milošević. Starting in 1997, he began to make arrangements with the «West», and steered a course toward independence. Đukanović's tenure in office has been accompanied by numerous charges of corruption.⁴⁶³

It is not only in Serbia, Macedonia and Montenegro that the post-communist social democrats wield important influence, they do so too in the other successor states of Yugoslavia as well. In Slovenia, Milan Kučan, a former party functionary, won the first free election in April 1990. Kučan's newly founded Slovenian Social Democrats became the strongest single party in the elections held at the same time, but had to yield governing power to a coalition of the opposition national liberals of the DEMOS Alliance. Thereafter however, the social democrats governed Slovenia in shifting coalitions between 1992 and 1996, and from 2000 to 2004; they have also been in power since 2008. In the presidential election of October 2008, Social Democrat Danilo Türk won the runoff elections with a convincing 68% of the vote, after winning only 24.4% in the first round.⁴⁶⁴ (see below for recent developments).

461 On this development, which surprised many observers, cf. Kanzleiter, Boris: *Politischer Umbruch in Serbien* (Standpunkte, 25), Berlin 2008.

462 In the 1990–1994, 1994–1998 and 2002–2006 legislative terms, the SDSM led the Macedonian government, so that it can certainly be said to have been the dominant party in the political system. Cf. Siljanovska Davkova, Gordana: *Makedonske političke partije kroz prizmu ideologije* (Macedonian political parties through the prism of ideology). In: Lutovac, Zoran (ed.): *Političke stranke i birači u državama bivše Jugoslavije*. (Political parties and voters in the states of former Yugoslavia), Belgrade 2006, p. 209.

463 For the emergence of the Montenegrin political system and Đukanović's role in it, cf. Kovačević, Filip: *Montenegro and the Politics of Postcommunist Transition: 1990 to 2006*. In: *Mediterranean Quarterly*, 2007, 18/3, pp. 72–93.

464 The social democrats in Slovenia changed their party name several times. The Party of Democratic Renewal (SDP) became first the Social Democratic Renewal (SP) and later the Social Democrats (SD). Cf. Lukšič 2006: 660.

In Croatia, the post-communist Social Democratic Party (SDP)⁴⁶⁵ lost the first free presidential and parliamentary elections in 1990, and had to yield power to the extremist nationalists of the Croatian Democratic Community (HDC) under Franjo Tuđman. In the immediate post-Tuđman era, from 2000 to 2003, the STP was able to temporarily regain government power, only to lose it again to the HDZ, which had by now mellowed into a more moderate nationalist conservative party. In January 2009, Social Democrat Ivo Josipović was however able to win the presidency⁴⁶⁶ and the SDP returned to power in 2011 (see below).

In Bosnia-Herzegovina, the situation is complicated. Here, the three nationalist parties, the Serbian SDS, the Croatian HDZ and the Party of Democratic Action (SDA) initially gained the upper hand in the spring of 1992 prior to the outbreak of the war, by claiming to represent the interests of the three ethnic groups of the country, Serbs, Croats and Muslims, respectively. The war-making forces grouped around these three parties, while the post-communist social democrats⁴⁶⁷ splintered into a number of parties with only local influence.⁴⁶⁸ However, in the Serbian part of Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Serbian Republic (Republika Srpska), Premier Milorad Dodik's Independent Social Democrats (SNSD) dominated the government from 1998 and 2001, and have done so again since 2006; this party could be considered a successor party of the SKJ. By contrast, the STP was only the third strongest force after the general elections of 2006 in the Bosnian Federation. The Social Democrats are nonetheless still present as a small group in the common Parliament of Bosnia-Herzegovina.⁴⁶⁹

465 The Social Democratic Party of Croatia (SDP), as the reformed successor party of the league of Communists of Croatia, in April 1994 united with the small Social Democratic Party founded in 1989. Cf. Zakošek, Nenad: *Das politische System Kroatiens* (The political system of Croatia). In: Ismayr, Wolfgang op cit., 2006, p. 707.

466 The election of Josipović can be seen as a positive sign for the domestic political development of Croatia. Unlike his predecessor Stipe Mesić, Josipović has sent clear signals of the conciliation to Serbia, and has also distance himself from the national conservative Catholic Church.

467 In the first parliamentary election in 1990, the successor to the League of Communists of Bosnia-Herzegovina, the SK BiH-SDP won only 8.32%. Cf. Anđelić, Neven: *SDP – prvih 100 godina. Kratki pogled na socijal-demokratiju u BiH* (SDP: The first 100 years. A brief overview of social democracy in Bosnia-Herzegovina). Sarajevo 2009, p. 37.

468 During the war, the (Serbian) League of Independent Social Democrats (SNSD) was formed in Banja Luka, while the old «reformists» in Tuzla formed the Union Bosnian-Herzegovinian Social Democrats, which then merged with the old/new SDP under Zlatko Lagumdžija. This party won the election in 2000, as part of the coalition «Alliance for Change». Two years later, due to an intensive reform policy and several scandals, it lost power again, and the old ethnic structures reestablished themselves in the new political system. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 39.

469 Theoretically, the «Serbian» and the «other» Social Democrats would, under the current relations of power, hold twelve of the 42 seats in the Parliament of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Cf. 2006 election results under: Central Electoral Commission of Bosnia-Herzegovina, http://www.izbori.ba/rezultati/konacni/parlament_bih/index.htm#, accessed on January 14 2010.

The programmatic reorientation of the post-communist social democrats: The national turn, the market economy and «Europe»

Power struggles and programmatic differences between the republics' parties already marked the development of the SKJ during the socialist-federative period.⁴⁷⁰ Nonetheless, it was possible, due to a number of internal and external factors, to maintain the cohesion of the party through to the end of the 1980s. At the beginning of the '90s however, dramatic events began to occur, which brought the crisis of the left in Yugoslavia as a whole to the fore. For in the wars of the '90s, the «post-communist» social democrats were on various sides of the fronts, and were among the most important war-making forces. At the same time, a paradox emerged in terms of the long-term perspective: for the parties at the same time saw a clear symmetry of programmatic development, which can be described by the key terms «national turn», «market economy» and «Europe».

The nationalistic discourse in the various former Yugoslav republics initially emerged at the end of the 1980s within the various republics, amongst intellectuals outside of the SKJ party structure. Some of them, such as Bosnian Muslim leader Alija Izetbegović or the founder of the Serbian radical party Vojislav Šešelj, were openly anti-Communist. A number of other leading nationalist intellectuals, such as Dobrica Ćosić in Serbia and Franjo Tuđman in Croatia, were former members of the SKJ who had been expelled from the party in the late '60s or early '70s because of their nationalistic positions.⁴⁷¹

In the context of the economic crisis and the crisis of legitimacy and existence of the SKJ, similar developments occurred in most of the republics at the end of the 1980s. The party organisations increasingly adopted the discourse of the nationalistic intellectuals outside the party. This was especially notable in Serbia, where Slobodan Milošević had since 1987 entered into a close alliance with the nationalistic intelligentsia. But in Slovenia too, the party at a very early stage moved closer to those intellectuals who were using nationalistic arguments to call for an independent course for Slovenia. In Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, the post-communist social democrats were during the '90s not war-making governing parties, but that did not prevent them from adopting the core position of the discourse of the nationalistic right-wing

⁴⁷⁰ Within the SKJ, there were numerous sharp confrontations between various republic parties. In the mid-'60s, there was a major struggle between the conservative centralists around the Serbian Interior Minister and Secret Police Chief Aleksandar Ranković, and economic liberal federalists around Slovenian leader Edvard Kardelj, in which the Ranković faction lost out in 1966. In 1970–71, the Communist leadership in Croatia under Savka Dabčević-Kučar launched a nationalistic movement for greater independence for Croatia; this «Croatian Spring» was suppressed at Tito's behest at the end of 1971. In 1968 and 1981, functionaries of the Albanian Communists in Kosovo supported rebellions aimed at establishing a separate Republic of Kosovo. For a good insight into the conflicts within the SKJ, see Haberl's study.

⁴⁷¹ For this development, see: Dragović-Soso, Jasna: «Saviours of the Nation». Serbia's Intellectual Opposition and the Revival of Nationalism. London 2002.

in their particular countries on the «national question».⁴⁷² For example, SDP functionaries in Croatia use the term *branitelj* («defender») for war veterans, with no hint of distance, suggesting that Croatian troops had a generally defensive role, and also participate in the annual commemorations on August 4, marking the offensive of 1995, which drove more than 150,000 Serbs out of Croatia. Although this rhetoric has softened somewhat since the end of the war, national narratives remain the determining factor for the identity of most parties.

The post-communist social democrats not only abandoned the slogan of «fraternity and unity», which had described the SKJ's nationalities policy, they also renounced «workers' self-management», the second basic principle of Yugoslav socialism. At various times and in various forms, all significant successor parties of the SKJ adopted the neo-liberal guiding concept of privatisation and market reform. Moreover, the parties to some extent function as true «privatisation agencies»; with their positions of power in the economic and state apparatus, significant segments of the leading cadre were able to transfer the factories from «social ownership» to their own private ownership.⁴⁷³

Like the other parties which took over functions of power in the post-Yugoslav multiparty systems, the post-communist social democratic parties are to a large degree clientelistic supply organisations for their own functionaries. Even after the privatisation process had been largely concluded, the state positions provide access to considerable resources and are filled in accordance with party membership. Corruption and malfeasance in office are an integral, possibly even a constituent, factor of the post-Yugoslav power systems.⁴⁷⁴

This clinging to power also explains the sometimes breathtaking programmatic transformation that certain social democratic parties have undergone in recent years. The above described switch by Montenegrin leader Đukanović in 1997 from an alliance with Milošević to a pro-Western position, enabled him to ride out the war and secure his own position of power. The SPS likewise had no problem abandoning the heritage of the Milošević era in 2008, in order to enter an alliance with its former arch-enemy, the «pro-Western» DP. These rapid transformation processes are moreo-

472 One example is the Croatian SDP. Most SDP functionaries in Croatia use a common term *branitelj* («defender») for war veterans, with no hint of distance or criticism, which attributes to the Croatian troops in the war of the '90s a generally defensive position, rather than criticizing their behaviour in the escalation of the conflict. Functionaries also participated in the annual commemorations on August 4, marking the major offensive launched by the Croatian army in 1995, as a result of which more than 150,000 Serbs were driven out of Croatia.

473 No precise analysis of this process has yet been made, though it is an important area of research. Insight is provided by: Obradović, Marija: Privatisation and the break-up of Yugoslavia, in: South-East Europe Review, 2007, 2, pp. 33–55.

474 As Michael Ehrke of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation said with regard to the development: «It is possible to hide the morality of the Mafia behind a social democratic programme.» Ehrke, Michael : Sozialdemokratische Parteien in Zentral- und Südosteuropa. Politische Gesinnungsvereinigungen oder Managementagenturen für die Regierung (Social democratic parties in Central and South Eastern Europe: Political associations of the like-minded, or management agencies for the government). Bonn 2009, p. 7.

ver the characteristics of all major political parties in the post-Yugoslav area. They mark the functions of the parties as a form of «post-modern» enterprise beyond the scope of the Western European left-right model. Holding onto power is the imperative of their politics. Labels such as «social democratic», «conservative» or «liberal» are not particularly useful in describing the identity of such organisations. None of the post-communist social democratic parties in former Yugoslavia is the locus of any comprehensive programmatic debate.

At least at the level of declarations, the successor parties of the SKJ have today arrived in the mainstream of European social democracy. They call for rapid acceptance of their countries into the European Union and NATO, a status which both Slovenia and Croatia have already joined. Most successor parties of the SKJ have since the mid-1990s also joined the Socialist International (SI); none on the other hand, is a member of the European Left Party.

The key exception, is that of the SPS in Serbia, although here too, the social democratic mainstream tendency largely won out at the time of the party's re-entry into government in the summer of 2008. The SPS too now wants Serbia's rapid accession to the EU and has applied for SI membership, although it still rejects joining NATO, a position it shares with the other major political parties in Serbia, at least officially. That is hardly surprising, in view of the NATO bombing of 1999. In 2012, after softening its position on Kosovo, Serbia achieved candidate status.

In view of the stated developments of post-communist social democracy in former Yugoslavia, the question emerges as to whether these parties can be considered «left». In spite of many caveats, the question must be answered in the affirmative. For in spite of all ideological and programmatic transformation processes, there are some areas of policy in which the post-communist social democrats clearly distinguish themselves from their competitive neo-liberal, conservative and right-wing populist competitors. Let us examine two of them here.

First, unlike the religious/nationalistic right wing, the post-communist social democrats generally keep their distance from the once again powerful churches, and thus to some extent provide a counter-pole to their goal of the re-traditionalisation of society. Second: although they too often reinterpret the anti-fascist partisan struggle in a nationalistic manner, they nonetheless proclaim their adherence to its tradition, while the conservative and right-wing populist parties popularize the heritage of the anti-communist nationalists, particularly the Croatian Ustasha and the Serbian Chetniks, who, during the Second World War collaborated with the Germans in various ways.

Research into the parties in former Yugoslavia is only just beginning. Only in a few cases are there reliable differentiated quantitative and qualitative data on the development of the membership and supporters of post-communist social democracy. The few available studies show that the parties to the left of the centre are largely supported by farmers, workers, pensioners, students and the unemployed. At the same time, the results of recent studies reveal that within these social groups, left parties

enjoy approx. the same level of support as do the parties of the right.⁴⁷⁵ Most of those surveyed, asked to characterize their own political positions, categorize themselves as neither left nor right, or supported parties which they considered to be parties of the centre.⁴⁷⁶ In a study carried out in Serbian 2005, 50 % of all those surveyed stated that they did not see themselves as close to any party. The only group emerging from the survey that was larger than this group of non-party respondents was that which saw itself as members of a «lower class»; this amounted to 54 % of the total.⁴⁷⁷

The left oriented resistance against nationalism and neo-liberalism

The transformation outlined above was the main trend involved in the disintegration of the SKJ. However, at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the '90s explicitly anti-nationalist initiatives emerged from the SKJ. The most important force was the League of Reformist Forces of Yugoslavia (SRSJ), founded at the end of 1990s by the last Yugoslav premier, Ante Marković. His popularity had increased greatly over the course of that year, since he had succeeded in slowing down the rampant inflation. With his all-Yugoslav perspective, he was a counterforce to the nationalists; however, his political and economic transformation ideas were clearly marked by neo-liberal tendencies.⁴⁷⁸

But, left oriented pro-Yugoslav forces also spoke out. In the spring of 1989, the Association for a Yugoslav Democratic initiative (Udruženje za jugoslovensku demokratsku inicijativu – UJDI) was founded, in which politicians and intellectuals of high moral integrity and repute came together.⁴⁷⁹ They included, as a member of the Council of the Association, the surrealist novelist, Spanish Civil War veteran, former Yugoslav People's Army commander and Foreign Minister Koča Popović, and such respected members as the economist and theoretician of worker self-management Branko Horvat, and former members of the magazine Praxis, such as Predrag Vranicki (Zagreb), Nebojša Popov (Belgrade) and Božidar Gajo Sekulić (Sarajevo). Other members included former protagonists of the 1968 student protests and of the feminist movement of the 1970s.⁴⁸⁰

475 Šiber, Ivan : Političko ponašanje hrvatskih birača u izborima 1990 – 2003 (Political behaviour of Croatian voters in elections. In: Lutovac, Zoran, Belgrade, op cit., pp. 323–362; Stojiljković, Zoran (2006): Socijalni rascepi i linije političkih podela u Srbiji (Social fissures and lines of political divisions in Serbia. In: *ibid*, 2006, pp. 9–39.

476 Šiber, p. 329.

477 Stojiljković, p. 25.

478 As the Yugoslav federal prime minister, Marković pushed through the first laws which permitted the privatisation of state enterprises. Cf. Gagnon, Valère Philip Jr. : The myth of ethnic war. Serbia and Croatia in the 1990s. Ithaca 2004, p. 91. In October 1989, Marković developed a neo-liberal economic reform program under the aegis of the IMF. Cf. Boughton, James M.: Silent Revolution: The International Monetary Fund, 1979–89. Washington 2001, p. 578.

479 Cf. Stojaković, Krunoslav: Prešućena povijest. UJDI i antiratna opozicija u Jugoslaviji (The untold story. UJDI and anti-war opposition in Yugoslavia). In: Tomić, Đorđe; Atanacković, Petar (eds.): Društvo u pokretu. Novi društveni pokreti u Jugoslaviji od 1968 do danas. (Society on the move. New social movements in Yugoslavia, 1968 to date) Cenzura 2009, pp. 169–182.

480 For a list of all members, see: Horvat, Branko: The association for Yugoslav democratic initiative. In: Đokić, Dejan (ed.): Yugoslavism. Histories of a Failed Idea 1918–1992. London 2003, pp. 302–03.

The primary political approach of the UJDI was the demand for «radical democratisation» as the only possibility for the continued existence of Yugoslavia. However, the UJDI did not see itself as a political party, but rather wanted to create a «movement for the democratic transformation of Yugoslavia», which, in view of the deep crisis, it saw as the only way that a «return of the construction of authentic socialism» might succeed.⁴⁸¹ The need for the foundation of the UJDI was stated as being the fact that there was at present no political force in Yugoslavia that was «both Yugoslavian and Democratic»⁴⁸² (emphasis in the original).

However, neither Marković nor the UJDI were able to establish themselves as permanent political organisations with a mass base. Nonetheless, the UJDI especially had long-term political significance. For out of its environment there emerged a large number of groups, networks and initiatives which from the beginning of the '90s represented points of departure for a political alternative tendency. A part of this trend has formed small parties;⁴⁸³ another part has continued its activities in the form of campaigns, or has founded NGOs.

Central for these alternative tendencies is a commitment to the struggle against war, nationalism and the re-traditionalisation of society. During the '90s, the anti-war movement succeeded at least to a certain extent in maintaining a pan-Yugoslav network,⁴⁸⁴ with feminist women's organisations playing a key role. One good example was the organisation Women in Black (Žene u crnom), founded in Belgrade in 1991 as an anti-military and feminist peace organisation. It has now for 20 years been involved in the struggle against war, nationalism, patriarchy and all other forms of oppression.⁴⁸⁵

In recent years, organisations fighting for equal rights for sexual minorities are also increasingly playing an important role within the spectrum of anti-nationalistic alter-

481 *ibid.*, pp. 298ff.

482 *ibid.*, pp. 300–01.

483 In Serbia, the Citizens' Alliance (Gradjanski savez) emerged in this context during the early '90s. Also, the Social Democratic Union (SDU) and a regional party, the League of Social Democrats of Vojvodina (LSV), should be mentioned. Cf. Milošević, *op. cit.*, pp. 70ff. In Croatia, there was a similar development. In addition to the Socialist Workers' Party of Croatia, founded in 1997, the generally leftist parties included the Action of Social Democrats of Croatia (ASH) and the Croatian Left (Ljevica Hrvatske), founded in 2007 by the unification of a number of left parties. However, none of these parties were able to establish themselves as electoral alternatives.

484 Particularly deserving of mention are the Centre for Anti-War Action (CAA) in Serbia, the Anti-War Campaign (ARK) in Croatia, the International Centre For Peace in Sarajevo, and the Titograd Citizens' Peace Council in Montenegro, which have since 1993 been working together within the framework of the ZaMir (For-Peace) Network, and have launched a number of projects, publications and Initiatives, such as Arkzin, ZaMir Women, ZaMirZine, etc. Cf. Unija 47/Croatian Anti-War Campaign: History. http://www.zamirnet.hr/unija47/ark_unija47.html, accessed on January 12 2010.

For a comprehensive documentation of antiwar actions throughout former Yugoslavia, see: Rosandić, Ružica et al.: *Teži put. Mirovne akcije na tlu bivše Jugoslavije* (Hard times. Peacekeeping operations in former Yugoslavia). Belgrade 2005.

485 Žene u crnom, Belgrade (Feminist antimilitarist women's peace group): O nama (about us), http://www.zeneucnom.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=blogcategory&id=2&Itemid=4, accessed on January 12 2010.

native tendencies.⁴⁸⁶ Various Gay Pride marches held in Ljubljana and Zagreb have shown the power of these initiatives to mobilize. All over ex-Yugoslavia however, these initiatives run up against bitter hostility from nationalistic, clerical and right-wing forces. In Sarajevo, a Gay Pride march had to be broken off in September 2008 after fundamentalist Islamists attacked it. In Belgrade in 2002, a Gay Pride march was attacked by hundreds of clerical fascist hooligans. In the summer of 2009, a second attempt to hold a Gay Pride march in the Serbian capital was again stymied by the threats of violence by the hooligans, clerical and right-wing populist politicians.⁴⁸⁷

Any current political evaluation of the spectrum of anti-nationalistic forces should make a clear differentiation between two tendencies: one of these identifies itself with a left-oriented perspective. It includes the generation of elderly intellectuals in the major cities which grew out of either the left oriented oppositional forces within old Yugoslavia which were pushing for the democratisation of socialism, or from the party structures of the SKJ itself. They include a number of UJDI founders who are continuing to take part in left oriented alternative discussion. Examples include the Serbian Journal *Republika*, or the Mirovni (Peace) Institute in the Slovenian capital of Ljubljana.⁴⁸⁸ This segment also includes a new generation of young leftists whose political socialisation only began at the end of the socialist era. The main issues for these young leftists include anti-fascism, feminism and social protest.⁴⁸⁹

The second major anti-nationalistic tendency can today no longer be considered left oriented. Here, since the beginning of the '90s, the increasingly dominant discourse centres around a rapid and unconditional integration of the post-Yugoslav states into the «Euro-Atlantic structures», and the implementation of «Western values». These structures combine demands for political democratisation and respect for human rights with those for the establishment of a liberal capitalist market economy and world market integration. This (neo)-liberal segment of the anti-nationalist spectrum is represented by such organisations as the Serbian and Croatian Helsinki Committees, and the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) in Serbia.

The left and (neo)-liberal segments of the anti-nationalist opposition tendency are connected through their social base; what all segments of «civil society» have failed to accomplish to date is the construction of any mass base in the population. The

486 Ever since the early '90s, organisations for equal rights for gays and lesbians have emerged. Cf. Živković, Ljiljana (eds.): *First there was a letter. Fifteen Years of Lesbian and Gay Activism in Serbia and Montenegro. 1990–2005*. Belgrade 2005; Sagasta, Sanja: *Lesbians in Croatia*, in: *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 2001, 8/3, pp. 357–372.

487 Here, it should be noted that especially some of the leading figures most widely touted in the West as «the democratic opposition», have exhibited a particularly aggressive brand of homophobia.

488 *Republika* was founded as the Journal of the UJDI, and is headed by the sociologist and former Praxis staff member Nebojša Popov.

489 Some examples include the alternative youth centre CK13 in Novi Sad (Serbia), which carries out various artistic and also critical theoretical projects, the group *Pokret za slobodu* (Belgrade), which participates in mobilizing workers protests, the youth group *Lenka* (Skopje), and the group around the left-wing critical Journal *Novi Plamen* (Zagreb).

protagonists of these tendencies are for the most part members of the educated elite. Critics describe this «civil society» as the «NGO industry». Professionalisation and institutionalisation of the employees of the NGOs often replace the direct participation of «target groups». «Lobbying» by NGOs at national and multinational government organisations often replaces the mobilisation of political opinion of the people affected.⁴⁹⁰

Trade Unions and social protest

An almost ignored but nonetheless important aspect of the social crisis in Yugoslavia of the 1980s was the growth of a social protest movement of workers. Strikes and workers' demonstrations became increasingly common, especially during the latter half of the 1980s. The demands were oriented largely toward maintaining social standards and jobs, and for payment of wages. The mobilisation of workers was not directed openly against the political system, but rather demanded that the SKJ be kept its promises. Initially, this protest had no nationalistic accents. Only after the leading functionaries of the SKJ turned toward nationalism were workers' protests channelled into the stream of nationalist demands, so that no pan-Yugoslav independent workers' movement was able to emerge at the end of the '80s.⁴⁹¹ In hindsight, the workers in former Yugoslavia must be considered the big losers of the destruction of the federal Yugoslav state. Several waves of inflation have meant enormous losses in purchasing power. At the same time, the economic crisis, wartime destruction and neo-liberal restructuring have caused the collapse of the industrial base, and indeed, a process of de-industrialisation. The long-term effects have been the erosion of social standards, high unemployment and the expansion of the informal sector. Today, secure employment conditions are the privilege of a minority in former Yugoslavia.⁴⁹²

490 Based on a study conducted in 2004, Belgrade sociologist Mladen Lazić ascertained that a major share of the NGO activists in Serbia are women (60%) between the ages of 30 and 50 (45.6%), with a high level of education (university or technical college) (63.7%). More than half of the NGO members surveyed are employed as members of academic staffs (53.2%), and many are still students (21.4%); 47% come from homes with college-educated parents. Notable is the fact that the class self-identification of those surveyed is predominantly (52.8%) middle class. Politically, the majority of those surveyed identified as (45.6%) in the middle of the political spectrum, 26% see themselves as centre-left, and only 10.5% self-identify as leftists or «extreme» leftists. Cf. Lazić, Mladen: *Promene i otpori. Srbija u transformacijskim procesima* (Change and resistance. Serbia in the transformation process), Belgrade 2005, pp. 83ff.

491 This development is described very well in: Vladislavjević, Nebojša: *Serbia's Antibureaucratic Revolution. Milošević, the Fall of Communism and Nationalist Mobilisation*, New York 2008.

492 Throughout the 1990s, there was a dramatic rise in the unemployment rate in all post-Yugoslav countries: in former Yugoslavia in 1989, that rate was still 14.9%; today, it is not below that mark in any of the successor states. Unemployment is especially serious in Kosovo, where the official rate in 2007 was 46.3%. Cf. International Labour Organisation Geneva: LABORSTA Labour Statistics Database, (Data bases: Labour Force Survey and Employment Office Records), <http://laborsta.ilo.org/>, accessed on January 25 2010; Republic of Serbia, State Statistical Office: *Anketa o radnoj snazi. Stopa nezaposlenosti* (Labour Force Survey. The unemployment rate), <http://webzhs.stat.gov.rs/axd/drugastrana.php?Sifra=0018&izbor=odel&tab=152>, accessed on January 25 2010; Republic of Croatia, State Statistical Office: *Stopa registrirane nezaposlenosti* (Registered unemployment rate) <http://www.dzs.hr/>, accessed on January 25 2010.

Pushing through the interests of workers is extremely difficult, given this situation. Threatened unemployment and insecure jobs hamper the ability of workers to mobilize. At the same time, the trade union movement is also weak for reasons of organisational politics. On the one hand, various trade union federations compete with one another, and thus often stand in each other's way. Second, the union organisations often are dominated by the interests of particular plants. In contrast, industry-wide unions and union federations are weak.⁴⁹³

Nonetheless, trade union protest is sometimes mobilised. Even during the '90s, there were often protests against the social impact of the economic transformation; however, due to the war, their effects were minimal. In recent years, there has been a new wave of workers' protest, especially involving three conflict situations. First, employees have demanded the payment of their wages, which are often held back for months or even years. Second, there have been protests against layoffs. And third, employees have protested against the manner in which plants have been privatised. Most of these three forms of protest are defensive reactions to attacks on employees' interests. By contrast, virtually no offensive representation of trade union interests has been in evidence. Only in exceptional situations do worker protests display a political orientation which might provide a point of connection for left oriented alternative discussion. One example is that of the Jugoremedija pharmaceuticals plant in Zrenjanin, where staff resisted a takeover by a corrupt investor, and successfully developed an employees' shareholder model.⁴⁹⁴

In addition to the workers, students have in recent years increasingly been engaged in social protest. In this area, clearly positive developments can be seen. For the first time since the end of the war, there have been signs of the emergence of a new socially critical student movement which places social issues front and centre. While a student and youth protest of the '90s often displayed an expressly anti-communist character, there has since 2007 once again been an articulate left-oriented student movement. The issues of these protests are tuition fees, studying conditions and the neo-liberal reform of the universities. In their protests at the universities, young people in Croatia, Serbia and Macedonia and Bosnia-Herzegovina are once again connecting positively to one another across these new boundaries.⁴⁹⁵

493 In the post-Yugoslav states, as in most Eastern European countries, the successor organisations of the old «state trade unions» continue to exist, and there are also newly founded organisations, often patterned after the model of *Solidarność* in Poland. However, ideological differences are today no longer of major importance. Cf. Grdešić, Marko: *Tranzicija, sindikati i političke elite u Sloveniji i Hrvatskoj* (The transition, unions and political elites in Slovenia and Croatia), in: *Politička misao*, 2006, 43/4, pp. 121–141.

494 Cf. *Koordinacioni odbor radničkih protesta u Srbiji* (2009): *Novi radnički pokret u Srbiji* (Coordinating Board for Workers' Protests in Serbia (2009): A new labour movement in Serbia), in: *Pokret*, No. 3, pp. 2ff. On the Serbian workers' movement, see: Zlatić, Ivan (2009): *Novi radnički pokreti u Srbiji – ciljevi i prepreke* (The new labour movement in Serbia: Goals and obstacles). In: *Republika*, No. 468–469, Jan. 1–31, 2010.

495 Cf. Tomić, Đorđe: *Chancen für eine neue kritische Jugendbewegung. Studentische Proteste in Serbien und Kroatien* (Opportunities for a new critical youth movement: Student protests in Serbia and Croatia). (Standpunkte International, 21). Berlin 2009.

Bibliography

- Andelić, Neven (2009): SDP – prvih 100 godina. Kratki pogled na socijaldemokratiju u BiH. (The SDP: The first hundred years: A brief overview of social democracy in Bosnia-Herzegovina); Sarajevo: Forum Lijeve Inicijative.
- Boughton, James M. (2001): *Silent Revolution: The International Monetary Fund, 1979–89*. Washington: International Monetary Fund.
- Buden, Boris (2009): *Zone des Übergangs. Vom Ende des Postkommunismus*. (Transition zone: the end of post-communism) Frankfurt: Suhrkamp.
- Dragović-Soso, Jasna (2002): «Saviours of the Nation». Serbia's Intellectual Opposition and the Revival of Nationalism. London: Hurst.
- Ehrke, Michael (2009): *Sozialdemokratische Parteien in Zentral- und Südosteuropa. Politische Gesinnungsvereinigungen oder Managementagenturen für die Regierung*. (Social democratic parties in Central and South Eastern Europe: associations of the politically like-minded, or management agencies for the government), Bonn: Foundation International. Political analysis.
- Gagnon, Valère Philip Jr. (2004): *The myth of ethnic war. Serbia and Croatia in the 1990s*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Grdešić, Marko (2006): *Tranzicija, sindikati i političke elite u Sloveniji i Hrvatskoj* (Transition, unions and the political elites in Slovenia and Croatia). In: *Politička misao*, vol. 43, no. 4, pp. 121–141.
- Haberl, Othmar Nikola (1976): *Parteiorganisation und nationale Frage in Jugoslawien* (Philosophical and sociological publications, Eastern European Institute at the Free University of Berlin, vol. 13). Berlin: Otto Harrassowitz.
- Horvat, Branko (2003): *The Association for Yugoslav Democratic Initiative*. In: Đokić, Dejan: *Yugoslavism: histories of a failed idea, 1918–1992*. London: Hurst, pp. 298–303.
- Karabeg, Omer (2005): *Razgovor s Vericom Barać i Josipom Kregarom* (Interview with Verica Barac and Josip Kregar). In: *Zarez*, no. 157, June 16, 2005.
- Kanzleiter, Boris (2008): *Politischer Umbruch in Serbien* (Political transformation in Serbia) (Standpunkte, 25). Berlin: Rosa Luxemburg Foundation.
- Koordinacioni odbor radničkih protesta u Srbiji (2009): *Novi radnički pokret u Srbiji*. (Coordinating Board Workers' protests in Serbia [2009]: A new labor movement in Serbia), in: *Pokret*, no. 3, pp. 2–7
- Kovačević, Filip (2007): *Montenegro and the Politics of Postcommunist Transition: 1990 to 2006*. In: *Mediterranean Quarterly*, vol. 18, no. 3, pp. 72–93.
- Lazić, Mladen (2005): *Promene i otpori. Srbija u transformacijskim procesima* (Change and resistance. Serbia in the transformation process), Belgrade: Filip Višnjić.
- Lukšič, Igor (2006): *Das politische System Sloweniens*. In: Ismayr, Wolfgang (ed.): *Die politischen Systeme Osteuropas* (The political systems in Eastern Europe), Wiesbaden: VS Verl. für Sozialwissenschaften, pp. 660.
- Milošević, Milan (2000): *Die Parteienlandschaft Serbiens* (The party landscape in Serbia), Berlin: Berlin-Verl. Spitz.
- Nohlen, Dieter (2007): *Lexikon der Politik*, vol. 7, Munich: Beck.
- Ramet, Sabrina P. (2005): *Thinking about Yugoslavia. Scholarly Debates about the Yugoslav Breakup and the Wars in Bosnia and Kosovo*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Rosandić, Ružica u.a. (2005): *Teži put. Mirovne akcije na tlu bivše Jugoslavije*. Belgrade: Centar za antiratnu akciju.
- Sagasta, Sanja (2001): *Lesbians in Croatia* (Hard times. Peacekeeping operation in the former Yugoslavia), In: *European Journal of Women's Studies* vol. 8, no. 3, pp. 357–372.
- Šiber, Ivan (2006): *Političko ponašanje hrvatskih birača u izborima 1990 – 2003* (Political behavior of Croatian voters in elections). In: Lutovac, Zoran, Belgrade, op cit., pp. 323–362 pp. 323–362.
- Siljanovska Davkova, Gordana (2006): *Makedonske političke partije kroz prizmu ideologije* (Macedonian political parties through the prism of ideology), in: Lutovac, Zoran (ed.): *Političke stranke i birači u državama bivše Jugoslavije*. (Political parties and voters in the states of former Yugoslavia) Belgrade: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung; Institute of Social Sciences, pp. 205–236
- Stojaković, Krunoslav (2009): *Prešućena povijest. UJDI i antiratna opozicija u Jugoslaviji*. In: Tomić, Đorđe; Atanacković, Petar (eds.): *Društvo u pokretu. Novi društveni pokreti u Jugoslaviji od 1968. Do danas* [society emotion: new social group with Yugoslavia from 1968 to date]. Cenzura: Novi Sad, pp. 169–182.
- Stojilković, Zoran (2006): *Socijalni rascepi i linije političkih podela u Srbiji* (Social fissures and lines of political division in Serbia), in: Lutovac, op. cit., pp. 9–39
- Tomić, Đorđe (2009): *Chancen für eine neue kritische Jugendbewegung. Studentische Proteste in Serbien und Kroatien* (Opportunities for new critical youth movement: student protests in Serbia and Croatia). (Standpunkte International, 21). Berlin: Rosa-Luxemburg Foundation.

- Unija 47/Antiratna kampanja Hrvatske: Povijest ARKa (Croatian anti-war campaign history of the ARK) URL: http://www.zamirnet.hr/unija47/ark_unija47.html, accessed: Jan. 12, 2010.
- Vladislavjević, Nebojša (2008): Serbia's Antibureaucratic Revolution. Milošević, the Fall of Communism and Nationalist Mobilisation, New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Zakošek, Nenad (2006): Das politische System Kroatiens. In: Ismayr, op cit., pp. 677–726.
- Žene u crnom Beograd. Ženska mirovna grupa feminističko-antimilitarističke orijentacije: O nama (about us) URL: http://www.zeneucrom.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=blogcategory&id=2&Itemid=4, accessed: Jan. 12, 2010.
- Zentrale Wahlkommission BiH (Central electoral commission of Bosnia-Herzegovina). URL: http://www.izbori.ba/rezultati/konacni/parlament_bih/index.htm#, accessed: Jan. 14, 2010.
- Živković, Ljiljana (ed.) (2005): First there was a letter. Fifteen Years of Lesbian and Gay Activism in Serbia and Montenegro. 1990–2005. Belgrade: Labris – Lesbian Human Rights Organisation.
- Zlatić, Ivan (2009): Novi radnički pokreti u Srbiji – ciljevi i prepreke (The new labour movement in Serbia – the goals and obstacles). In: Republika, no. 468–469, pp. 1-Jan. 31, 2010.

Links

Social democratic parties

Bosnia-Herzegovina

Socijaldemokratska partija Bosne i Hercegovine (SDP) [Social Democratic Party of Bosnia-Herzegovina] <http://www.sdp.ba/>

Savez nezavisnih socijaldemokrata (SNSD) [League of Independent Social Democrats] <http://www.snsd.org/>

Croatia

Socijaldemokratska partija Hrvatske (SDP) [Social Democratic Party of Croatia] <http://www.sdp.hr/>

Macedonia

Socijaldemokratski savez na Makedonija (SDSM) [Sozialdemokratischer Bund Mazadoniens] <http://www.sdsm.org.mk/>

Montenegro

Demokratska partija socijalista (DPS) [Democratic Party of Socialists] <http://www.dpscg.org/> (Link inaktiv)

Socijaldemokratska partija Crne Gore (SDP) [Social Democratic Party of Montenegro] <http://www.sdp.co.me/>

Serbia

Demokratska stranka (DS) [Democratic Party] <http://www.ds.org.rs/>

Socijaldemokratska partija (SDP) [Social Democratic Party] <http://www.sdp.org.rs/>

Socijaldemokratska partija Srbije (SDP)⁴⁹⁶ [Social Democratic Party of Serbia] <http://www.sdpsrbije.org.rs/>

Socijalistička partija Srbije (SPS) [Socialist Party Serbia] <http://www.sps.org.rs/>

Socijaldemokratska Unija (SDU) [Social Democratic Union] <http://www.sdu.org.rs/>

Slovenia

Socialni demokrati (SD) [Social Democrats] <http://www.socialnidemokrati.si/>

⁴⁹⁶ The party was founded in 2009. The abbreviation is the same as that of the Social Democratic Party of Nebojša Čović which is a member of the Socialist International; however this is a different party.

Other left parties

Croatia

Socijalistička radnička partija Hrvatske (SRP) [Socialist Workers' Party of Croatia] <http://www.srp.hr/>

Serbia

Socijaldemokratska unija (SDU) [Social Democratic Union] <http://www.sdu.org.rs/>

Liga socijaldemokrata Vojvodine (LSV) [League of Social Democrats of Vojvodina] <http://www.lsv.org.rs/>

Leftist Parties of the World, Eastern Europe and the Former USSR (Extensive list of left parties in Eastern Europe) <http://www.broadleft.org/easteuro.htm>

Peace initiatives

Centar za kulturnu dekontaminaciju [Center for cultural decontamination, Belgrade] <http://www.czkd.org/>

Centar za mir i razvoj demokratije/(ex) Centar za antiratnu akciju [Centre for peace and democracy development, (formerly Center for antiwar action), Belgrad] <http://www.caa.org.yu/>

Centar za mirovne studije [Centre for Peace Studies, Zagreb] <http://www.cms.hr/>

Unija 47/Antiratna kampanja Hrvatske [Union 47/Croatian Anti-War Campaign, Zagreb] <http://www.zamirnet.hr/unija47/unija47.html/>

Mirovni inštitut – inštitut za sodobne družbene in politične študije [Peace Institute – Institute for Contemporary Social and Political Studies, Ljubljana] <http://www.mirovni-institut.si/>

Feminist initiatives

Autonomni ženski centar [Autonomous Women's Centre, Belgrade] <http://www.womenngo.org.rs/>

Žene u crnom [Women in Black, Belgrade] <http://www.zeneucrnom.org/>

Žene ženama [Women to/with Women, Sarajevo] <http://www.zenezenama.org/>

Ženska mreža Hrvatske [Croatian Women's Network] <http://www.zenska-mreza.hr/>

Ženske grupe BiH [list of women's groups in Bosnien-Herzegowina]

<http://zenskegrupebih.fondacijacure.org/>

Ženski informaciono-dokumentacioni centar [Women's Information and Documentation Centre, Belgrade] <http://www.zindokcentar.org/>

Centar za ženske studije Beograd [Centre for Women's Studies, Belgrade] <http://www.zenskestudie.edu.rs/>

Centar za ženske studije Zagreb [Centre for Women's Studies, Zagreb] <http://www.zenstud.hr/>

Ženske studije i istraživanja [Women's Studies and Research] Novi Sad

<http://www.zenskestudije.org.rs/>

LGBT groups

Labris Beograd <http://www.labris.org.rs/>

Queer Beograd <http://www.queerbeograd.org/>

SiQRD – Slovenian Queer Recourse Directory <http://www.ljudmila.org/siqrd/>

Udruženje Q [Q Confederation, Sarajevo] <http://www.queer.ba/>

Ženska alijansa [Women's Alliance, Skopje] <http://www.womensalliance.mk/>

Belgrade Pride <http://belgradepride.rs/>

Zagreb Pride <http://www.zagreb-pride.net/>

Left youth groups

Alternativna kulturna organizacija (AKO) [Alternative Culture Organisation] Novi Sad <http://www.ako.rs/>

Crna kuća 13 [Black House 13] Novi Sad <http://www.ck13.org/>;

Delavsko-punkerska univerza [Worker-Punker University of Ljubljana]

<http://dpu.mirovni-institut.si/>

KSSD «Diskrepancija» [«Discrepancy Club» of sociology students, Zagreb]

<http://www.diskrepancija.org/>;

Lenka – dvizenje za socijalna pravda [Lenka – Movement for Social Justice, Skopje] <http://lenka.blog.com.mk/>

Student protests

Bosnia-Herzegovina

Student Plenum of the University of Tuzla: <http://studentskiplenum.blogger.ba/>

Croatia

Slobodni filozofski (Philosophy Department), Student plenum of the philosophy department at the University of Zagreb: <http://www.slobodnifilozofski.com/>

<http://slobodnifilozofski.org/> (English-language site)

Autonomni studenti (Autonomous Students), Department of Philosophy in Rijeka:

<http://blog.autonomnistudenti.com/>

Nezavisna studentska inicijativa Split, University of in Split: <http://nsist.blog.hr/>

Inicijativa za besplatno visoko obrazovanje – OS. i dalje smo tu :) i borimo se! (Initiative for free higher education – Osijek. We are still here :) and we are fighting!), University of Osijek: <http://www.osjecki.studenti.blogger.hr/>

Macedonia

Sloboden indeks <http://slobodenindeks.blog.com.mk/>

Serbia

Borba za znanje (Struggle for knowledge), site of the 2005 – 2008 student protests: <http://protest.zbrka.net/>

Studenti za studente (Students for Students), University of Belgrade:

<http://studentskiprotest08.blogspot.com/> (2008 site)

<http://www.studentizastudente.net/> (current site)

Left and critical media

Arkzin (Zagreb) <http://arkzin.net>

Belgrade Circle Journal (Belgrade) <http://www.usm.maine.edu/bcj/>

Diskrepancija (Zagreb) <http://diskrepancija.org/casopis/>

Nova Iskra (Skopje) <http://www.novaiskra.mk/>

Novi Plamen (Zagreb) <http://www.noviplamen.org/>

Peščanik <http://www.pescanik.net/>

Prelom (Belgrade) <http://www.prelomkolektiv.org/srp/casopis.htm>

Republika (Belgrade) <http://www.republika.co.rs/>

ZaMirZine (Zagreb) <http://www.zamirzine.net/>

Zarez (Zagreb) <http://www.zarez.hr/>

Krunoslav Stojaković

CROATIA VOTES FOR CHANGE

On 4th December 2011, Croatia held its seventh election for the Sabor (the Croatian Parliament) since the break-up of Yugoslavia. A series of corruption scandals and the dismantling of social rights polarised the election between the political camps, leading to a major reduction in voter turn-out. The clear winner was the «Kukuriku Coalition» led by the Social Democratic Party (STP), so the vote has initiated a change of course for the left, and for Croatian politics in general. Now the question is whether a substantial and practical shift from the previously dominant neo-liberal clientelistic politics to a more transparent, socially just politics, including the protection of public goods is possible.

Between corruption and economic crisis: Lijepa Naša in transition⁴⁹⁷

Croatia is currently in a very serious economic and financial situation, marked both by a clear slow-down in economic growth and an extremely high state debt, amounting to 102 % of GDP, accompanied by high unemployment of over 18 %, an accelerated dismantling of social benefits, and increased undermining of free access to public goods. The result of this form of capitalist transition politics has led to a severe reduction in average living standards in Croatia; however, they are not exclusively Croatian problems, they are common across all post-Yugoslav states.

The crisis in the educational sector, out of which a grassroots-democratically organised social movement has formed, highlights how socially exclusive the Croatian educational system is and the concomitant disadvantages imposed on young people from working class families. The Croatian higher education system has also, like the political system, come under investigation of anti-corruption authorities. In the con-

⁴⁹⁷ «Our beautiful» – this is the title of the Croatian national anthem, and is used by the Croatian tourist industry for advertising purposes.

text of the «Indeks Affair», the public was made aware of an apparently widespread system whereby sexual services and outright bribery are a recognised substitute for the usual academic performance, particularly in the departments of economics and engineering.

The final stage of Croatia's negotiation with the EU for accession was, at least formally, seen as one of the few positive results of the last legislative term. Nonetheless, there is a fear that in the course of these negotiations, the last vestiges of social security and workers' rights will be softened up or abolished. The electoral campaign of the government coalition, especially its leading party, the Croatian Democratic Union (Hrvatska demokratska zajednica/HDZ) led by then Prime Minister Jadranka Kosor, was completely at odds with the European idea. For the HDZ, which dropped below 20% in the polls, no trick seemed too cheap to win back the electorate to the ruling party. The HDZ oscillated between two supposedly threatening enemies: on the one hand, with a brassy kind of anti-Communism in domestic politics, and on the other, with jingoistic nationalism in the foreign-policy discourse. Warning the electorate of a «red Croatia» was part of an ideological campaign that also targeted the nation's president, the moderate leftist Ivo Josipović, accompanied by a fall back to the '90s, with Kosor's repeated announcement that Croatia would never again accept orders from the Serbian capital, Belgrade. This was a reference to a planned extradition request from Serbian judicial authorities against suspected Croatian war criminals, which the Croatian side no longer considers legally binding.

Also notable was the current human rights environment, especially for the Serbian minority. Although the independent Serbian Democratic Party (SDSS) was even a partner in the coalition government, no notable positive change in the question of the right of return and compensation for expelled citizens of Serbian nationality seems to be in the offing, even with the new legislative term. Even less satisfactory was the handling of the rights of sexual minorities. Even if one considers the fact that a lengthy process of transformation with regard to the recognition and full equal rights for homosexual and transsexual communities will be needed, especially when one considers that the mental disposition of the majority since the 1990s has been systematically shaped by a reactionary and ultraconservative clergy in the Catholic and Orthodox churches. Croatia's political elite still bears full responsibility for the inexcusable escalation of violence against sexual minorities, as dramatically shown at the gay pride parades (parade ponosa) in Zagreb and Split.

The 2011 election

Electoral participation in this year's parliamentary elections barely exceeded 46%, an eleven% drop from the turn-out in 2007. The victorious Kukuriku Coalition, led by the SDP, won a total of 80 seats, with 52% of the votes cast, while the formerly ruling HDZ barely exceeded 30% of the votes and won only 47 seats. The Kukuriku Coali-

tion, named after a restaurant in Rijeka where it was formed,⁴⁹⁸ brought the Social Democrats together with the Croatian People's Party (HNS), the regionalist Istrian Democratic Assembly and the Croatian Pensioners' Party (HSU). The government, led by the new Social Democratic Premier Zoran Milanović, could also count on the support of smaller groups in Parliament to the left of the HDZ.

The Left in Croatia

This election means that Croatia has at least formally taken a turn to the left. Of the total of 39 parties standing for election, at least three from the left spectrum managed to enter Parliament – the SDP, the SDSS, and, outside the coalition, the Croatian Workers; moreover, the Greens were part of a coalition which elected one representative. One interesting independent candidacy was that of the left-liberal priest Ivan Grubišić, known as a progressive critic of the Catholic Church and its clergy, who won two seats.

From a left perspective however, the Socialist Workers' Party (SRP) is also interesting in spite of the fact that it failed to win representation in Parliament, for it is the only socialist alternative in Croatia. Founded in 1997 by Stipe Šušvar, the former chair of the SKJ, it initially managed to attract many respected intellectuals, such as the late Milan Kangrga, a cofounder of the philosophical magazine Praxis and of the Korčula Summer School. According to its programme, the SRP sees itself as a broad movement of all socialist oriented forces in Croatia, although since its founding, it has been repeatedly rent by splits, as currently manifested by a split-off of Trotskyist members who wish to associate with the Fourth International. The intraparty disputes and ideological programmatic conflicts are also a reason why the party has remained politically marginalised, as can be seen from its present electoral results.

Perspective

Currently, the left in Croatia is both at the focus of regional attention and at a crossroads. On the one hand, its success shows the necessity and attractiveness of left positions in the current transformation societies of former Yugoslavia. This could have the effect of sparking other left tendencies in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia, Macedonia and Slovenia. In some cases this has already occurred, as networking and solidarity between student activists from Zagreb, Belgrade Ljubljana, Sarajevo and Skopje shows. Moreover, actions and solidarity between workers are also increasing. Its position at the crossroads is shown by the fact that the expectations facing it will only be partially met by the parties represented in parliament – including by the Croatian Workers (HL), who are to the left of the Social Democrats. This could lead to rejection in the population of left political perspectives. Here, a strong extra-parliamentary left move-

⁴⁹⁸ Kukuriku means «cock-a-doodle-doo».

ment would have to address the goal of accompanying and intervening critically in political decision-making processes, and articulating contrary positions.

Slovenia also moves left – But not enough

On 4th December, 2011, elections were also held in neighbouring Slovenia, which has been a member of the EU since 2004 and, together with Slovakia and Estonia, is one of the three Eastern European countries to have gained admission to the euro zone. It has generally been considered a model of efficient and goal oriented transformation policy. However, with the advent of the economic and financial crisis, even comfortable little Slovenia has been confronted with an ever deeper social divide, so that ever more organised resistance has been building up against the old model of liberal capitalist transformation. The most recent example for that, which also reflects the persistent miserable conditions in the educational sector, is the occupation of the Department of Philosophy of the country's biggest university, in the capital, Ljubljana.⁴⁹⁹ The Slovenian elections were held in the middle of this complicated and conflict-ridden situation, and seemed certain to result in a victory for the experienced political technocrat Janez Janša, of the national-liberal Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS). However, the Slovenian people provided a surprise by dropping Janša to second place behind Ljubljana Mayor Zoran Janković, a popular media personality, and his newly founded party «Positive Slovenia», a centre-left grouping the political profile of which is not yet really clear. Although Janković's edge was slim, the Social Democrats of former Premier Borut Pahor won 10 %, ahead of the liberal Civic List (8 %), so that a centre-left government was initially expected; however, the Civic List refused to support Janković, and ultimately aligned with the SDS. With the aid of smaller centrist parties, the conservative Janša was finally elected to the premiership in January 2012.

499 Dazu <http://www.slobodnifilozofski.com/2011/eleven/mi-smo-univerza-fasizam-na-filozofskom.html>, zuletzt aufgerufen am 06.12.2011.

Dorothee de Nève/Tina Olteanu

ROMANIA: THE SEARCH FOR A NEW LEFT IDENTITY

Romania has long been considered a special case: during the decades after the Second World War, a sultanistic system of rule developed which was very different from those of neighbouring countries. The change of power in 1989-'90 was violent and bloody, and unlike in the central European countries, leftist forces were already the most important political actors by the early '90s. In this paper, we would like to demonstrate how the spectrum of leftist parties and the left electorate has developed over the past 20 years. Moreover, we will analyze the programmatic positions of the left in various policy areas, including its relationship to the European Union and its policies. The goal of the paper is to describe, by means of these observations, a complex search for a new political identity of the left.

Reorientation in transformation

By the beginning of 2010, there was only one party remaining in the Romanian Parliament which considered itself part of the political left. Although a large number of socialist and social democratic parties had been founded, especially during the early 1990s, a far-reaching transformation of the political party landscape has occurred over the course of the last 20 years, since the downfall of the regime of the Romanian Communist Party (PCR – Partidul Comunist Român). In the autumn of 1989, the so-called National Salvation Front (FSN – Frontul Salvării Naționale) appeared for the first time with an anonymous appeal to the delegates of the 14th Party Congress of the PCR. Even today, the exact circumstances of the seizure of power by the FSN during the «revolution» of December 1989 have not been sufficiently cleared up (Siani-Davies 2007). Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu were convicted in a summary proceeding of a special court on December 25, 1989, and immediately executed. The PCR was never formally dissolved or disbanded, but simply stopped existing in its previous form. The NSF, which later saw itself as a revolutionary movement, proclaimed itself

the new power in the state. Ultimately, a large number of left parties emerged from it, which decisively determined the process of political transformation.

The experience of the interwar years and the national communist regime of Nicolae Ceaușescu (1967–1989) decisively marked the development of left parties after 1989. The Romanian regime under the sultanistic leadership style of Ceaușescu and his family was considerably different from those of other eastern and central European socialist political systems. By contrast to developments in East Central Europe, no political, economic or cultural liberalisation tendencies were apparent during the period preceding the process of transformation. Rather, the Socialist Republic of Romania pursued an autarkic economic policy and a policy of far-reaching separation from the Soviet Union and from the Warsaw Pact. This policy, along with Ceaușescu's megalomaniac style of rule, caused a deep economic and supply crisis, which worsened over the course of the 1980s.

During this phase of political upheaval, there were thus no dissident movements in Romania, nor were there any oppositional structures which might have politically helped shape a new beginning. As a result, the mystification of the revolution and the glorification of the interwar years provided focal points for the identification of the new parties. However, the reestablishment of the historical parties, the Romanian Social Democratic Party (*Partidul Social Democrat Român*/PSDR), the National Liberal Party (*Partidul Național Liberal*/PNL) and the Christian Democratic National Peasants' Party (*Partidul Național Țărănesc Creștin Democrat*/PNTCD), in some cases involving surviving activists of these parties, proved to be not particularly successful. Even though there was some personal continuity from the interwar period and the communist regime not only for the historical parties, but also in the leftist and nationalist parties, the struggle between post- and anti-Communist political forces was not a key element of interparty competition in Romania – unlike other countries of the region. By the latter half of the '90s, the idea of harvesting political capital from this supposed antagonism collapsed for good.

In spite of this problematic point of departure, the Romanian party landscape can on the one hand be considered fairly stable, since there have since the beginning of the transformation been no early elections, and the Social Democratic Party (*Partidul Social Democrat*/PSD), while having repeatedly changed its name during this period,⁵⁰⁰ has always been one of the most important political parties. On the other hand, the competition between the parties is very fluid, and parties operate in shifting coalitions, there have been numerous splits and new foundations of parties, and the party supporters and elected representatives themselves often switch from one party to another. As a result, the citizens generally have a very low level of trust in

500 The party has borne the names National Salvation Front (FSN), Democratic Front of National Salvation (FDSN – *Frontul Democrat al Salvării Naționale*), Party of Social Democracy of Romania (PDSR – *Partidul Democrației Sociale din România*) and, today the Social Democratic Party (PSD).

the parties, including the left parties, and it has been additionally shaken by patronage, political scandals and corruption. All this has led to a sceptical attitude toward Romanian parliamentarism, and of the parties operating within it: polls show that the number of citizens who want a «strong leader» has been rising for years. In 2005, 78.3% of respondents agreed with the statement «we ought to have a strong leader who doesn't have to worry about Parliament and elections.» In 1997, only 47.3% of the people had responded affirmatively to that question; by 2000 that had risen to 66.6%.⁵⁰¹ Nonetheless, this public scepticism toward parties in Parliament is not an expression of a general dissatisfaction with democracy. In 2005, 95% of those questioned responded that it was good to have a democratic form of government. The democratic practice of the Romanian system in 2005, on the other hand, was assessed more sceptically: 55.8% of respondents assessed democratic performance in Romania as generally positive, or as very positive.⁵⁰² This trend was much more problematic in 1999, when 20.9% of those questioned stated that they were generally satisfied or very satisfied with the democratic development of their country.⁵⁰³

Clearly, 20 years after the regime change, the critical attitude toward parties and toward the specific quality of Romanian democracy is fairly widespread. Nonetheless, surprisingly enough, this has not generated the same kinds of shocks in Romania as it has in other transformation countries, where new political groupings have emerged overnight,⁵⁰⁴ entered Parliament, and even achieved governmental responsibility. Even the extra-parliamentary spectrum of political movements has been greatly marginalised, and the willingness for political participation is minimal. These processes have affected the entire political spectrum, including the left.

The Left in Romania

The left part of the political spectrum can be categorised into three different groupings: (i) the established parliamentary left of social democratic orientation; (ii) the marginalised extra-parliamentary radical left; and (iii) the leftist scene with no party organisation.

(i) The heritage of the so-called successor parties of the former state parties in eastern and south-eastern Europe was, first, that of leftist and national communist ideas as *familles spirituelles*; second, personal continuity; and third the ownership of the party infrastructure, including real estate. Interestingly enough, the established, moderate left in Parliament adopted this heritage in all these three dimensions to a large extent, even though it did not explicitly consider itself the successor party to the PCR.

501 European Values Survey Romania (waves 3–5); our calculations.

502 Here, respondents were asked to assess how democratic they considered today's governance in Romania, on a scale of 1 for «not democratic at all» to 10, for «totally democratic». The value given here is the result of the positive tendency (6 to 10 on the scale). European Values Survey Romania (5th wave) 2005.

503 European Values Survey (4th wave) 1999.

504 Generally, these are right-wing populist or right-wing extremist, as in Poland, Hungary and Bulgaria.

Rather, the FSN in 1990 defined itself as a political association which had emerged from the victory of the revolution. According to its own self-definition, the National Salvation Front was in fact radically opposed to the communist system and its ideology (de Nève 2002: 65). In its later development, the party then linked itself to the tradition of historic social democracy.

Since 2004, the Romanian Social Democratic Party (PSD) has been a centre-left party and the only left party in parliament. It is the politically most successful party in Romania, with which numerous smaller parties have merged over the course of the past 20 years, including the historic Social Democratic Party of Romania (PSDR). In public perception it was (especially during the 1990s, and in contrast to its own self-definition) the central post-communist successor party. This public perception was reinforced to a large degree by the personal continuity at the top of the party. Ion Iliescu was the successful party chairman from 1990 until 2005, when he was surprisingly defeated in a contested vote at the PSD Party Congress by his former protégé Mircea Geoană. Iliescu, born in 1930, had a successful career in the Communist Party (PCR) until the early 1970s, when he was forced to resign from all party offices. This took place during the so-called Romanian Cultural Revolution. Nonetheless, he continued as vice president of the PCR in Timiș district, and later as director of a publishing house. He wielded by far the greatest influence of any individual on the left after the beginning of the democratisation process. Moreover from 1990 to 1996 and from 2000 to 2004, he served as president of Romania. At the end of his second term, he continued to enjoy widespread popularity in the Romanian populace. It was only because of the constitutional two-term limit was he unable to run for re-election. Given the situation of a polarised competition between the parties, along with numerous splits and mergers, the PSD was, under Iliescu's leadership, involved in governing coalitions of various make-ups, so that it was the main force in designing policy from the phase of the drafting of the Constitution, the implementation of the political and economic transformation, and the movement of the country toward membership of the European Union. As the party with the largest membership, the PSD, unlike other parties of the fragmented Romanian party system, has a nationwide organisational structure with established women's, senior citizens' and youth organisations upon which internal party decision-making processes have only a limited effect. The PSD maintains ties to the unions. Prior to local elections in 2008 for example, a pact between the National Confederation of Free Trade Unions (Confederația Națională a Sindicatelor Libere din România – Frăția/CNSLR) and the PSD was renewed; it provided for close cooperation. In addition to raising the minimum wage, it also included participation in the future government. The PSD cooperates internationally as a member of the Socialist International (SI) and the European Social Democratic Party (PES). In recent years, another party which had also emerged from the National Salvation Front, the so-called Democratic

Party (Partidul Democrat/PD ⁵⁰⁵) was considered a party of the centre-left. However, during the 2004 elections, it underwent a programmatic transformation, and now defines itself as the people's party of the centre-right. Since its merger with a split-off from the National Liberal Party (Partidul Național Liberal/PNL), it is now called the Democratic Liberal Party (Partidul Democrat-Liberal/PD-L).

(ii) The radical left now operates exclusively in the extra-parliamentary realm, since the parties belonging to that spectrum cannot get enough votes in elections to overcome the minimum threshold for representation, and/or because they can find no suitable partners with which to enter into electoral alliances. The Socialist Labour Party (PSM – Partidul Socialist al Muncii) claims to be the legitimate successor to the Romanian Communist Party (PCR); however, in 2002, it was prevented by court order from using the name of the former state party. The Socialist Alliance Party (PAS – Partidul Alianța Socialistă) is a left split-off from the PSM, which in 2003 declined to merge with the PSD. The PAS is one of the founding members of the European Left Party. Other parties of the radical left include the New Communist Party (Noul Partid Comunist Român/nPCR), likewise formed in 2003, and the People's Party for Social Security (Partidul Popular și al Protecției Sociale/PPPS). Unlike the centre-left, the radical left in Romania is primarily based on the tradition of the national communist past and of democratic socialism. After repeated name changes, fusions and splits, the extra-parliamentary left is now marginalised, badly fragmented and to some extent politically radicalised and even nationalistic.

(iii) In addition moreover, there is an extremely weak left alternative scene. It consists of small political groupings formed by individual activists involved in civil society activity, such as the Romanian Social Forum or ATTAC Romania, and also such single-issue initiatives as the movement to stop the gold mine project at Roșia Montană in Transylvania. The left lacks social allies, such as in the area of environmental and women's organisations. The relative weakness of these organisations is due to their lack of networking, their weak support in the population, and the general shortage of resources available to civil society activists overall. As a result, Romania has seen the development of hardly any culture of alternative left protest in recent years, which might have organised political opposition. Even in times of economic crisis, which has had a wide variety of very negative consequences in Romania as elsewhere, there has been no left-wing protest. Even the unions have not been able to articulate any protest.

The location of the left within the party system has changed fundamentally since the beginning of the democratisation process. In the context of the founding elections of 1990, a new competitive party system emerged. After the slow disintegration of the power of the National Salvation Front and the Social Democratic Party of Romania

505 The party was originally called the National Salvation Front (FSN), the Social Democratic Union (USD), the Democratic Party (PD), and today the Democratic-Liberal Party (PD-L).

(PDSR),⁵⁰⁶ a «polarised pluralistic party system», with a triangular interaction structure emerged, in which the parties competed to occupy the political centre. In this contest, it is likely that none of the competing parties will in future be able to win an absolute majority of the votes. At the same time, the established Social Democratic Party remains one of the most important political parties in the competitive arena, and the most powerful force in the left camp. There is virtually no networking within the left party spectrum, especially between the established parliamentary parties and the extra-parliamentary left.

The left electoral potential

Unfortunately, no reliable information is available with regard to the socio-economic make-up of the membership structures of left parties, even for the PSD, a long-established parliamentary party. However, this information gap is hardly surprising; given the Romanian – and possibly the overall Eastern European – context, such data is not available for any political party. This is in part due to the fact that, beyond their officialdom, the parties generally have a weak membership base, and membership dues – and their regular payment – are largely symbolic. Moreover, a culture of intraparty dialogue with the members by means of various local and regional levels is not established. One element of Ceauşescu's communist regime in this respect may be the «freedom» from political participation, which frequently had a formalistic, theatrical character, perfectly staged. The Communist Party of Romania (PCR) was always a party with a large membership, compared with its sister parties in other countries; in the end, the party had approx. 4 million members (Stoica 2006: 457–8). After such an experience of party membership, which was viewed as useless, non-membership was seen as an accomplishment. The low party membership figures in Romania have ultimately promoted similar development tendencies as those which can be observed in other Western and Eastern European countries: reduced or slight importance of party membership is accompanied by a process of professionalisation of the party elites, so that the parties develop organisational structures which can operate just as well without members. By means of the commercialisation of parties, other interest groups and companies gain influence over these parties. The fact that the social rooting of parties is not developed by way of membership ultimately causes the party elites themselves, especially during electoral campaigns, to approach the electorate directly (de Nève 2008: 288–9). Campaign gifts, compensatory services and club amenities then become the means with which the parties overcome this deficit in communications.

Nonetheless, it is possible to make statements regarding the electoral potential of left parties on the basis of available polling data. The electoral results since the early

506 See FN 1.

1990s and public opinion polls show that on the one hand, there is a low level of support for left-wing positions among the citizenry, but that on the other, the electoral potential for the centre-left is relatively high and stable.

Tab. 1: Self-positioning of the citizens

	Left	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Right	
Women	4.3	2.7	4.7	3.5	36.8	19	7.4	8.9	3.1	9.7	100 %
Men	6.4	3.2	5	5.6	26.8	18.3	10.9	10.3	5	8.5	100 %
Total	5.5	3	4.9	4.7	30.9	18.6	9.4	9.8	4.3	9	100 %

Source: European Values Survey Romania (1999–2004); our calculations. N = 635. data in per cent

Only 5.5 % of Romanian citizens consider themselves on the left of the political spectrum, with the share of men somewhat greater than that of women. Approximately one third of those questioned would place themselves in the centre-left, including 36.8 % of women and 26.8 % of men (see Table 1). Overall, we can therefore assume that approx. half the electorate sympathizes with leftist or social democratic positions. While the centre-left coalitions often win the greatest share of the vote in elections, such leftist parties as the Socialist Alliance party (PAS) and the People’s Party for Social Security (PPPS) attract only very few votes (Figure 1).⁵⁰⁷ Since the founding elections in 1990, there has indeed been a continual drop in the left’s share of the electoral spectrum; nonetheless, the political left has always had the support of more than 30 % of the electorate. The articulated political preference of the citizens is reflected in the electoral results to the extent that the centre-left plays a dominant role. However, the left has so far not succeeded in exhausting its political mobilisation potential. The organised party-political left in Romania was strongly discredited by the period through 1989. This leads to the paradoxical situation that while its self-description as «left» may be relatively weak, leftist policies often gain very great support. This can for example be seen in the political attitude of citizens toward income inequality. The privatisation and economic transformation of Romania, as elsewhere, has led to a dramatic increase in income inequality. The majority of citizens consider such income differences as unjust, and holds the opinion that the state has a duty to exercise control over companies, to secure pensions, and to enhance educational opportunities (Table 2).

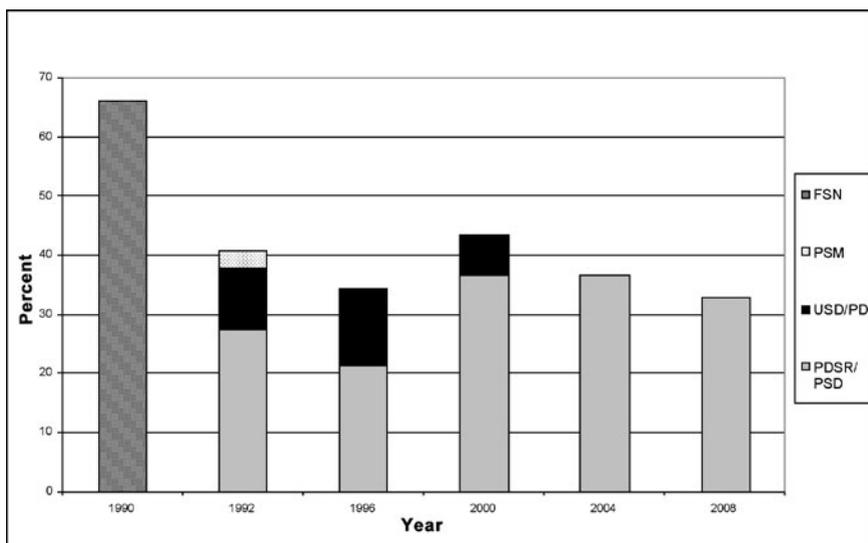
⁵⁰⁷ In the 2008 parliamentary elections, the PAS won 585 valid votes for the lower house of Parliament (0.08 %), and the PPPS 8388 (0.12 %), out of a total of 6,886,794. cf. http://www.becparlamentare2008.ro/rezul/CO-MUNICAT_PRAG.pdf, accessed March 3 2010.

Tab. 2: Eliminating major income inequality

	Very important (1)	2	3	4	Completely unimportant
Women	43.1	43.1	8.1	3.8	1.9
Me	45.7	38	8.5	4.7	3.2
Total	44.4	40.5	8.3	4.3	2.6

Source: European Values Survey Romania (1999–2004); our calculations; N = 1052; in percent.

Fig. 1: Electoral results of left parties in parliamentary elections since 1990



Source: Autengruber 2006, pp. 169–180; Olteanu 2008: p. 165.

The electoral success of the Romanian Social Democratic Party (PSD) is due on the one hand to the above average voting shares in the east and southeast of the country, in Moldavia, Muntenia, Oltenia and Dobruja; moreover, it has also been successful in addressing voters of all generations. One quarter of young voters, aged 18 through 29, vote for the PSD (25.2 %); the party's share of votes from older generations, those above 60, is 39.2 %.⁵⁰⁸ Other left-wing parties, especially the New Communist Party (and PCR) have a clearly over-aged pool of supporters.

508 Biroul de Cercetări Sociale: Sondaj de opinie publică, November 10–14, 2008.

The most recent parliamentary elections took place in November 2008.⁵⁰⁹ As it had four years earlier, the PSD stood for the election in alliance with the Conservative Party (PC – Partidul Conservator). This power-seeking coalition, which was programmatically extremely heterogeneous, can be explained in large part by the fact that the founder of the PC, Dan Voiculescu, owns numerous TV stations. While the PC was the only party with a female chair until March 1, 2010, she operated entirely at the behest of Dan Voiculescu. How unequal this partnership was can be seen in the fact the PSD won eleven of the coalition's total of eleven seats in the Chamber of Representatives and 48 of 49 in the Senate. The PAS by contrast failed once again to win seats, which was certainly also due not only to its organisational weaknesses, but also to what it was offering voters in terms of a programme. In addition, the electoral law was changed to a majority voting system with a few components of proportional representation. The candidates of the PAS seem to have been largely unknown to voters.

During the course of the legislative term, there was a relatively strong shift in the parliamentary groups in Romania, not only because several representatives resigned their seats, but also because there was frequent shifting from one parliamentary group or party to another (Roth, de Nève 2002: 192). Thus, two years after the last parliamentary election, the parliamentary group of the PSD/PC alliance had a strength of only 101 seats, including two PC representatives and 99 PSD representatives; in Parliament as a whole, it dropped from 163 to 145 members, of which three were conservatives.

The presidential election of autumn 2009 brought a refreshing change, as the Green party (PV – Partidul Verde) fielded its own very unconventional presidential candidate. Remus Cernia, with his long hair and casual dress, did not fit into the uniform picture of Romanian politicians, with their suits and ties. He also was a contrast to the widespread public perception of a politician concerned primarily with his own image. He challenged the political system by making skilful use of formal instruments of participation, and repeatedly tried to make his voice heard in the close debates of realistic presidential hopefuls. This brought him a relatively high level of media attention, even if his level of success in the election was minimal – 0.62%.⁵¹⁰ His party represents classic ecological issues, and is conservative in terms of economic policy (privatisation, little state economic participation), albeit with an ecological approach. His socio-political demands for a minimum wage of €350 and a minimum pension of €200 are fairly high for Romania, and evidence of a clear leftist orientation. However, they are flanked by demands for «controls» to protect against abuse of the social

509 For an overview of the results of the parliamentary elections of 2008, cf. Biroul Electoral Central, <http://www.becparlamentare2008.ro/>, accessed March 2 2010. In the 2004 elections, the PSD and the PC had made a deal in advance specifying that the PC would receive 30 seats in Parliament, regardless of the results. It then switched sides after the elections and joined a government with the other parties. cf. Olteanu 2008: 157.

510 <http://www.bec2009p.ro/Documente%20PDF/Rezultate/Rezultate%20provizorii%20finale/Date%20provizorii%20P.pdf>, accessed March 3 2010.

welfare system. Another left-wing presidential candidate was Sorin Oprescu, a former member of the PSD, who left the party because it refused to support his candidacy for the mayoralty of Bucharest. Nonetheless, he stood as an independent, and in the presidential election was able to score 3.18% of the vote.⁵¹¹ The PAS candidate, Constantin Rotaru, was hardly noticed by the public, and achieved 0.44% of the vote,⁵¹² while the candidate of another Green party, the Ecologists (Partidul Ecologist Român/PER)⁵¹³, won 0.23%. However this party cannot be considered leftist; its programme is very contradictory, and strongly tends toward economic liberalism. The most successful leftist candidate, Mircea Geană, lost in the runoff to the incumbent president Traian Băsescu.

The coalition behaviour of the PSD

The coalition behaviour of the left parties in the Romanian Parliament can be characterised as ranging from pragmatic to opportunistic. The strong position of the PSD has especially allowed it in past years to use a wide variety of coalition options. From 1992 to 1996, it formed a coalition with right-wing populist radical parties,⁵¹⁴ and between 2004 and 2008, formed an electoral alliance with the Humanist Party of Romania (PUR – Partidul Umanist Român),⁵¹⁵ which can be considered economically liberal with conservative values. In 2000, the PSD succeeded in forming a minority government after having won only 36.6% of the vote, which however, translated into 44.9% of the seats in parliament. Thereafter, it gradually succeeded in recruiting representatives from other parties into the PSD and thus obtained a majority. During the 2004–’08 parliamentary term, the PSD, after the rupture of the centre-right coalition, supported the minority government of the National Liberal Party. However, no alliance with the Democratic Party (PD), which was politically closest to the PSD, could be forged, due to personal rivalries. Only in 2008, and after the programmatic transformation of the PD described above, did the alliance of the PSD and the Liberal Democratic Party, as it was now called (Partidul Democrat-Liberal/PD-L),⁵¹⁶ come into being; however, it fell apart prior to the presidential election of December 2009 and the resulting minority government ruled until February 2012, when it was replaced by the non-party Premier Mihai Ungureanu, until elections later in the year.

These developments showed that the political cleavage between post- and anti-communists, which had been constructed and instrumentalised over the course of the past

511 *ibid*

512 *ibid*

513 *ibid*

514 At that time, the party was called the Democratic Front for National Salvation (FDSN). Its coalition partners at the executive and legislative levels included the National Romanian Unity Party (PDNR) and the Greater Romania Party (PRM).

515 Today the Conservative Party (PC), cf. FN 14.

516 See FN 6 for the various names used by this party.

20 years, was no longer convincing. For in terms of personalities, all parties in the Romanian party system recruited a mixture of people from the new elites and former members of the Communist Party. The often opportunistic coalition behaviour of recent years is moreover an indication of the fact that these alliances are primarily office-seeking coalitions, in which programmatic goals are of secondary importance. Currently, the PSD is once again in opposition. Its presidential candidate, Mircea Geoană, was supported in the runoff election by the National Liberals, so that he came within less than a percentage point of the result of incumbent Traian Băsescu (50.34% to 49.66%).⁵¹⁷

This election however revealed interesting voting behaviour with respect to the electoral districts at home and abroad. While incumbent president Băsescu did much better abroad, his Social Democratic challenger Geoană won a majority of the vote in the domestic districts.⁵¹⁸ This difference was ultimately decisive. Due to the organisational weakness described above and the lack of support among citizens, the extra-parliamentary left has not succeeded in influencing the relevant political decision-making processes.

The programmatic orientation of the left

The programmatic orientation of the political left in Romania is, beyond the traditional national orientation of all political parties, essentially characterised by several key issues, which sometimes are also the cause of conflict within the political left itself:

- privatisation and labour market policy
- the European Union
- equal opportunity policy
- advocacy for specific groups
- religion, and
- privatisation and labour market policy

While the Social Democrats⁵¹⁹ in the early '90s still called for a gradual path and only partial privatisation of state enterprises, the party today supports the social market economy and largely rejects regulation of the labour market. Nonetheless, as the PSD's behaviour in coalitions has demonstrated, there is a great discrepancy between its programme and its actions. Since 2000, the PSD has been instrumental in implementing neo-liberal economic policies, even when it led a minority government. Investigations and trials have been carried out against high party officials and former

517 <http://www.bec2009p.ro/Documente%20PDF/Rezultate/Rezultate%20finale%20turul%20II/PV%20BEC%20Turul%20II.pdf>, accessed March 3 2010.

518 Our calculations, based on information from <http://www.bec2009p.ro/Procese%20verbale%20Presedinte-Turul%20II.html>, accessed March 3 2010.

519 Now the PSD; then the National Salvation Front (FSN) and later the Democratic National Salvation Front (FDSN).

ministers for corruption; they have still not been finally adjudicated. Often, the PSD is considered the most corrupt party, and it has moreover installed its «local barons» in the regions (Olteanu 2007). Other parties are of course not immune to this phenomenon; nonetheless, for this party, the contrast with its original critique of capitalism is particularly notable. The extra-parliamentary left demands controls upon or even the abolition of the free market economy, and the expansion of state employment policies.

The European Union

The PSD has overcome its original reservations regarding EU membership, and during the period of participation in government, has pushed the process of integration forward considerably. For the extra-parliamentary left, the debate around the European Union is either not an issue (nPCR), or else they emphasize that the realisation of programmatic goals could be carried out in cooperation and in harmony with other European countries. Only the Socialist Alliance Party (PAS) states that it wants a Europe of the nations, and thus indirectly articulates critique of the European Union as an institution. These two areas thus highlight the programmatic differences and similarities between the established Social Democrats on the one hand and the extra-parliamentary left on the other.

Equal opportunity policy

It is to the credit of the social democratic left that it has supported equal opportunity policies. Although the entire political system in Romania remains strongly male-dominated, the PSD has stipulated in its statutes the goal of having at least 25 % proportional participation by women in political office. However, the party itself currently falls behind its own target, for only two of the 14 vice presidents in the party leadership are women. The PSD has a higher than average share of female representatives in both houses of the Romanian Parliament; in absolute figures however, female representation is still low. Currently 14 % of PSD representatives in the lower house are women, compared to eleven.4 % overall; in the Senate, the figure is 8 %, while it is 5.8 % for the Senate as a whole. In response to an initiative by a female PSD MP, a parliamentary commission for equal gender opportunity was established for the first time in 2000. However, during the party's last term in government, from 2008 to 2009, the PSD filled only one of its nine cabinet positions with a woman. Its partner in government, the PD-L, also only nominated two women among its eleven cabinet members. The current PD-L/UDMR cabinet⁵²⁰ only includes one woman. This reticent attitude toward women in politics is also reflected in opinion polls. For example, 55 % of those polled agreed (or agreed strongly) with the statement «men are better

⁵²⁰ Democratic Union of Magyars of Romania, which represents the Hungarian minority, has a very broad political programme.

political leaders» (European values Survey Romania (5th wave) 2005). Conservatism regarding social issues is, as this example shows, still very powerful.

Advocacy for specific groups

Beyond gender politics, the major opportunity for the left is to articulate the interests of politically, economically and socially disadvantaged groups of the population. For example, the People's Party for Social Security (PPPS) demands an «end to the genocide of pensioners», and calls for far-reaching measures for their social support. This is also shown in the party logo, an open umbrella. It is notable, moreover, that all proclaimed rejection of any form of discrimination is accompanied by nationalistic tendencies, for instance when a local economy, or potential loss of control in Transylvania, where the Hungarian minority is concentrated, are raised as issues, or when such demands are raised as sanctions for members of ethnic minorities who insult the country, or for a ban on their singing the national anthems of the countries of their ethnicity, or of using non-Romanian national symbols. On the other hand, neither left nor right parliamentary parties have any problem cooperating with the ethnic Hungarian UDMR, the only exception being the greater Romanian party (PRM) which is however currently not represented in Parliament. An additional Romanian peculiarity is that recognised ethnic groups have privileged access to Parliament in the form of a special representative. Currently, 18 representatives of minorities are represented in Parliament; traditionally, they vote with the government majority. Integration of immigrants and asylum seekers is still a low priority issue in Romania, since the country has largely been affected by an extreme degree of emigration, including a brain drain, to Western Europe. The very large and heterogeneous group of Romanians abroad has so far not been addressed directly as a constituency by any party, and as stated above, constituted a decisive critical mass in favour of the centre-right parties only in the presidential election of 2009. Other issues are largely ignored by both left and right parties in Romania. The discrimination of the Roma people or of handicapped people, and equal rights for same-sex partnerships are more or less completely taboo issues.

Religion

The connection of left parties to religion is surprising, and deserving of note. The PPPS, for example, supports peaceful co-existence of the established Christian religions, and opposes the expansion of sects. They also see themselves in the role of mediators between the Orthodox and Catholic churches.⁵²¹ The PAS too sees the churches as not only part of the social dialogue, but emphasizes in a separate section of its programme their role in preserving Romania's «cultural identity» and «national

521 <http://www.ppps.ro/program.html>, accessed March 3 2010.

spirituality». It ascribes to the church a system-preserving role through moral ideas and patriotic feelings, which it helps to strengthen amongst its believers.⁵²² The PSD programme addresses the role of the church in somewhat less flowery terms, but nonetheless emphasizes the integration of the church into the educational and research system. This importance of religion among the extreme and social democratic left is a peculiarity that derives from the Orthodox Church which is organised on a national basis, and which has traditionally maintained close contact with the political elite – at all times and under all forms of government. Here, religious and national components are very strongly merged. Moreover, the institution of the church and religiousness are essential to a large proportion of the population. In this respect, the Green presidential candidate Remus Cernea mentioned above broke new ground by demanding strict separation of church and state. He was met with nationwide rejection.

In sum, it can be stated that especially the PSD has consistently initiated relevant reform processes and has for example called for dialogue with leftist social forces,⁵²³ and for equal opportunity policies. However, these reform processes are often opposed to social conservatism and to resistance within the party itself. This often leads to the result that issues such as the equality of same-sex partnerships, the discrimination of the Roma people and other socio-politically relevant issues are not addressed by the left.

Intraparty democracy

The PSD has so far been the only party to provide any impulses regarding intraparty democracy.⁵²⁴ The intellectuals within the PD-L (such as the European Parliament members Monica Macovey and Christian Preda) have also attempted to initiate a public discussion about party orientation, goals and nominating procedures, but they were soon suppressed. The new majority vote law somewhat changes the logic of nominations, since one candidate for a party runs in each constituency. The previous electoral lists have been abolished. After the first elections held under this new law, there was heavy criticism, so much so that a revision prior to the next election is fairly probable. Intraparty discussion, not only with regard to the occupation of offices, is in many respects merely a project within the PSD, as was shown prior to the last Party Congress. Thus, party chair Geoană was under considerable pressure after his narrow defeat in the presidential election, and potential successors moved into position. The exclusively male dominance of the candidacies for the party chair is notable. Also a

522 <http://www.pasro.ro/index.php/program>, accessed March 3 2010.

523 In 2008, the PSD entered into a new dialogue with leftist forces in order to spark citizens participation in politics beyond the electoral process.

524 In the context of the 2004 parliamentary elections, the PSD established a new intraparty selection procedure for nominating candidates. Unfortunately, it was not consistently implemented.

major problem, which has been raised strongly in the media, is the fact that there was a selection of potential delegates in the run-up to the Congress. Generally, all factions within the PSD discussed options which endangered the selection process and thus made the election easier to manipulate. This is an especially ominous public signal, since electoral fraud was a charge which the PSD had raised in the context of the presidential election. Moreover, the fact that various candidates did not develop any programmatic juxtapositions is a major problem. Programmatic processes of negotiation and understanding are seen as far less important than the struggle between individual leaders. What most characterised the people standing for elections was their various ties and obligations to regional party clienteles. On February 20, 2010, 38-year-old Victor Ponta was surprisingly and narrowly elected as the new party president, while most party offices were occupied by confidants of former PSD president Geană. Ponta promised a breath of fresh air and a stronger orientation towards the party grassroots as well as the regional structures; but, whether this was just election promises or if concrete action will be taken on these matters, remains to be seen. One candidate, Cristian Diaconescu, withdrew his candidacy ten minutes prior to the vote. It turned out that he had been privately investigated, and compromising material had been gathered. He has now withdrawn from the party and joined the pool of independent candidates, which consists largely of former PSD members. Some observers assume that a new left party could be formed from this pool, but that also remains to be seen if anything comes of it. Generally in recent years, the attempted foundations of new parties have tended to lead to the absorption of these groups – or their key people – into existing parliamentary parties.

The Left and the EU

The Social Democrats have made important steps in support of a European good-neighbour policy. They are especially active in calling for stronger European involvement in the Republic of Moldova, particularly with the goal of supporting a process of EU membership for that neighbouring country. Also important are relations with countries of the European periphery, particularly the Ukraine and Georgia, as well as relationships with the Black Sea region. These processes of regional integration and cooperation have however gained a particular dynamic, and will in future be priority issues on the agenda of the European Union, a prime likely example being the Danube regional strategy. The EU will have to involve itself more strongly here, and Romania's left could play a mediating role. On the other hand (and this is true of the entire Romanian party system) Romania can as yet boast no proactive European policy. To a large extent, impulses for an independent European policy of the country are lacking in the political parties. Moreover, the parliamentary members elected to the

European Parliament have been highly controversial domestically.⁵²⁵ After Romania's long wait for membership, which included required semi-annual evaluations of the country by the European Commission, Romania reacts very sensitively to demands made upon it. Here, the left has a clear need to emancipate itself.

Conclusion

In Romania, a fundamental transformation of the political system has occurred since the fall of the Ceaușescu regime, which has made a reorientation of the left necessary. However, due to the specific structures of the old ruling system the search for a new identity is problematic for the left since socialist or communist ideals were only of minor importance in the sultanistic regime of Nicolae Ceaușescu. In this respect, the public debate about the heritage of the old regime and Romania – including, the activities of the Securitate – was different from that in other countries of the region. The strategy of the National Salvation Front (FSN) in defining itself not as the successor party, but rather as a revolutionary movement, was politically very successful – even if the citizens and the rival parties did not accept this self-staged revolutionary mythology.

Left-wing parties were among the key actors in the political transformation. The FSN was the central force which largely shaped the political and economic transformation processes and supported the consolidation of the democratic system in Romania. Due to the historical fact that Romania had already loosened its close ties to the Warsaw Pact at an early stage, and due to the rapid process of the social democratisation of the party, support for the integration process into the European Union was much greater and less controversial than it was in other enlargement countries, both for the left and for citizens generally.

Even if the PSD is today no longer the predominant actor in the party system, and the fragmentation of the left has continued in the extra-parliamentary realm, it is nonetheless an important party in the tri-polar competitive structure of the country, and without a doubt the party with the strongest intraparty organisational structure. In spite of these political successes, the left remains in a structural crisis, in part due to the specific characteristics of the Romanian party system. These include programmatic ideological weaknesses of all parties, its opportunistic alliance behaviour, and the constant change of government. To an extent, this weakness is due to public dis-

⁵²⁵ One prominent example is that of the president's politically relatively inexperienced daughter who, with the support of the party organisation of the PD-L, was elected as an independent to the European Parliament, only to join the European People's Party group – the Conservatives/Christian Democrats. This caused some disquiet within the party. The extreme right wing Greater Romania Party lost its representation in the national parliament in 2008, but does have three representatives in the European Parliament. In addition to its Party Chairman Corneliu Vadim Tudor, the party also set George Gigi, of the New Generation Party – Christian Orthodox, to Brussels, who is known for his ultra-conservative and fundamentalist positions. The Social Democratic delegation to the European Parliament represents a good cross-section.

interest in political participation, so that alternative left-wing parties and movements must unfortunately be considered absolutely insignificant. The left as a whole is represented in Parliament by the social democratic PSD. At this point in time, it cannot be expected that any other competition on the left of the spectrum will be established, although certain leftist issues certainly do encounter broad support from the citizenry.

Bibliography

- Autengruber, Christian 2006: Die politischen Parteien in Bulgarien und Rumänien. Eine vergleichende Analyse seit Beginn der 90er Jahre (The political parties in Bulgaria and Romania: A comparative analysis since the early '90s), Stuttgart: ibidem.
- Gilberg, Trond 1972: Ceausescu »kleine Kulturrevolution« in Rumänien (Ceausescu's little revolution in Romania). In: *Osteuropa* 10/1972, pp. 717–728.
- Gross, Peter/Tismaneanu, Vladimir 2005: The End of Postcommunism in Romania. In: *Journal of Democracy* 16/2, pp. 146–162.
- Mungiu-Pippidi, Alina 2002: The Romanian Postcommunist parties. A success story. In: Bozóki, Andras; Ishiyama, John T. (eds.): *The Communist Successor Parties of Central and Eastern Europe*. Armonk: Sharpe. pp. 188–205.
- de Nève, Dorothee 2002: Sozialdemokratische und sozialistische Parteien in Südosteuropa. Albanien, Bulgarien und Rumänien 1989 – 1997 (Social democratic and socialist parties in South-eastern Europe: Albania, Bulgaria and Romania, 1989 – 1997). Opladen: Leske & Budrich.
- de Nève, Dorothee 2002: Koalitionen in Albanien, Bulgarien und Rumänien: Überwindung des régime divide mit Hindernissen. In: Kropp, Sabine; Schüttemeyer, Suzanne pp.; Sturm, Roland (ed.): *Koalitionen in West- und Osteuropa*. Opladen: Leske und Budrich. pp. 301–342.
- de Nève, Dorothee 2008: Parteien in der Krise? In: Bos, Ellen; Segert, Dieter (eds.): *Osteuropäische Demokratien als Trendsetter? Parteien und Parteiensysteme nach dem Ende des Übergangsjahrzehnts (Eastern European democracies as trendsetters? Parties and party systems after the end of the transition decade)*. Opladen: Barbara Budrich. pp. 281–302.
- Olteanu, Tina 2007: Korruption in Rumänien – ein Erbe des Staatssozialismus? (Corruption in Romania: heritage of state socialism?), in: Dieter Segert (ed.): *Postsozialismus. Hinterlassenschaft des Staatssozialismus und neue Kapitalismen (post socialism: the heritage of state socialism and new capitalisms)*. «Studien zur politischen Wirklichkeit» series, vol. 18, ed.: Anton Pelinka, Vienna: Braumüller, pp. 65–85.
- Olteanu, Tina 2008: Rumänien: Vom Einparteiensystem zum Einheitsbrei? (Romania: from a single party system to a single stew?), In: Bos et al, op. cit. pp. 147–166.
- Pop-Eleches, Grigore 2008: A party for all seasons: Electoral adaption of Romanian Communist successor parties. In: *Communist and Postcommunist Studies* 41/4, pp. 465–479.
- Roth, Alexander; de Nève, Dorothee 2002: Rumänien – Zustimmungsmaschine oder «einziger Gesetzgeber des Landes? (Romania: rubberstamp or «Sole national legislative authority?»), In: Kraatz, Susanne; von Steinsdorff, Silvia (ed.): *Parlamente und Systemtransformation im postsozialistischen Europa (Parliaments and system transformation in post-Socialist Europe)*, Opladen: Leske und Budrich. pp. 183–206.
- Siani-Davies, Peter (2007): *The Romanian Revolution of December 1989*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press.
- Stoica, Cătălin Augustin 2006: Once upon a Time There was a Big Party: The Social Bases of the Romanian Communist Party (Part II). In: *East European Politics and Societies* 20/3, pp. 447–482.

Links

<http://www.forumsocialroman.ro/index2.php?page=1&lang=en> (Social Forum)

<http://www.guengl.org> (European Left)

<http://www.npcr.ro/> (New Communist Party of Romania)

<http://www.partidulverde.ro/> (Romanian Green Party)

<http://www.pasro.ro/> (Socialist Alliance of Romania)

<http://www.pd.ro/> (Democratic Liberal Party of Romania)

<http://peroman.wordpress.com/> (Romanian Ecological Party)

<http://www.pes.eu/> (European Social Democratic Party)

<http://www.pnl.ro> (National Liberal Party of Romania)

<http://www.ppps.ro/> (People's Party for Social Security)

<http://www.prm.org.ro> (Greater Romania Party)

<http://www.psd.ro/> (Social Democratic Party of Romania)

<http://www.pur.ro/> (Conservative Party)

<http://www.socialistinternational.org/> (Socialist International)

Cem Sey

THE SEARCH FOR UNITY: THE LEFT IN TURKEY

Introduction

The political left in Turkey was smashed in the military coup of 1980. Attempts to organize it anew after 1989 led to the foundation of a large number of small groups and parties which were unable to get along with one another. These already small groups have since split repeatedly, so that an extremely fractured leftist spectrum has emerged. Leftists who were always very aware of the splintered situation have made great efforts to bring these ever smaller groups back together, so as to strengthen them again. Nonetheless, the situation has worsened, and in 2009, the Freedom and Democracy Party (ÖDP – *Özgürlük ve Demokrasi Partisi*), up to that point the most successful example of a leftist fusion project, fell apart. The same year saw the ban on the Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP – *Demokratik Toplum Partisi*); thus, 2009 was a year of failure and defeat. Nonetheless, 2009 also gave many leftists who wanted to make positive use of the crisis the opportunity for new organisations and new groupings.

In the summer of 2009, the ÖDP split, after intraparty disputes. On the one side was a group of members around former Party Chair Mehmet Ufuk Uras, the only socialist member of the Turkish Parliament. Opposing him was the new party leadership, especially the group Revolutionary Solidarity.

Prior to that, in early 2009, Ufuk Uras had been removed from the leadership at an extraordinary Party Congress. While Uras and the members of the Freedom Left (*Özgürlükcü Sol*) shortly thereafter withdrew from the party, and formed the group Freedom Left Movement (*Özgürlükcü Sol Hareketi/ÖSH*), the rest of the ÖDP reorganised itself at the regular Party Congress in June 2009.

A further problem that developed in 2009 was the ban on the Kurdish DTP by the Turkish Constitutional Court on December 11. That removed the well organised and basically leftist oriented Kurdish movement from Parliament, at least for the time being.

The social democratic movement has for years been split. The larger Republican People's Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi/CHP*), which continues to describe itself as social democratic and, since it is the only Turkish member of the Socialist international, is internationally recognised as such, is increasingly oriented toward nationalistic state-authoritarian policies.

The smaller Social Democratic People's Party (*Sosyal Demokrat Halk Partisi/SHP*), by contrast, is politically moving toward the left, and is participating in the foundation of a new left party together with the ÖSH and other left groups and personalities.

The breakup of the ÖDP

For years, fierce debates around political direction and strategy had shaken the ÖDP, a member party in the European Left. In 2008, the conflict over the direction of the party came to a head.

Ufuk Uras, chair of the party until the extraordinary Party Congress, openly complained about «nationalists in the party».⁵²⁶ The Revolutionary Solidarity faction on the other hand criticised him openly at the Congress for exploratory talks with other leftist and Kurdish groups. Uras had conducted these talks with a view of founding an umbrella party in which they might be brought together.

The Ergenekon case, too, raised a serious problem for the party. It involved a secret organisation which had undertaken several coup attempts, and is said to be responsible for a number of unsolved political murders. Dozens of Turkish army officers, police officers, intellectuals lawyers and journalists have already been arrested.⁵²⁷

The free left faction in the ÖDP around Uras demanded a no-compromise position on the case, and supported the actions of the security forces against Ergenekon. The Revolutionary Solidarity faction by contrast refused to take sides in the issue. They saw the Ergenekon trial as a «struggle within the ruling class», and refused to have any part in «this struggle between forces within the system».

With the global financial crisis, which in September 2008 also affected Turkey, the debate over the issue of whether democratisation or anti-capitalism should be the main focus of party work has intensified.

Former ÖDP Vice-Chair Saruhan Oluç stressed that there was one left which considered the struggle «both against nationalism in society at large, and nationalistic tendencies within the left»⁵²⁸ as important, and another left which considered this struggle «unimportant, and under existing conditions sought to emphasize the strug-

526 Tehdit altında olan cumhuriyet değil, 12 Eylül rejimi («Not the Republic but the regime of September 12 is threatened»), Interview with Nuriye Akman, ZAMAN, July 13, 2008.

527 For more information on Ergenekon cf. Cem Sey: ÖDP – a Turkish left party between patriotism and liberalism, in: Birgit Daiber/Cornelia Hildebrandt (eds.): Die Linke in Europa. Analysen linker Parteien und Parteialianzen. rls papers, Berlin 2009, pp. 165–6.

528 Interview with the author, October 27, 2009, in Istanbul.

gle against the governing party, the AKP, with all means». ⁵²⁹ Oluç criticised his former party comrades because, in his view, they «see no difference between the elected government and those circles which want to bring down the government by means of a military coup.» ⁵³⁰

The struggle between the Freedom Left and the Revolutionary Solidarity factions culminated on February 1, 2009 in the above-mentioned removal from power of Uras at the extraordinary Party Congress, when the Revolutionary Solidarity group was able to win the support of a slim majority of the delegates. Uras was replaced by his predecessor Hayri Kozanoğlu, who was assigned to lead the party until the regular Party Congress.

Shortly before that Congress, Uras and the ÖSH members withdrew from the ÖDP. Uras announced his resignation from the party at a press conference in the Turkish parliament, stating: «We would like to point out the urgency of a historic merger of societal strata and citizens who are disadvantaged by the various forms of repression, subordination and exploitation of the ruling system.» He noted that a number of initiatives have been launched in awareness of this need, but had remained unsuccessful, and added: «We have been unable to develop any common approaches to solutions together with our many friends with whom we have for many years stood together shoulder to shoulder in struggle.» The result, he said, was that the ÖDP had split at the seam between different analytical approaches and strategies for solutions, and concluded: «We have seen that there is no way out of this dilemma, and have determined to end this intraparty contest rather than continuing it.» ⁵³¹

As a result, twenty-eight members of the executive committee left the ÖDP – almost half of that body. What effect the split has had on the grassroots of the party is unclear; what is clear is that very large parts of that grassroots also left the party. It can be assumed that both the party organisation and the party base split more or less in half, as a result of which the rump ÖDP faced major organisational challenges.

The ÖDP finally use the scheduled regular 6th Party Congress of June 21/22 to launch the reorganisation of the party, a process that is continuing.

Revolutionary rhetoric

After the split of the ÖDP, relations appeared to improve between the rump ÖDP and two other more extreme left parties, the Communist Party of Turkey (*Türkiye Komünist Partisi*/TKP) and the Labour Party (*Emek Partisi*/EMEP). The key to this new harmony is apparent similarities in the methods of analysis of the problems of the country. All three parties see both socioeconomic factors and class struggle as having key roles in their analysis of the developments in Turkey. For all three parties, the

⁵²⁹ *ibid.*

⁵³⁰ *ibid.*

⁵³¹ Press release by Representative Ufuk Uras, Juni 17, 2009 in the Turkish Parliament.

rhetoric of class struggle is primary. The following still fuzzy picture emerges from the declarations and actions of these parties:

The left groupings which stayed in the ÖDP are closer to the TKP and the EMEP. The ÖSH, which left the ÖDP in June 2009, was never close to them. As a result, these three left parties now join together more often in actions than they did in the past. For instance, in September 2009, they issued a joint call for demonstrations against the meeting of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in Istanbul.⁵³² At the end of November 2009, they published a joint declaration, together with two other smaller revolutionary parties, in which they supported strikes by public employees against virtually any social injustice.⁵³³

In the leftist scene in Turkey, which is unanimous in describing itself as «revolutionary», there is apparently a need for such a process of moving together. The Facebook page «tkp,emep,ödp,dsip,ıkp,dıp,sdp,esp,ehp birleşsin»⁵³⁴ can be seen as an expression of that new need for cooperation. There, various revolutionary groups call for «unification» not only of the members of the ÖDP, the TKP and the EMEP, but also of six other like-minded revolutionary parties.

The ban on the DTP

Shortly before year's end, on December 11, 2009, a leftist party was banned in Turkey – hardly a unique occurrence in recent Turkish history. This time, the victim was the Kurdish DTP, which was banned by a unanimous ruling of the Turkish Constitutional Court. The party chair, Ahmet Türk, and 37 other party activists were banned from all political activity for a period of five years.⁵³⁵ The ruling was not only a severe blow to the Kurdish minority and their political representatives, but also for the entire democratisation process in Turkey. Up to that time, the DTP had operated legally and had been dominated by the Workers' Party of Kurdistan (*Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan/*PKK), which is illegal in Turkey. In recent years, the DTP had increasingly become the parliamentary representative of the majority of the Kurdish population in Turkey. It held 21 seats in the Turkish parliament, enough for full parliamentary group status. Politically, the DTP primarily called for an end of the war between the Turkish army and the PKK, and for equal rights for Kurds in Turkey. The ban by the Constitutional Court, according to a widespread interpretation, was an attempt to push Kurdish politics out of the legal framework of Turkey.

The Turkish left in the past often criticised the DTP, accusing it and its members of only worrying about Kurdish interests, and of neglecting the country's other prob-

532 Cf. <http://english.sol.org.tr/news/turkey/tkp-odp-and-emep-were-taksim-protesting-imf-874>; accessed December 20, 2009.

533 Cf. http://www.odp.org.tr/genel/bizden_detay.php?kod=1505&tipi=2&sube=0; accessed December 20, 2009.

534 <http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=30657906018&v=wall>; accessed on December 20, 2009.

535 For the entire text of the justification of the ban, presented by the Chief Justice of the Turkish Constitutional Court, in Turkish, see <http://www.haberform.com/haber/flas-dtp-kapatildi-38175.htm>; accessed December 20, 2009.

lems, especially such issues as unemployment, which affect both Turks and Kurds. The DTP leadership has always denied these charges, and announced itself demonstratively in favour of cooperation in such issues, but insisted that such nationwide problems could not be solved without a solution to the Kurdish question.⁵³⁶

Until the military coup in 1980, the Kurds in Turkey that supported leftist Turkish parties almost exclusively. After the coup however, the Turkish and Kurdish left went separate ways. After more than 25 years of war, there have in recent years been signs that the left of the two groups of the population are approaching one another again.

However, the rapprochement between the ethnically split camps is slow and difficult. The prejudices on both sides are great, but similar. Thus, each side accuses the other of being «nationalistically motivated». The fact is that there are indeed nationalists on both sides. Another stumbling block to rapprochement is the numerical superiority of the Kurdish left, compared with the vanishingly small number of Turkish leftists, which causes mistrust among the latter. At the same time, according to former DTP chair Ahmet Türk, the lack of success of the Turkish left demotivates the Kurdish left with respect to organisational unity.⁵³⁷

As contradictory as it may appear, the ban on the DTP might open a new opportunity to overcome the division between the left of the two population groups; at least activists on both sides hope that that will be the case. Ahmet Türk, who has been banned from active politics by court order, announced that the remaining representatives of his party had after the ban joined another party, the Party for Freedom and Democracy (BDP – *Baris ve Demokrasi Partisi*), and were continuing their activity there.⁵³⁸ Former ÖDP representative Uras also announced that he had joined the BDP, to ensure its party group status, which was threatened by the fact that two of its representatives had been banned from political activity.⁵³⁹

In the attempts to overcome the split between the Turkish and Kurdish left, the position of the BDP, particularly in the question of violence, could play a key role. For in the view of observers, the unification of Turkish leftists with the Kurdish left could only be practicable if the BDP were to accede to the long-time demands of many Turkish leftists and intellectuals and reject violence as a means of solving problems in political life, thus becoming a party for all citizens and not only for the Kurds.⁵⁴⁰ This was made clear in a declaration on the ban on the DTP by 24 Turkish

536 Ahmet Türk, Interview with the author, November 4, 2009 in Istanbul.

537 *ibid.*

538 Cf. <http://www.superpoligon.com/haber/14385>; accessed on December 20, 2009.

539 Cf. <http://haber.mynet.com/detay/politika/ufuk-uras-bdpye-katiliyor/485802>; accessed Dec. 20, 2009.

540 Cf. BDP Türkiye partisi olabilir mi? (1) (Can the BDP become a party for all of Turkey?), Delil Karakocan, *Günlük*, January 26, 2009, <http://www.gunlukgazetesi.net/haber.asp?haberid=87086>; Kapatılmamalı, yeniden kurulmalı («It should not be banned, it should be founded anew»), Yasemin Congar, *Taraf*, December 10, 2009, <http://taraf.com.tr/makale/8954.htm>, Sen Dogru Bildigini Söyle, Yaz, Yap («Say, write and do what you consider right»), Aydın Engin, *t24*, December 15, 2009, <http://t24.com.tr/content/authors.aspx?article=1325&author=13>.

intellectuals, which was well received by the Turkish and Kurdish public.⁵⁴¹ After this declaration had been positively assessed by former Kurdish DTP representatives as well, there is now reason to believe that the process of rapprochement can be intensified in future.

The Crisis of Social Democracy

Social democracy in Turkey has never corresponded to what has commonly been considered social democracy in Europe. For decades, it was primarily members of the Republican People's Party (CHP), which the founder of the modern state Mustafa Kemal Atatürk had set up in 1923, who were referred to as social democrats, as they had during the 1960s constituted themselves as a social democratic party. From that point on, the CHP, which had previously had a nationalistic authoritarian orientation, took social democracy, which had grown stronger in the West after the Second World War, as its model. The CHP and its then-Labour Minister Bülent Ecevit played an important role in expanding the legal framework for the workers' movement and the unions in Turkey. The law that in 1963 led to the recognition of the right to strike was signed by Ecevit.

But at the beginning of the 1970s, and especially after the growth of other socialist movements in the country, the party gradually moved away from its successful social democratic line, and returned to its old nationalistic authoritarian ideological structures. Especially after Turkey, under the leadership of the Islamist government of the Party for Justice and Development (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*/AKP), initiated negotiations with the EU for membership, and began to implement democratic reforms at a dizzying pace, the CHP began to defend the old state structures of the status quo in the country against the reforms being promoted by Brussels.

This backward development, which was accompanied by a leadership style fixed upon the person of party leader Deniz Baykal, alienated a large number of party members who remained convinced of social democratic ideals. A process of disintegration ensued.

Today, the CHP often presents itself as a loose ally of the fascistic Party of the National Movement (*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi*/MHP). It nips in the bud any attempt to solve the Kurdish question peacefully, and to provide equal rights for the Kurdish population. The CHP supports the Turkish military leadership, which it sees as the guarantee of the state and of the secular system. Moreover, it opposes any reform of the Army. Recently, CHP MP Onur Öymen, the former Turkish ambassador in Germany, even openly called for violence against the Kurdish population, pointing out that during the 1930s, the state had violently suppressed an Alevite-Kurdish rebellion,

541 Çözümün adresi TBMM'dir («The solution is in the Great National Assembly of Turkey»), joint declaration by 24 Turkish intellectuals, December 2009.

and that then too, no one had concerned themselves about the tears of the mothers.⁵⁴² This statement sparked a broad wave of protests within the CHP. Many members, particularly those of Alevite persuasion, resigned from the party in protest.

The other social democratic party, the Social Democratic People's Party (SHP), took the opposite path, and developed into a leftist social democratic party. The resignation from the party of former Vice Premier and Party Chair Murat Karayalçın cleared the way for moving in that direction. Karayalçın then ran for mayor of Ankara on the CHP ticket. Since the ÖSH left the ÖDP, the SHP leadership has also been involved in founding a new left party.

The new left party: The Justice and Democracy Party

After leaving the ÖDP, Ufuk Uras, at a meeting of socialists, left social democrats and leftist activists at the beginning of July 2009, called for the founding of a new leftist party. At this meeting, a contact group was founded which addressed other leftist groups in order to prepare for the foundation of a such a party, to organize further meetings in Anatolian cities, and to discuss the idea of this party.

The contact group was expanded three times, in order to give the initiative as broad a base as possible during the preparatory phase. The group drafted a basic text establishing the foundations of the new left party.

The initiators of this movement, in addition to the ÖSH, where the SHP and the so-called December 10 Movement, which represents a gathering of leftist personalities and trade unionists. One important grouping among the initiators was also a group of independent leftist intellectuals. The new left party was founded on March 9, 2010 under the name Equality and Democracy Party (*Eşitlik ve Demokrasi Partisi*/EDP).

This party founding process sparked interest especially in left intellectual circles, but it nonetheless was not free of tension. Especially one debate kept cropping up: Some initiators advocated the rapid founding of the party by the representatives of the three groups in the contact group, the ÖSH, the December 10 Movement and the SHP. In their view, these groups were to be represented equally in party bodies. By contrast, other initiators, especially intellectuals participating as individuals, wanted to await the results of a nationwide debate. They rejected the formation of party bodies by the participating groups, arguing that under such conditions, there would not be a «new» party. During the founding period, the decisions were consistently in favour of the latter approach.

In the Turkish media, the new initiative was largely assessed as positive, which observers interpreted as a diffuse attitude of hopefulness in society. However, the ÖDP criticised the process of party founding, and especially the role of the ÖSH in the

⁵⁴² Speech by Onur Öymen in the Turkish parliament, during the debate over the planned government reforms for solving the Kurdish question, November 10, 2009, Ankara, <http://www.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanak/donem23/yil4/bas/b015m.htm>.

process. The current chair of the ÖDP, Alper Taş, expressed this criticism in his speech to the delegates of the 6th Party Congress as follows: «It may be that this country needs a social democratic party. But can it really be the task of socialists to found such a party?»⁵⁴³ However, there was also criticism from other leftist groupings. For instance, their activists accuse the new initiative of betraying socialism by uniting with social democrats. For example, the well-known Trotskyite author Sungur Savran pointed out that he had formerly attacked left liberalism, which in his view, characterised the ÖSH, as bourgeois socialism. Savran criticised the new project as a «gathering of social democrats»⁵⁴⁴ Nonetheless, the founding of the new party was not to be in stopped. Ziya Halis, who had been minister of labour from June 18 through October 15, 1995, assumed the leadership of the party.

Differences in analysis

After the most recent upheavals in the left party landscape in Turkey, we can identify three different approaches within that landscape, which can be differentiated as follows:

First, there is a block of «anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist groups», which believes in the need to sharpen anti-imperialist struggles; its most important task is the organisation of an internationalist party of the working people in the service of the class struggle.

Second, there is the EEP. The new party would like to form a «new left political centre» with «true social justice» as its main goal, and strong rejection of both nationalism and conservatism; moreover it would demand democracy for all and struggle for a «diverse, free and democratic country».⁵⁴⁵

In addition, there is a strong Kurdish movement which is still on the margins of legality, partially through no fault of its own. It continues to unabashedly place the struggle for equal rights for Kurds in Turkey in the centre of its political goals.

The Anti-Capitalist Bloc

The best known and most influential representatives of the Anti-Capitalist Bloc are the ÖDP, the TKP and the EMEP: a large number of other parties and groups can also be considered part of this block. The activists in this tendency see their primary task as being to organize the struggle of the working people against the capitalist system. They generally consider their attitude on this issue «revolutionary». Especially the ÖDP, the TKP and the EMEP stand in general elections, and thus participate in the democratic electoral process, even though they do not consider the citizens' trip to

543 <http://www.tumgazeteler.com/?a=5230065>; accessed on December 20, 2009.

544 <http://incebay.blogcu.com/yeni-odp-nin-turnusol-kagidi-ab-ile-muzakere-mi-mucadele-mi/5803928> (Our negotiations or the struggle against the EU the litmus test of the new ÖDP); accessed on December 20, 2009.

545 Yeni bir sol merkez için önemli bir adım (An important step for new left centre), Basic Text of the Contact Group, September 25, 2009.

the polls, or the resulting parliamentary work, as being decisive. Rather, these parties stressed the democratic character of extra-parliamentary opposition, which in their view is the real theatre of anti-capitalist struggle.⁵⁴⁶

They see the struggle for democracy, for equal rights for the Kurdish population, and against coup d'états and state repression as subordinate to the struggle against the capitalist system, albeit as an important part of that struggle.⁵⁴⁷ The ÖDP, in its final document of the 6th Party Congress, stated that it «consistently supports the struggle for justice and democracy for the poor».⁵⁴⁸

For example, numerous actors within this «bloc» saw the Ergenekon trial against officers of the Turkish army, which shook the Turkish public, as a «struggle within the ruling class», as the daily newspaper *Birgün*, which is close to the ÖDP, headlined two years ago.⁵⁴⁹ While the leading actors generally voiced support for democracy, they refuse to take a position in the current debate around the issue of democracy in Turkey.

Some organisations, such as the TKD, even go so far in their societal analysis as to say that the struggle of the «reactionary government» – by which they mean the AKP-led government – against the power of the army is a «plot by US imperialism».⁵⁵⁰

The ÖDP too seems to have positioned itself differently on this question. Although today's ÖDP leaders in the past called for strict neutrality on the democracy issue, party chair Alper Taş, in an interview with the daily newspaper *Cumhuriyet*, seemed to lean against the government, saying: «While in the past, state institutions traditionally operated outside the framework of the law, the AKP government is restructuring the state so as to create an even cleverer regime of repression»; he also refers to an «AKP state».⁵⁵¹

For representatives of the new ÖDP, the removal of the AKP government is the most urgent basic task. In the current debates around democracy in Turkey, these representatives see traps that the AKP is consciously setting: «Any time the opposition of the working and repressed people against the AKP grows stronger, either a trial against the AKP is initiated with the goal of banning it, or else new documents are dug up [which implicate the Army]. Such antidemocratic actions are useful for the AKP. The democratic struggle of the working and oppressed people will overthrow the AKP.»⁵⁵²

546 Cf. Biz toplumun vicdaniyiz (We are the conscience of society), Interview with ÖDP chair Alper Tas, July 6, 2009, http://www.odp.org.tr/genel/bizden_detay.php?kod=986&tipi=5&sube=0.

547 «Kürt Sorunu»na dair (On the «Kurdish question»), TKP Press release on the ban of the DTP, December 11, 2009, and Durun... Durdurun! Kardesligimize asla zarar vermeyin, verdirtmeyin! («Put an end to it! Stop! Don't damage our brotherhood, don't let others damage our brotherhood!»), TKP Press release on the ban of the DTP, December 15, 2009.

548 Final communiqué of the Sixth Regular Party Congress, June 27, 2009, http://www.odp.org.tr/genel/bizden_detay.php?kod=968&tipi=2&sube=0; accessed on December 20, 2009.

549 *Birgün*, March 22, 2008.

550 Halkimiza ve Türkiye soluna cagrimizdir (Appeal to our people and to the left in Turkey), TKP Press release, January 8, 2009.

551 Baskı rejimine doğru (Toward a repressive regime), Alper Taş in an interview with Tarkan Temur, *Cumhuriyet*, November 19, 2009.

552 *ibid.*

The Equality and Democracy Party (EDP)

The initiators of this new left party have compiled their concepts in the basic paper. Accordingly, «Only an egalitarian movement for freedom which resists the pro-status quo, nationalistic, militaristic, conservative and market-oriented forces, and struggles with broad societal support against the dark forces which are choking society», will be able to lead Turkey to a democracy «in which no one suffers from hunger or homelessness, in which no one has to conceal his religious or ethnic identity, in which no identity is forced upon anyone, in which justice and freedom can actually be breathed, and problems freely discuss, and in which the country lives in peace with its own history and with all its neighbours.»⁵⁵³

The activists of this group announced that liberal or statist versions of capitalism «cannot be accepted as the fate of humankind,» and that «with a new alternative based on participation, partnership and voluntary initiative, we can liberate ourselves» from this intractable situation.⁵⁵⁴

EGP supporters consider the struggle for democracy and social justice as being certainly of equal value with the task of replacing the current Turkish Constitution, a remnant of the military coup of 1980, with a new democratic constitution.

They advocate equal rights for Kurds and the normalisation of relations between Turkey and Armenia, and have consistently opposed the domination by the military of social and political life. But merely the fact that these problems are not explicitly identified in the basic text could be an indication that the authors either fear rejection by broad segments of the population, or are themselves not united on the issues. By contrast, the new left party clearly states its goal of «founding a social and democratic republic».⁵⁵⁵

The DTP, the BDP and the Kurdish movement

Since the former DTP representatives joined the BDP, Turkish commentators have often raised the question of whether the BDP might not be a party relevant for the entire country. That implicitly raises the criticism that the DTP was not a party which worried about the problems of the entire country, but only about the problems of the Kurdish population. Secondly, those who raise such questions would like to know from BDP representatives whether they are prepared to address the interests of the Turks, too. In its programme, the BDP does not address this question directly; it does however state explicitly that the party «believes ... that in the Democratic Republic, in a common democratic country,» and that in spite of all differences, cohabitation is possible.⁵⁵⁶ However, it sees the democratisation of Turkey as the precondition for

553 Basic Text, op. cit.

554 *ibid.*

555 *ibid.*

556 Programme of the Freedom and Democracy Party, <http://www.bdp.org.tr/hakkimizda/program.html>.

the solution to other problems: «Turkey ... urgently needs a comprehensive and true democratisation. Only then will Turkey be able to become a modern and honourable country on this earth.»⁵⁵⁷

Today, indications as to the possible orientation of the party have come primarily from the declarations by Ahmet Türk.⁵⁵⁸ Regarding the question of whether leftist Kurdish politics could also raise the common problems of Turks and Kurds, Türk responded: «The Kurdish question is a problem of Turkey. It is the most important problem.» Certainly he conceded, there were other problems too, which required solutions, but the reality was in his view, and that «the Kurdish question is the most important roadblock to transformation and change in the country. Without a solution to the Kurdish question, there will neither be change nor will any transformation be successful.» According to Türk, the Kurdish question can only be solved if both peoples stand together. Now that the existence of the Kurds has long since stopped being denied in the Turkish public sphere, as it was officially until the mid-'90s, «we have now arrived at a phase of solving this problem.» In order both to fulfil the demands of the Kurds and to change Turkey, the common struggle of all democratic forces is necessary. We fear that nationalism and ethnic conflicts will increase if the Kurds are left alone.»

Prior to the official ban on the DTP, Ahmet Türk had suggested bringing the Turkish and Kurdish left together in the DTP. At that time, he had said, «The DTP is willing to incorporate the Turkish left. Maybe we can transform this party, which is now an experienced party, which also has done parliamentary work, into a party in which the left can come together. That is more realistic than waiting for the Turkish left to unite itself.»

At the same time, Ahmet Türk pointed to the basic lack of trust between the left of the two ethnic groups. «Some accuse us of being nationalists only because we emphasize the Kurdish question, i.e., the just demands of the Kurds. When a nation-state was created in Anatolia, the Kurds and other peoples were seen as a potential danger. Let's be realistic: this mentality is deeply ingrained in the mentality of the left as well. Even if it isn't apparent at first glance, it is deeply rooted in people's minds,» said Türk, and added: «If the Turkish left distances itself from the Kurds, and is not prepared to struggle with them for the solution to the most important problem of Turkey, then we will be unable to come together. Only a common approach will save us from our own narrow-mindedness, and from an attitude which will cause us to slide into nationalism. For isolation leads to emotionalism. Then we will get a Kurdish movement that sees itself as having been left alone. And then it too will begin to distance itself from the revolutionary and democratic potential of Turkey.»

557 *ibid.*

558 All quotes from Ahmet Türk, Interview with the author, November 4, 2009 in Istanbul.

The structure of the base

Until the military coup of 1980, Turkey had clearly structured left organisations, many of which were located largely in the student circles at Turkish colleges. On the other hand, pro-Soviet parties such as the Communist Party of Turkey (TKP) had strong support from workers. With such groupings as a leftist policemen's association POL-DER and the leftist teachers' association TÖB-DER, the socialist revolutionary left was even organised within the security forces and the teaching establishment.

In view of the societal omnipresence of the organised left, the military, once in power in Ankara, pursued the goal of destroying leftist structures, which they in fact succeeded in doing within only a few years. With executions, murders, mass arrests, torture and intimidation, they largely succeeded in destroying the Turkish left, or driving it into exile. In the years since the coup, a re-organisation by Turkish leftists has largely been prevented by media censorship, slander campaigns, misinformation and controlled Islamisation.

The Turkish left was in an increasingly hopeless position once the war against the Kurds began in 1984. This accelerated the retreat of the persecuted Kurds, especially of the Kurdish left. They formed their own organisations, and increasingly turned away from the Turkish left.

Only in 1990, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, did the Turkish state relax its control of leftist groups in the country, although it has not abandoned it entirely to this day. This decades-long persecution and suppression partially explains why the leftist groups in Turkey have had such a difficult time organizing a new beginning, even to the present day. The movement quite simply lacks any implementable perspectives.

The membership structure

The parties and groups which have reconstituted themselves so far essentially come from two societal groups: old leftists socialised during the period prior to 1980, and the politicised youth.

Establishing a prototype of current leftist activists is not yet possible, for the organisations themselves refuse, for understandable security reasons, to provide any information about their structures or members. There are virtually no reliable statements regarding membership figures, either at the local level or nationwide. The author has been able to gather the following information from conversations with leading activists:

The anti-capitalist block around the ÖDP, the TKP and the EMEP consists largely of young people and young adults. It is notable that in recent years, these organisations have largely been taken over by young cadre who had not experienced the leftist movement prior to 1980. By contrast, the activists of the EDP have been recruited largely from the middle class and its urban intellectual circles.

While links with the unions do generally exist, this does not mean that the leftist organisations have been successful to any significant degree in addressing the working class. Rather, during the years of the dictatorship and the ensuing authoritarian

governments, nationalist, religious and/or right-wing conservative unions were able to establish themselves among working people.

Only the Public Service Workers' Union (KESK – *Kamu Emekçileri Sendikası*), established in 1995, which was from the beginning supported by socialist revolutionary groups, could be considered a union of predominantly leftist orientation. By contrast, the legendary pre-coup Confederation of Revolutionary Workers' Unions (*Devrimci İşçi Sebdikaları Konfederasyonu/DISK*) still today suffers from the after-effects of what was inflicted upon it during the '80s and '90s. The majority of ITS activists were arrested in 1980, and between 1981 and 1991, 1477 were put on trial. For 78 of them, the state's attorney demanded the death penalty. The trial ended on July 16, 1991, after 10 years and 10 months, with an acquittal.

The potential of the left in Turkey

The weakness of the left in Turkey does not, strictly speaking, reflect the economic and social conditions of the country, which would under other political circumstances be advantageous for the strengthening of leftist parties.

In the parliamentary election of July 22, 2007, leftist candidates largely stood as independents, so as to be able to circumvent the 10 % threshold. The result was a major success, by Turkish standards. For the first time since the 1960s, a socialist managed to get elected to Parliament with the support of the DTP. Mehmet Ufuk Uras, who was at that time still chair of the ÖDP, won the first-past-the-post race in his constituency.

Other DTP candidates too stood as independents, again to circumvent the 10 % threshold stipulated for parties. Ultimately, 22 of them were elected to Parliament, and immediately rejoined the DTP, so that the party was able to achieve parliamentary group status.

Since most successful candidates had run as independents, but generally had the support of leftist groups and parties, it is impossible to ascertain the exact level of support for each leftist party. Nonetheless, the votes cast for the parties as such can be used as guidelines: Here, the ÖDP won 52,195 votes, or 0.15 %; the TKP, 80,092 votes, or 0.23 %; and the EMEP, 26,556 votes, or 0.08 %. Electoral analysts assume that most of the votes cast for independent candidates were in fact for the DTP. Accordingly, its share of the vote must be considered to be around 5 %.⁵⁵⁹ Uras, at that time the chair of the ÖDP, won 81,486 constituency votes, which was more than his party won altogether nationwide.⁵⁶⁰

The results which the parties received in the local elections of March 29, 2009 for city councils are better suited for ascertaining the levels of voter support. In that election, the ÖDP received 0.16 %, the TKP 0.18 % and the EMEP 0.11 %.⁵⁶¹ The only

559 Cf. <http://www.turkiyeseccimleri.com/secim-sonuclari.php>.

560 Cf. <http://www.ysk.gov.tr/ysk/Sonuc/istanbul1.htm>.

561 Cf. <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/yerelecim2009>.

socialist mayor elected in that election was Mithat Nehir in Samandağ district in the southern part of the country, on the Syrian border. The DTP won an overall success in the Kurdish dominated southeast of the country, winning 5.68 % of the vote, and electing eight provincial mayors and 50 district mayors.⁵⁶²

Polls taken in 2010 show that the three Turkish-left parties of the anti-capitalist block still have no significant support. According to the results obtained in the «Survey on society and politics in, Turkey, fourth quarter», of December 2009, responses to the question «Who would you vote for if the election were this week?», the ruling AKP got 36.5 %, the CHP 22.9 %, and the fascist MHP 18.8 % of the vote. They were followed by the new Kurdish party, the BDP, with 7.1 % of the vote. Since the above-named Turkish leftist parties have very little support, they disappear into the «others» column in such surveys, which in this case accounted for 4.9 % of the vote, which also included non-left parties.⁵⁶³

Ahmet Türk, the former chair of the DTP, who is under a ban on political activity, is the fifth most popular politician in the country, with the support of 5.4 % of respondents. Uras scores better here than the ÖDP overall, which he led until the end of 2008, winning 1.6 %, for ninth place.⁵⁶⁴ In the same survey, 3.8 % of those polled identified themselves as social democrats, 3.5 % as socialists and 0.2 % as communists.⁵⁶⁵

The survey shows that the Turkish population is primarily interested in improving the economic situation of the country, with 34.4 % identifying the economic crisis as the most important issue of 2009; 4.6 % identified the «democratic opening», with which the Erdogan government is trying to solve the Kurdish question, and 14.5 % said that the ban on the DTP was the issue of the year.⁵⁶⁶

An older survey, of September 2009, the «Survey on Political Tendencies and Expectations in Turkey», shows the problems which concerned Turks the most. There, 66.7 % of those questioned saw unemployment of the most urgent problem. Economic concerns and low purchase power followed with 50.2 %. Security problems ranked in third place, with 24.8 %.⁵⁶⁷

These figures show that classical leftist issues continue to be important in Turkey. Economic and social justice seem to be the issues which the citizens of the country identify first and foremost. Nonetheless, left parties are not successful in profiting

562 Cf. <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/yerelsecim2009>.

563 Cf. http://www.genar.com.tr/files/2009_TURKIYE_TOPLUM_VE_SIYASET_4_CEYREK_VE_ENLER_ARASTIRMASI.pdf, GENAR (Survey on society and politics of Turkey, and the superlatives), 2009, 4th Quarter, Istanbul, December 2009, p. 5.

564 *ibid.*, p. 29.

565 *ibid.*, p. 18.

566 *ibid.*, p. 15.

567 Cf. *Türkiye Siyasi Eğilimler ve Beklentiler Arastirmasi* (Survey on Political Tendencies and Expectations in Turkey), SONAR, September 2009, Istanbul, http://www.sonararastirma.com/rapor/Siyasi_Egilimler_Eylül_2009-SONAR.pdf, p. 23.

from this mood. The major reason for this is evidently the policy of the AKP, which is seen as successful. For the same surveys also show clearly that it is especially the social policy of the Islamist AKP which enjoys the greatest support in the population.

In the latter survey, the percentage of those who believe that the economic condition of the country will get worse was only 20.6%, while 30.8% believed that it will get better.⁵⁶⁸

In the GENAR survey in December 2009, the AKP was the unchallenged leader in terms of social policy, with 52.2% of those surveyed stating that the AKP government's social policies had been successful. Accordingly, social policy is not only the field on which the Islamist government score is best, but also the only one in which it receives good marks from more than half of those surveyed.⁵⁶⁹

Is fusion the solution?

Most leftists in Turkey know and accept their political weakness. Now however, the pessimism of past years has resulted in a renewed search for strategies for overcoming these weaknesses. Notably, leftists assume that only an organisational fusion of the left can bring a turnaround.⁵⁷⁰ What is remarkable is that activists refer to Germany in this respect, to the fusion of the German left into the Left Party, and to that party's electoral results. They frequently seek to copy the strategies and policies of the Left Party in Germany, which they consider a successful model.

But a glance at the recent history of Turkey shows that numerous attempts to merge various leftist groups and parties have been reasonably assured of failure. Nor do the current attempts hold any promise for greater success.

Tanıl Bora, a leftist publisher who is knowledgeable about the scene, believes that the move toward a united party is a mistake. He doubts that the old left «will ever succeed in cooperating within a single organisation.» Young leftists too, Bora believes, are oriented too strongly toward old unity ideals, be they pro-Soviet parties or extra-parliamentary movements, to be able to come together successfully. In the end, Bora recommends: «Maybe we should start by just accepting this incapacity, and try to work together only on a single-issue or single-action basis.»⁵⁷¹

568 *ibid.*, p. 25

569 Cf. GENAR, *op. cit.*

570 Cf. Erol Katircioglu, Solun birliği üzerine, (On the unity of the left), Radikal March 17, 2007, <http://www.radikal.com.tr/Default.aspx?aType=RadikalYazarYazisi&ArticleID=808819>; Hüseyin Cakir, Cagdas Demokratik Yeni Bir Sola Dogru (Toward a modern democratic left), Sansürsüz, November 29, 2009, <http://www.sansursuz.com/makale/cagdas-demokratik-yeni-bir-sola-dogru>.

571 Conversation with the author on November 3, 2009 in Ankara.

Julian Marioulas

THE AKEL IN CYPRUS

Introduction: Social structure and milieu of the Party

The Progressive Party of the Working People (Anorthotiko Komma Ergazomenou Laou/AKEL) is the largest party in Cyprus, in terms of both to membership figures and to electoral results. By professional background, its activists are predominately workers and white-collar employees. Of the 1336 delegates at the last Party Congress in November 2005, 850 had such a background; 26 were farmers, 201 were self-employed, 190 were pensioners, eleven were students, 57 were housewives and only one was unemployed. Women are underrepresented in the party and its bodies. With 204 delegates, they accounted for only 20% of delegates to that Congress, and for only 15 of the 105 members of the Central Committee. In 2005, a woman was elected to the Politburo for the first time. Their share of the overall membership is higher, since in many left-wing families, each generation joins a party. Due to traditional gender roles, however, it is usually men who are politically active. Many functionaries are critical of this situation, since the AKEL has, since its founding in 1941, supported women's rights. Its women's organisation Pogo, which has been organisationally autonomous since 1996, provides a structure that promises greater involvement. The association has more than 10,000 members, of whom only a small number are active in the party. Women's quotas are not an issue in the AKEL.

Very few people of non-Cypriot nationality join the AKEL. Although Cyprus has a high number of immigrant labourers, most of them only stay for a few years, since their permits to stay are limited. No attempts are made to integrate them into society, and there is as yet no second generation of immigrants. The AKEL's efforts with respect to immigrants are in the area of trade union organizing. Party memberships are generally very long-lasting. There is no problem recruiting young people, but most functionaries of the party are, as is usual in European parties, 40 or older. Among the delegates, the distribution at the last Party Congress was as follows: 85 were 30 years

old or younger, 196 were aged 31 through 40, 415 were 41 through 50, 313 were 51 through 60, and 327 were 61 years old or older. There was a wide range of educational qualifications, with 304 delegates having primary school leaving certificates, 505 having lower-secondary leaving certificates, and 527 having the apolytirion (A-level certificates).

The position of the party in society and the political system

In the last two elections, the AKEL entered Parliament as the largest party. Along with the conservative Democratic Rally (DISY), it is one of the two political blocs which have dominated the island's life since the Turkish invasion. Its roots in Cyprus go back to the 1940s, when the AKEL opened itself up as a mass party. Since then, it has been able to count on the firm support of some one third of the Cypriot population. It is not the party of a constituency or a sub-culture; its supporters can be found in all social classes, even if its support is greatest among the wage dependent sector. The Cypriot middle class, which includes self-employed white-collar employees and scientific staff, supports these two political camps in approx. equal measure. The self-employed, especially shop owners, belong to the core support of the AKEL. The DISY is stronger among the employees of the extensive public sector of Cyprus, which is due to the fact that during the 1960s, communists hardly ever received jobs there. This policy still has its after-effects today, since open jobs are often filled on the basis of connections.

The AKEL is also supported by people who, while not socialised in the left, support the communist position in the Cyprus conflict. This was shown clearly in the presidential election of 2008, in which the solution of the conflict was central, since foreign-policy and negotiations with the North of the island are the responsibility of the president. The party's candidate, Demetris Christophias, was elected with 53.4% in the runoff election. Moreover, the AKEL is the only party which also has supporters in North Cyprus.

There is an urban-rural divide, but it is not very great. In many villages, the AKEL is not the strongest party, but it is strongly rooted in the suburbs of the cities. The historic reason for this is that many workers work during the day in one of the few industrial centres of the island, and return to their families in the villages at night.

Within the Cypriot left, the party sees itself as the political guide. Thus, it sets the stipulations for the so-called People's Movement (*Laiko Kinima*), and for the associations and organisations united within it, which incorporate broad segments of society. That includes first and foremost the Pan-Cypriot Labour Federation (PEO – *Pankypria Ergatiki Omospondia*), the Confederation of unions, founded in 1941, which, with 80,000 members, is the largest labour organisation. In addition to the PEO, there are leftist associations within the separate trade unions.

The United Democratic Youth Organisation (EDON), which is close to the AKEL, is far and away the largest political youth group in Cyprus. It is more like a mass organisation in terms of its activity than are other youth associations. The EDON's

actions are even oriented toward toddlers, and are conceived as promoting such values as solidarity and tolerance. It organizes such events as expeditions, camps and sports competitions, but also music, theatre and dance groups. In elections for school councils, EDON representatives always receive an absolute majority, and at the universities, they win over 40 % in elections. AKEL maintains a union for peasants and farmers, the TKA, with over 10,000 members and, as stated above, is close to the women's association Pogo. In Cyprus, there are no social movements or left-wing organisations worthy of mention which do not have their origins in the AKEL.

There are representatives of the left, either of the AKEL or of associations close to it, in virtually every village. Many institutions of everyday life see themselves as leftist, be they sports clubs, cafés or entire factories. Their members are also active in local church organisations, which are responsible for administering the local church assets. The party also issues recommendations for elections for church offices, to which the public has restricted rights of codetermination. Currently, one local party chapter is headed by a priest. Nonetheless, the Orthodox Church is generally much closer to the conservatives.

Support for intellectuals and artists is one of the foundations upon which the existing cultural hegemony of the left in Cyprus is based. Many well-known figures in the arts scene came out of local left cultural associations, where theatre, poetry, painting and music are presented to the public, and taught. The central committee has a Cultural Bureau, which proved its usefulness prior to the 2008 elections by mobilizing support among artists for Demetris Christophias' candidacy for president. The relationship between the party and intellectuals is therefore seen as advantageous to both sides.

The strategic orientation of the party

In order to understand the situation of the Communist Party at the head of the government of Cyprus, it is necessary to look at the island's history. The AKEL has since its foundation in 1941 seen itself as anti-colonialist. The liberation of the island from British rule required cooperation with other political groupings, and shifting alliances. Between 1931 and 1941, Cypriot communists operated underground. During the Second World War, the AKEL, which had just been legalised, called on the people to join the British Army in order to fight for the liberation of Greece, in the hope that the British would show appreciation for this after the war. When the colonial regime stayed in power, the AKEL led a peaceful but determined resistance movement for a decade. During this period, it called for an independent Cyprus, and the incorporation of Greeks and Turks into the new state. In 1949, Ezekias Ioannou took over the party leadership and kept it until his death in 1988. Under his control, the party remained loyal to the USSR and its conception of socialism.

In 1955, the nationalist Greek forces, organised by George Grivas in the National Organisation of Cypriot Fighters (Eoka) started an armed uprising to achieve the

annexation of Cyprus to Greece. The colonial authorities used the destabilised situation to ban the AKEL, although it supported neither the means nor the ends of the Eoka. Four years later, the party was legalised in the context of the Zürich-London Agreement, which regulated the transition to independence, which the Communists welcomed. On the other hand, they objected to the retention of British military bases, to the semi-presidential governing system, and to the rights of intervention by the United Kingdom, Greece and Turkey. In the first presidential election, the AKEL initiated the policy of supporting the most progressive of the «bourgeois» candidates; until 1974, that meant Archbishop Makarios. Three years after independence, ethnic conflict broke out, and the Turks withdrew from the common government.

After the coup in Greece in 1967, the regime of the colonels supported the establishment of a second paramilitary organisation, the so-called Eoka-B, in Cyprus, which started to murder communists; in the north of the island, nationalist Turks did the same. In 1974, the situation escalated, and the Eoka launched a coup; five days later, Turkey invaded the island. Thousands of AKEL members were interned by the fascist regime and many died in the course of the fighting. Although a democratic regime was re-established in the southern part of the island, the Turkish army did not withdraw, and with its occupation implemented the division of the island.

These historical developments of the party led to the emergence of a number of characteristics the effects of which are still being felt. The subculture of the party was shaped by the labour and liberation struggles. From the outset, the leadership based itself on the formation of class consciousness among the working people. The persecution of its leadership, and the bans of the party, led to the maintenance of strict democratic centralism, all the way to a personality cult, in order to ensure discipline among members. The battle against British colonialism was the driving factor of the party. They defined their anti-imperialism according to Soviet terminology, but also often formed alliances with other «progressive» forces on the island in order to achieve, and later protect, independence. The USSR accepted this course, since it could not hope for any systemic change, due to the complicated situation. Even as the party fought against the Greek nationalism of the right, it could not, due to the fact that the majority of its voters were Greeks, ever deviate from the majority opinion too strongly on this issue, and accordingly adapted its own concept of Cypriot nationalism to this situation.

The AKEL gained entry into the governing coalition relatively late, due to reservations on the part of the other parties, but also due to its own strategic considerations. In 2004, it for the first time made support for a presidential candidacy of the moderate National Democratic Party (DIKO) conditional upon government participation, and was successful. In 2007, when President Tassos Papadopoulos announced his intention to run for re-election, in violation of the joint agreement, Christofias announced his candidacy as well, thus becoming the first presidential candidate of his party. Until February 2010, a coalition with the DIKO and the Social Democratic

Movement (EDEK) was formed. The main difficulties in the government involved the evaluation of the question of how a solution to the Cyprus conflict should look, which was also the reason for the disagreement with the EDEK. There are major differences with the parties of the right on economic and social policies, as well as the historical continuity, as the AKEL perceives it, between the EOKA and the nationalists represented by the DISY.

The immediate goal of the AKEL is a peaceful solution to the Cypriot conflict. It also sees its role as the representation of the interests of the working people; however, the government programme of the president is within the framework of capitalism. Nonetheless, during the past five years, the AKEL has remained a party which, due to its strong position, has not been forced to enter into any compromises which might have called its identity into question. A change of system is seen as possible only within the context of a united Cyprus, and with the precondition that other European countries also abandon capitalism.

In government, the AKEL saw itself directly confronted with the effects of the global financial crisis. Although the domestic banking sector was hardly affected by it, since it had been managed cautiously and boasted a high rate of coverage. There was a major drop in tourism and in the construction sector, both of which are dependent on foreign inflow of money. This was countered by government measures to the tune of €300 million, or equal to more than 1.5% of the GDP. Of that, €51 million was used as subsidies for the tourist industry, while €245 million was earmarked for government construction projects, primarily social housing and for loans for low-income families. This had a dual effect: first, it stimulated the economy, and second it provided low-cost housing.

The standard of living on the island is high, and the financial leeway is large enough that an increase in social spending can solve the most urgent problems. The government has set itself the goal of eliminating poverty in Cyprus by 2012, which would mean that nobody would have to make do on less than €420 per month. In the medium term, the AKEL is considering restructuring the health sector to increase the quality of public care, and make equal treatment possible regardless of income. However, the government does not yet have any concrete plans to this end. Other urgent problems which were addressed during the first year in government involve Cypriot peculiarities: the shortage of water, and overcoming nationalist tendencies in education.

The AKEL sees it as its achievement that neo-liberalism has never had any great influence in Cyprus. Even during the 1990s, when the DISY ruled under President Glafkos Klerides, the PEO was able to protect social achievements. The fact that the conservative labour union association was at that time not willing to act simply as a tool of the president was very helpful in this regard. The AKEL regularly publishes analyses of the current situation of capitalism, with a strong critique, especially of the United States, and is in solidarity with leftist movements worldwide. Communist

symbolism at party congresses and in public is fairly subdued by comparison with the 1980s, but it is still present.

Leftist ideas for European policy

The ups and downs during the AKEL's history have turned it into a party which is unique on the European left. The question arises as to whether this is solely due to the particular situation in Cyprus, or whether the AKEL has in addition gathered any experience of a generally applicable nature which might help the European left to strengthen its profile in future.

The decision to support Cyprus' membership in the EU was taken at the 18th Party Congress in 1995 after a long internal debate, and was by no means unanimous; with some one third of the delegates voting against it. That had been preceded by a realistic reorientation of the party, since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the loss of importance of the Non-Aligned Movement meant the loss of important allies. Politburo member Stavros Evangorou described the situation in retrospect as follows: «The EU was our only potential ally for a solution to the Cypriot problem. Some other communist parties told us that the EU was the Europe of capital. Okay, I know that it's the Europe of capital. But show me something different, something better. There is none. There's nothing better.»⁵⁷² This attitude is dominant within the party today. Reality demands cooperation with the EU; hence, the AKEL is very cooperative in most political fields. It sharply attacked the EU reform treaty, and voted against it in Parliament, but only because a majority for the treaty was guaranteed by its coalition partners and by the conservative opposition. While the AKEL does work toward shaping a «different Europe» within the limits of its possibilities, these limits are very narrow, so that its main emphasis of action is ensuring that the EU involve itself more strongly in solving the Cypriot conflict and thus exert greater pressure on Turkey. Due to the gentler critique of capitalism raised by the social forums and by ATTAC, the AKEL does not see the alternative-globalisation movement as its primary ally. The AKEL differs most strongly from the European left in its historic assessment of communism and the state socialist systems. But even if it does maintain close ties to such traditionalist communist parties as the Greek KKE and the Cuban CP, its current political projects, even outside of government, place it much closer to those reformed parties.

Identity and organisation

The AKEL sees itself as a representative of the working people, and within the European left, it is certainly the party which satisfies this claim the most fully. The party's basic concept of socialism goes back to 1990, and includes a positive assessment of Marxism-Leninism. A number of members, including members of Parliament, left

572 cf. Dunphy/Bale, p.298

the AKEL at that time, without however being able to establish themselves in other parties successfully over the long term. Since then, the party has not faced the necessity of any theoretical reorientation. For example, the last Party Congress in 2005 maintained the terminology of Marxism-Leninism and scientific socialism as a method. Unlike the Greek KKE, the current development of capitalism is however not seen in terms of Lenin's theory of imperialism. Moreover, members are not required to undergo any ideological training. Since the 1990s, the party has primarily presented itself under the banner «AKEL – the Left – New Forces», with the goal of addressing people who were not communists, and winning them to the party.

However, a sectarian approach to theory was never dominant within the AKEL. The judgement of Christopher Brewin of Keele University describes the core of the party's identity: the maintenance of communist identity, the celebration of May Day, and the October Revolution are not merely nostalgic clinging to past times, nor do they serve the purpose of holding onto traditional voters by continuing to promise the dream of a better future – although both factors are also present. Primarily, upholding the continuity of communism has a fundamental, even existential function of giving the party a pan-Cypriot, rather than a Hellenocentric orientation.

The statutes of the AKEL correspond to those of a cadre party. The most important organ is the Party Congress, which meets every five years, and makes programmatic and personnel related decisions. It elects the central committee, with the base organisations having the right to nominate candidates, but the drafting of the list is carried out by a separate body. The Central Committee elects the Politburo and the secretary general from among its own members; they run the party between Party Congresses. Additional Party Congresses are often convened prior to parliamentary elections, or if personnel issues have to be addressed, as in 2008, when Dimitris Christofias resigned from the party chair after 20 years, due to his responsibilities as president.

Internal factions are officially banned. However, since party members come from various milieus, they represent a broad spectrum of the political left. Day-to-day debate in the party is shaped both by fervent communists and pragmatic technocrats. Among the membership, the Cypriot problem is considerably more important than social or financial policy. The party leadership has made great efforts to win support for the president's engagement in negotiations with the Turkish side, which is anything but uncontroversial; in line with the demands of the party base. Journals and other publications of the AKEL provide the primary space for theoretical debate and critique.

Generally, it is assumed that a consensus will be found on key issues between Party Congresses, so that the delegates will only have to ratify the proposals presented to them. But unanimity is not always assured, even in the highest bodies. In the last election for secretary general, Andros Kyprianou edged out Nikos Katsouridis by 57 votes to 48 on the Central Committee.

It is not expected that there will be any major shakeups in the AKEL in coming years.

Perspectives for the future

After the election of Derviş Eroğlu, a member of the right-wing National Unity Party (UBP), as president of Turkish North Cyprus, any immediate perspective for a united Cyprus, and an end to the Turkish occupation, has ended. AKEL will however, no later than at the end of the current term, assess whether its 80-year anti-colonial struggle has been successfully concluded or not. President Christofias has already made his candidacy for re-election conditional upon that. The issue is further complicated by Turkish claims to rights to Cypriot offshore gas fields, which however appear difficult to justify.

Moreover, another issue has cast a shadow on Christofias' presidency. On July 11, 2011, some 100 crates of ammunition improperly stored at a Cypriot naval base exploded catastrophically, killing 13 people and causing damage estimated at 10% of Cyprus' GDP. The country was forced to request EU assistance, and riots rocked Nicosia. An investigation into the blast even implicated the President. Although he denied responsibility, Christofias' allies, DIKO and EDEK, broke with him. The controversy continues at this writing, as the country prepares for elections.

Table 1: Poll results prior to the 2008 presidential election

Candidate	Christofias (AKEL)	Papadopoulos (DIKO)	Kasoulides (DISY)
Capable of resolving the Cyprus conflict	28%	32%	24%
Is accepted abroad	26%	27%	31%
Is close to the people	46%	23%	17%
Capable of addressing domestic political problems	34%	30%	24%
Capable of addressing social problems	35%	27%	23%
Is dynamic	30%	32%	21%
Capable of addressing economic problems	29%	31%	24%
Is honest	31%	28%	21%
Will stand by his election programme	28%	26%	20%
Understands the problems of youth	33%	23%	25%

Bibliography

Documents and Self-Description of the AKEL

- AKEL: AKEL – To Komma tou Ergazomenou laou [AKEL – The party of the working people], Nikosia 1976.
- AKEL: 17. Synedrio AKEL, Apofaseis kai alla ntokoumenta [17th Party Congress of the AKEL, Resolutions and other Documents], Nikosia 1990.
- AKEL: 18. Synedrio AKEL, Apofaseis kai alla ntokoumenta [same, 18th Congress], Nikosia 1995.
- AKEL: 19. Synedrio AKEL, Apofaseis kai alla ntokoumenta [same, 19th Congress], Nikosia 2001.
- AKEL: 20. Synedrio AKEL, Apofaseis kai alla ntokoumenta [same, 20th Congress], Nikosia 2006.
- AKEL: Katastatiko tou AKEL [Statute of the AKEL], Nikosia 1990.
- AKEL: I diki mas antilipsi gia ton sosialismo [Our perception of Socialism], Nikosia 1990.
- Ausgaben des Neos Dimokratias [New Democrat], theoretical organ of the AKEL CC.
- Information on the Websites <http://www.edon.org.cy/>, <http://www.peo.org.cy/> and <http://www.pogo.org.cy/>.

Secondary literature

- Tzermias, Pavlos: Geschichte der Republik Zypern, Tübingen 2004.
- Bale, Tim/Dunphy, Richard: Red Flag still flying? Explaining AKEL – Cyprus's Communist Anomaly, in: Party Politics, Vol. 13, pp. 287–304, London 2007.
- Brewin, Christopher: The European Union and Cyprus, Huntingdon 2000.
- Papadakis, Yiannis/Peristianis, Nicos/Welz, Gisela (eds.): Divided Cyprus: Modernity, History, and an Island in Conflict, Bloomington 2006.

On current policy

Ausgaben der Haravgi (<http://www.haravgi.com.cy/>) and Cyprus Mail (<http://www.cyprus-mail.com/>).

Interviews in October 2010

- Giannakis Colokasidis, Mitglied im Politbüro des ZK der AKEL.
- Konstantinos Stylianou, Organisationssekretär der EDON.
- Mitglieder des Ortsverband der AKEL Nikosia im Anschluss an eine programmatische Sitzung.

Sources for electoral results and statistics

Zyprisches Presse- und Informationsbüro: <http://www.ekloges.pio.gov.cy/>

The public opinion institute Public Issue: www.publicissue.gr/wp-content/uploads/2008/02/cpcs14_12008.pdf

Roland Kulke/Mark Khan

THE ELECTORAL SYSTEMS IN THE COUNTRIES OF EUROPE

The following is a brief description of the various electoral systems used in the countries of Europe. Only with an understanding of these different systems is it possible to assess why in one country parties of the radical left are forced to form coalitions in order to enter elections, while in another they are forced to agree with others on compromise candidates for runoff elections, and in yet another they might face no minimum thresholds for winning seats in Parliament. In Europe both majority voting and proportional representation exists, along with combinations of the two; on top of that there are also historically rooted special situations. It is only for the elections to the European Parliament that the 20-seven members have so far been able to agree to the common use of proportional representation, and even then it is with variations in certain countries.

Austria

The Austrian Parliament is elected every five years by party-list proportional representation. Every voter has one party vote, and one preferential vote for a candidate on the list of that party. The 4% minimum threshold is designed to prevent the entry of small parties. The president is directly elected by the people, by runoff if necessary, and appoints the Chancellor. The upper house, the Federal Council, is elected by a proportional system within the nine state parliaments.

Belgium

The Belgian Parliament is elected for a four-year term by party-list proportional representation; voting is mandatory. Belgium has a distinct form of federalism in which the two major regions of the country, the Dutch-speaking North (Flanders) of the French-speaking South (Wallonia) have extensive powers of self-government. For this reason, each party actually exists as two independent parties, one in the French-speak-

ing and one in the Dutch-speaking part. Every Belgian government must include parties from both the North and the South, so that the Flemish majority of 60 % cannot simply establish permanent hegemony. The only exception is the radical left, where two parties both claim to be nationwide; in fact however, the traditional CPB is largely French-speaking, while the PvdA (of Maoist origins) is largely Dutch-speaking. The government can only be toppled by a constructive vote of no-confidence. The situation is complicated still further by the fact that the French-speaking capital, Brussels, is located in Flanders, but has a separate regional status. Moreover, there is a German-speaking mini-region within Wallonia. A dispute over the electoral status of Brussels caused the recently ended crisis, which kept the country under a care-taker government for a year and a half after the 2010 election. This situation gave the King mediating power otherwise unusual in Europe.

Bulgaria

Bulgaria is a unitary state with mandatory voting. It has a single-chamber parliament, so that there is no Senate in which the opposition may establish a counterforce to the government. Elections are held every four years by party-list proportional representation, with a 4 % minimum threshold. The president is a figurehead, but is elected directly by the people.

Croatia

Croatia is a unitary state. It has a dual or mixed presidential/parliamentary system, though for much of the period since its independence from the former Yugoslavia it has been more akin to a limited presidential system ie; is more than ceremonial head of state and holds a number of executive powers. The president is directly elected for a 5 year term of office. The Parliament (Sabor) has two chambers, the lower house (Zastupnicki Dom) with 127 members and the upper house (Zupanijski Dom) has 68 seats. The lower house is elected for a four year mandate by a mixed system: 80 members by PR on a national list system, 28 MPs in single seat FPTP constituencies, 12MPs by PR – List for Croats living abroad and 7MPs are reserved for ethnic minorities exceeding 8 % of the population. The upper house is semi federal in that 3 members are elected from each of the 21 counties and 5 are appointed by the president. The lower house is the main locus of power as the prime minister and cabinet must retain a majority of support from the lower house. The upper house can, however, propose laws and return laws for reconsideration.

Cyprus

The single-chamber Cypriot Parliament is elected by party-list proportional representation. Of the 80 seats, only 56 are occupied, since the rest are reserved for representatives of the Turkish minority, and have been vacant since the division of the island. There is a 1.8 % minimum threshold

Czech Republic

The president is elected by both chambers for five years; he or she appoints the premier, can veto legislation and dissolve the Chamber of Deputies. The 200 deputies are elected for four year terms by party-list proportional representation. The Republic is divided into eight voting districts, and in addition to the party lists, personal preference votes are provided. In order to prevent small parties from entering Parliament, there is a 5 % minimum threshold for single parties, 7 % for coalitions of up to three parties, and eleven % for coalitions with more parties than that. The 81-seat Senate is elected by majority vote in single-member constituencies.

Denmark

In Denmark, the single-chamber parliament is elected by party-list proportional representation. There are 175 representatives, of which 135 are elected directly in ten voting districts. The other 40 «compensatory» seats are assigned to parties which fall short of their nationwide share when the district seats are apportioned. However, parties must win a 2 % vote nationwide, or at least one district seat, to be eligible for compensatory seats. In addition, there are four «North Atlantic» seats – two each elected by the Faroe Islands and Greenland. Since the Second World War, most governments have been minority governments.

Estonia

Estonia is a unitary state. has a dual or mixed presidential/parliamentary system. The president is elected for a 5 year term, with two term limits, by a 2/3 majority of the parliament, if this is not possible after 3 rounds of voting the franchise is extended to all local government representatives as wellll as parliamentarians. The parliament has only one chamber (Riigikogu) which is made up of 101 deputies elected by a PR system for four year terms, with a 5 % threshold.

Finland

The single-chamber parliament is elected by a party-list proportional representation system. For this reason, there is still a very large number of parties in the Finnish Parliament. There is no formal minimum threshold, as there is in Germany, but there is an effective threshold due to the fact that the votes are apportioned only within voting districts and are not compensated nationwide. Nonetheless, the system does not have the effect of forcing smaller parties together, and parliaments with ten or more parties are common. Especially in heavily populated districts, small parties have a real chance to win seats. For this reason, the Finnish political system is very consensus oriented, and brings in a number of different societal actors and groups.

France

The lower house of the French parliament, the National Assembly, consists of 577 representatives elected by purely majority vote in single-member constituencies, sometimes by runoff. Each citizen has one vote. To be elected in the first round, a candidate must not only win over 50% of the votes cast, but there must also have been a participation rate of 25% of all voters within the constituency. One peculiarity is the so-called «Romance majority voting system», which permits any candidate who receives more than 12.5% of the vote in the first round to continue in the second round. In the runoff, proximate groups of parties generally agree on a common candidate. The Senate, the upper house of Parliament, is elected by an electoral college of approx. 150,000 members, mostly mayors. The election of the President of the Republic is especially important in France. Here too, the «Romance majority voting system» applies. In most cases today, the two large party blocks, the left and the right, have each been able to unite around a single candidate, with the third candidate being the right-wing extremist candidate Jean-Marie Le Pen (who has now passed the baton on to his daughter). The president, by far the most powerful head of state in Europe, can issue decrees which have the force of law, without participation of the parliament.

Germany

The German Bundestag, the lower chamber of the Parliament, has at least 598 seats, of which 299 «direct» seats are elected by single-member constituencies, with no runoffs. The rest of the seats are distributed by proportional representation among the parties, which field separate lists in each of the sixteen states. Each citizen casts one vote for a list, and one vote for direct candidate, who must not be of the same party as the list. There is a 5% minimum threshold which a party must obtain nationwide to be eligible for representation, or else it must win three «direct» seats in the constituencies. In 2002, the German Left Party missed the 5% threshold, and was thus represented only by two «directly elected» members. A complex compensation system assures that «excess» votes for a party within one state are not lost, but are «traded» for those of another party in another state. The size of the Bundestag can increase if parties win more constituencies in a state than their percentage vote in that state; the Bundestag elected in 2009 thus has 620 members. The federal president is a figurehead with virtually no power. The chancellor is not appointed by him/her, but is elected by the Bundestag, and can be removed only by a constructive vote of no confidence. The less powerful upper house of Parliament, the Bundesrat (Federal Council) has no elected members; its seats are held by representatives of the 16 state governments, and can change at any time, particularly after state elections.

Great Britain

The British Parliament consists of 646 representatives, each elected from a single-member constituency by simple majority vote, with no runoff – a system known as «first-past-the-post» or «winner-take-all». The British electoral system can provide a majority of the seats to a party which has actually received fewer votes. In the 1951 election a Conservative-Liberal coalition narrowly unseated the Labour government in spite of winning fewer votes. In 1974 the reverse occurred; this time Labour was able to rule with Liberal support, in spite of getting slightly fewer votes than the Tories. And of course, the system drastically disadvantages smaller parties, other than regional parties in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland; in 1983 for instance, the Liberal Alliance won 25.4% of the vote, but only 23 seats in Parliament (3.5%), and smaller progressive groups ended up with nothing for decades. In response, an interesting system of Internet-based «tactical voting» has emerged, by which voters in certain constituencies will agree to support progressive candidates for whom they might not otherwise have voted, in return for voters in another constituency supporting «their» candidate in that place.⁵⁷³ Two non-Labour progressives have thus won seats recently, for the first time – a radical leftist in 2005 and a Green in 2010. There have been major discussions about modifying the majority voting system. In Wales and Scotland, the regional parliaments were elected by proportional representation for the first time in 1999, and the Jenkins Commission Report of 1998 recommended a modified system known as «Alternative Voting Plus» or «instant-runoff» voting, which the Liberals now favour and Labour is considering. However, the ruling Conservatives favour the present system and have forced their Liberal allies to accept it.

Greece

The Greek example is interesting, since the 300 members of Parliament are elected by the so-called reinforced proportional representation system – 280 by party-list proportional representation in 10 large voting districts, 8 in single-member constituencies and 12 apportioned by the «bonus system», which rewards the largest party so as to facilitate stable government. There is a 3% nationwide minimum threshold; voting is mandatory. The president is elected by a two-thirds majority in Parliament, so that the opposition parties, too, can exert influence. He or she can veto legislation, but that veto can be overruled by the absolute majority of the members of Parliament – which the governing party can almost always muster, thanks to the bonus system. The elections of 2007 provided an example of the distortion which this system enables: the conservative New Democracy Party (ND) received 41.9% of the votes, but won an absolute majority of 152 seats, while the opposition Socialists (PASOK) won only 102 seats, while winning 38.1%.

⁵⁷³ Cf. <http://www.votedorset.net/>

Hungary

Hungary is a unitary state with a single-chamber parliament of 386 members elected for four years by a mixed majority and proportional representation system: 176 members are elected by majority vote, the rest by proportional representation. There is a runoff election open to all candidates winning at least 15 % of the vote, i.e., similar to the «Romance majority vote system». Of the 210 proportional seats, 152 are elected in voting districts, and that other 58 are so-called compensation seats, similar to the Scandinavian system. Parties which overcome the daunting requirements of collecting signatures for supporter lists then still face the 5 % minimum threshold – 10 % for party «coalitions» and 15 % for «alliances». Moreover, Hungary's new right-wing government plans to gerrymander the districts to reduce the electoral potential of the left. The president is elected by Parliament in as many as three votes. He has more power than the German or other largely figurehead presidents, and can, together with the parliament and the government, initiate legislation.

Iceland

The single-chamber parliament is elected for four years by party-list proportional representation apportioned within six voting districts, which means a de facto minimum threshold of approx. 10 % although there is no formal threshold. Voters can mark a preference of candidates on the party lists, and thus change the ranking.

Ireland

Ireland is a unitary state. It has dual system, but is predominantly a parliamentary system. The president is directly elected for a 7 year term of office and is limited to 2 terms. the only President in the world to be elected by the AV system. The President is a ceremonial figurehead and is considered the weakest directly elected president in the world. The Parliament (Oireachtas) has two chambers, the lower house (Dail Eireann) with 166 members and the upper house (Seanad Eireann) with 60 seats. The lower house is elected for a five year mandate by the unusual PR_STV system (which contains none of the changes made to the Maltese variant to overcome certain negative effects) it also uses much smaller districts therefore impacting the proportionality, new or small parties that make a breakthrough rarely last more than a decade. The upper house is extremely weak with only the power to refer bills back, which can be ignored as it can only delay bills by 90 days. The 60 Senators are elected in 3 different ways; 6 are elected by all registered graduates of the 5 oldest universities, eleven are nominated by the Prime Minister and the rest are nominated by a range of registered corporate bodies, the final list is then voted on an electoral college comprising – all county and city councillors, outgoing senators and incoming MPs. The Senate is viewed as a weak elitist institution that is used as a retirement home/relaunch platform for politicians who failed to get elected to the lower house.

Italy

The two chambers of the Italian Parliament, the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate have almost equal powers, both in terms of legislation, and in terms of monitoring the government.

The 630 deputies and 315 senators are elected for five year terms by a mixed system of majority and proportional representation, and with a bonus system for the strongest party, like in Greece, although the bonus is less, and is applied only if the strongest party or coalition of parties does not receive 55 % of the seats on its own. In order to reinforce the process of the concentration of parties in the system, i.e., to prevent the success of smaller parties, there is a 10 % minimum threshold for party coalitions and a 4 % threshold for single parties.

Latvia

Latvia is a small unitary state with a single-chamber parliament of 100 members elected every four years by party-list proportional representation. There is a 5 % minimum threshold for party lists. Latvia has, since regaining independence in 1991, elected only centre-right governments.

Lithuania

Like Latvia, Lithuania too has a single-chamber parliament elected for a four-year term, but unlike its neighbour, 71 of the 141 seats are elected in single-member constituencies, while 70 seats are elected by party-list proportional representation. There is a 4 % minimum threshold, which does not apply to the parties of national minorities. The president is elected by majority vote, with a runoff if necessary.

Luxemburg

Luxemburg is the constitutional monarchy with mandatory voting. The Grand Duke appoints the premier, can dissolve Parliament, and could introduce bills in parliament.

The single-chamber parliament is elected for five year terms by party-list proportional representation, within large voting districts, so that there is an effective, albeit unofficial, minimum threshold of between five and 10 %. Voters can mark a preference of candidates on the party lists to determine their ranking

Malta

Malta has a single-chamber parliament of eleven members elected in 13 voting districts according to a system similar to that in Ireland, with a transferable single vote, and three preference votes per voter. Moreover, there is a bonus-seat system for the strongest party, to ensure a stable governing majority in Parliament. The two-party system reflects the strong political polarisation of the population, which permeates broad segments of public life.

The Netherlands

The 150 members of the Second Chamber of the Dutch Estates General are elected by party-list proportional representation. The upper house, or First Chamber, consists of seventy-five members elected from the twelve provincial parliaments. Since there is no minimum threshold, small parties have relatively few problems getting into Parliament. Hence, coalition governments are common, and for many years the system encouraged consensus oriented politics similar to that in Finland.

Norway

The 169 representatives in the Storting are elected for four years by party-list proportional representation. The people elect 150 representatives directly in voting districts corresponding to the 19 counties, and the other 19 «compensatory» seats are assigned to parties which fall short of their nationwide share when the district seats are apportioned. There is no formal minimum threshold; however, only parties which achieve 4% are eligible for compensatory seats.

Poland

The structure of Poland is based on a central administration with elements of regional self-government, like in France. The 460 members of the Sejm are elected every four years according to a complicated system of party-list proportional representation in large voting districts. Single parties face a 5% minimum threshold to enter Parliament, and alliances of parties, an 8% threshold; this does not apply to national minorities. The 100-member Senate is elected by a bloc-vote system. The Polish president has considerably more power than do such figurehead presidents as the German head of state. He or she is elected by the people for a five year term, with a runoff if necessary, and can veto legislation, although the veto can be overturned in parliament by a 60% majority.

Portugal

Portugal has a single-chamber parliament of 230 members elected for four-year terms by party-list proportional representation in voting districts. These function as an effective minimum threshold, and also benefit the larger parties. The Portuguese president too has considerably greater powers than do figurehead presidents, since he/she can dismiss the government and assign the premier to form a new one, or dissolve Parliament. The president is directly elected by the people, with a runoff if necessary.

Romania

The Romanian Parliament has two chambers elected every four years by party-list proportional representation. The Senate consists of 143 members, and the Chamber of Deputies of 341. As in Italy, both chambers have similar rights and duties with regard to legislation. Parties face a 5% minimum threshold for parliamentary representation. The president is elected for five years by majority vote, with a runoff if necessary. He/she appoints the premier and can dissolve Parliament.

Slovakia

Slovakia's single-chamber parliament has 150 representatives elected by proportional representation every four years. Parties face a 5% minimum threshold, which does not apply to the Hungarian minority. The president is elected for five years directly by the people, with a runoff if necessary. He can stall legislation by veto, and appoints the premier.

Slovenia

The Second Chamber of the Slovenian parliament has 90 members, and is elected every four years by proportional representation; there is a 4% minimum threshold. The upper chamber, the Council of State, has a corporatist structure similar to that in Ireland. Citizens may introduce legislation by petition with at least 5000 signatures. The president is elected directly by the people, with a runoff if necessary.

Spain

After the Franco dictatorship a process of the decentralisation of the Spanish state structure began and has continued to this day. In 1980, Catalonia and the Basque Country were the first Spanish regions to receive statutes of autonomy. The head of state is the King, who can dissolve Parliament and appoint the premier. The Second Chamber of the Spanish Parliament has 350 representatives, elected every four years by party-list proportional representation in fifty-two voting districts, with a 3% minimum threshold in each. The drawing of the districts and the apportionment system are highly disproportionate, and systematically favour large parties. In Soria province for instance, only 26,143 votes are required to win a seat, while in Barcelona, 124,578 are necessary. In spite of these hindrances, and the 3% minimum threshold, there are quite a number of parties in Parliament, since the regional parties are hardly hampered at all by the disproportion mentioned, as their strength is of course concentrated in particular regions, where they can then overcome these hindrances.

Sweden

Sweden has no regional representation, and hence a single-chamber parliament. Of the 349 seats in the Riksdag, 310 are elected by party-list proportional representation in the 29 voting districts; the other 39 «compensatory» seats are assigned to parties which fall short of their nationwide share when the district seats are apportioned. In spite of the lack of mandatory voting, voting participation is between eighty-five and 90%. Voters can give a preference vote to one candidate on the list they choose, which boosts that candidate's chances on the list. There is a 4% minimum threshold for party lists, which is waived for parties which received at least 12% in at least one of the voting districts.

Turkey

The 550 representatives of the Turkish Parliament are elected by simple proportional representation for four years; voting is mandatory. After a coup d'état the Army ruled from 1980 to 1983. The army wanted to ensure, after the return to democracy, that the electoral system to be implemented would on the one hand ensure stable governments by giving preference to larger parties, but would on the other hand prevent Kurdish representation in the National Parliament. The potential vote of Kurdish parties is estimated at 6–7%, and has remained stable despite repeated changes in the electoral law (most recently in 2007 which requires that a party must not only surpass the 10% threshold, but also have a presence in at least half of the 81 provinces). Finally, there is a Supreme Electoral Council, which rules on the authorisation of parties. As a result of these barriers, 45% of voters were not represented in the parliament elected in 2002.

AUTHORS

Birgit Daiber

heads the Brussels office of the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation.

Norbert Hagemann

is a member of the Advisory Board of the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation and heads the Brussels office of Helmut Scholz, MEP for the German Left Party.

Dominic Heilig

is a political scientist and expert on European affairs, with a focus on judicial and home affairs.

Cornelia Hildebrandt

a consultant for parties and social movements for the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation.

Stanislav Holubec

is a researcher at the University of Jena and director of the network project lavka.info.

Thomas Kachel

is spokesman for the International Working Group on Peace of the Left in Saxony and a member of the National Working Group on Europe of the German Left Party.

Boris Kanzleiter

heads the regional office of the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation in Belgrade.

Anna Kontula

is a member of the academic staff at the University of Tampere and an active member of the VAS.

Tomi Kuhanen

is active in the Finnish Left Youth, and on the staff of a Left Party MP.

Roland Kulke

is a research associate in the Brussels office of the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation.

Julian Marioulas

lived in Greece in his youth, and was a member of the Communist Party Youth. In 2010 he completed his studies of history and political science in Germany.

Michael Müller

spent many years as a travelling correspondent in the Balkan region. Between 1978 and 1985, he was a foreign correspondent for the newspaper Neues Deutschland.

Dorothee de Neve

is a substitute professor of government and governance at the Correspondence University of Hagen.

Tina Olteanu

is a lecturer at the Institute of Political Science at the University of Vienna.

Toivo Palm

is head of research and education in the Estonian Ministry of Agriculture and a founding member of the research group «Tallinn in Europe».

Krzysztof Pilawski

lives and works as a journalist in Warsaw.

Holger Politt

headed the Office of the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation in Warsaw from 2002 to 2009. He is currently involved with a new translation of the Polish writings of Rosa Luxemburg.

Mimmo Porcaro

is a member of Rifondazione Comunista in Italy and the Cultural Association Punto Rosso e Alternative Europa.

Dag Seierstad

is a member of the Party Executive Committee of the Norwegian Left Party SV and the political advisor on European for their parliamentary group.

Cem Sey

is a freelance journalist in Washington D.C. He has reported, among others, for the Deutsche Welle, BBC and TV8, and writes regular columns for AGOS and Taraf.

Barbara Steiner

studied political science at the University of Vienna. She is an assistant in the European Coordination Bureau of the network transform!

Krunoslav Stojaković

of the Department for Eastern, East-Central and South-Eastern Europe of the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation contributed an update after recent elections in Croatia and Slovenia

Anna Striethorst

is a research associate in the Brussels office of the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation.

Đorđe Tomic

is currently working on his dissertation on student protest movements at the Free University Berlin.

Sascha Wagener

was a political scientist who lived in Freiburg and Bucharest and was working on the political theory of the European Left. He died in an accident in 2011.

Clemens Wirries

is a research assistant at the Göttingen Institute for Democracy Studies.