

## The Swedish Experience; the Decline of the "People's Home"

*The Swedish welfare state stood at the end of the 1970s at its highest point. It was considered as an admirable example from the perspective of many other countries round the world. Since then the "Swedish Model" has changed in many respects and it is now put under severe pressure. It seems reasonable to put it like the "People's home" is beginning to dissolve.*

### *Building the Peoples' Home: 1930s' to 1970s'*

In Sweden the Socialdemocratic Party, SAP, held governmental power for more than four decades, from 1932 to 1976. This long-time solid power base made it possible to implement a whole range of social reforms, to build what is often called the "people's home".<sup>1</sup> From a more theoretical point of view, the Swedish welfare system is perhaps the best example of what social theorist Esping-Andersen labels "the Socialdemocratic general welfare model".<sup>2</sup> Fundamental part of this Socialdemocratic welfare regime, according to Esping-Andersen specifically developed in the Nordic countries, was a redistributing tax system which was able to finance a large public sector with universal welfare programs.<sup>3</sup> Swedish Socialdemocracy, supported and pushed by the Communist party, implemented a sophisticated social insurance system which included more or less the whole population, in order to gain support for the system by the whole population and over-bridge gaps between different classes and segments. The model guaranteed almost full income compensation for child-care, unemployment and sickness. The socialdemocrats built up hospitals and health care, care of the elderly, schools, child-care, new houses etc. In the late 1950s' the labour movement in Sweden also succeeded to implement a beneficiary pension system, after long and hard struggle against the united bourgeois forces.<sup>4</sup>

Important elements of the Swedish model was the strategy for full employment as well as the solidaric wage policy, both worked out by trade union economists Rudolf Meidner and Gösta Rehn. The overarching-goal of full employment meant stronger power from the labour movement visavi the bourgeois. The solidaric wage policy meant that workers in industry with high profits held back their wage demands, in order to workers in others sectors of society to demand larger increases in wages.<sup>5</sup>

Almost every one of the social reforms was implemented against the will of the bourgeois parties and big enterprise. This was made possible because an internationally unique union-political cooperation between LO and SAP, and that the Communist Party was passively supporting in parliament, although never welcomed in the government.

All in all this Swedish model resulted in decreasing differences of income and wealth in the Swedish society. In comparison with other countries in Western Europe with other forms of welfare capitalism as Esping-Andersen puts it, this meant Sweden was a very just and equal society.

With one exception: *the conditions of power and property*. The conditions on the labour market was regulated in the Swedish form of "the historic compromise", which was set up in 1938 between LO and the employers federation, SAF. In this compromise employers gives the right to lead and organize the work, while the unions gets the right to organise and strike etc. The fundamental question of power and property conditions is out of the compromise, it is a forbidden and silent question and it is implicit that these conditions should not be questioned. To conclude, this meant that Swedish society during the period from early 30s' to late 70s' showed a remarkable increasing living standard for the working class, at the same

time the fundamental power/ownership interests of big industry were never really threatened. One can put it like political and social democracy were achieved, but not economic democracy.

#### *Cutbacks, privatization, deregulation: 1990s' and further*

And what about now? During the 1990s' like other countries in the global capitalist economy Sweden has experienced huge cutbacks on the public sector. Public sector share of BNP has decreased from 2/3 to about 1/2 for the period of last 20 years.<sup>6</sup> In money this means a loss of about 20 billion Euros per year in public expenditures, which is very much for a rather small economy as Swedens. This has resulted in a very problematic situation in the public health sector.<sup>7</sup> The newspapers writes every week about inhuman conditions in the care of elderly, in hospitals, in child-care, schools etc. Many hospitals have been closed down, and others are full with people lying in the corridors. Maternity hospitals have also been closed and those left are sometimes full, there is examples when women have been told to go to a hospital 200 km's away. Total number of employees in care sector has been much less, and there is too many examples of old peoples lying in their beds all day without getting any help. The mental care as well as the care of addicts has also experienced severe cutbacks, and that is no doubt one reason there is more violence on the streets. 20 years ago beggars did not exist on the streets of Stockholm, today you can see them every day. The cutbacks has been combined with privatizations, so today big stock companies are important actors on the health "market". Only 15-20 years ago private entrepreneurs were not aluded at all in the health care.

There has also been cutbacks in the social security systems. Full income compensation no longer exists, today the level is 80% for unemployment (if you are included in the system), sickness and child care. One very important change is the new pension system, decided in 1994 and implemented thereafter by four bourgeois parties together with the Social Democrats. In long term this will mean that the public pension system, with pension funds governed by the state, will melt away. Instead there will be hundreds of pension funds controlled by private banks, insurance companies etc, among which the employees are told to have the freedom to choose between. This new system was implemented by the same, or actually a rather different, Socialdemocracy that fought so hard to implement the public pension system in the 1950s'. The fact is also that it was actually the Social Democrats that in the late 1980s' first opened up for private alternatives in the public sector, a bourgeois government 1991-94 then could go on and multiply a development already initiated.<sup>8</sup> The Swedish Social Democracy of today is a Social Democracy that belongs to those who put pressure on for instance the French Socialist party to deregulate and privatize more, energy sector is one example. Instead of being a model for a radical progressive force, Swedish Social Democracy today is the opposite. The SAP leadership of today belongs to the "New Labour" of Tony Blair and "Die Neue Mitte" of Gerhard Schröder.

#### *The Hegemonic Turning Point: 1970s' and 80s'*

How can one understand this very drastic and fundamental change? To understand the present conditions it is important to understand the historic development and building of the Swedish welfare state as has been outlined, but even more important, to analyse the period inbetween past history and present. That leads us to focus on an issue that was the largest societal conflict in post-war Sweden, the so called wage-earner funds, or in a broader sense, the struggle for economic democracy. The wage earner funds struggle marked the Swedish society for more than a decade, from mid 1970s' to early 1990s'.<sup>9</sup>

As an answer to persistent or increasing concentration of power and property in big enterprise, the Socialdemocratic trade union federation (LO) in 1975 proposed the so called

wage-earner funds as a way to democratize enterprise. The original proposals would have meant that collective funds controlled by the trade unions, in a period of 20-40 years, should have taken over the ownership majority in big companies.<sup>10</sup> It was a democratic socialist strategy aiming at transforming the fundamental power/property-relations of society.<sup>11</sup> This proposal came as a chock. Bourgeois press shouted out "Revolution in Sweden".<sup>12</sup>

Bourgeois parties were at the time not united as a political force, but in the course of a couple of years they, together with the organised enterprise in the employers federation (SAF), manage to unite as a hegemonic force in a classical Gramscian<sup>13</sup> (more than a post-marxist Laclau/Moffe)<sup>14</sup> sense of the concept. The socialdemocratic party was hezitating, and after the parliamentary loss 1976 (they lost governmental power for the first time since 1932) more and more negative towards the LO wage earner funds. In 1983, the SAP presented a governmental bill concerned with wage-earner funds which was then adopted by the parliament.<sup>15</sup> However, the implemented wage-earner fund proposal was very different from the original LO-proposals. The issue of economic democracy and the aim of transforming the power and property conditions had faded away and it was now stated that the funds should *not* be aimed at majority ownership of companies. The gap between the LO and the SAP was, historically considered, exceptional, and the historically important union-political cooperation did not longer work. Swedish social democracy did not longer function as a hegemonic bloc which had been a necessary condition for the long-time progressive development of the Swedish model. At the same time as the inner conflict in the social democratic movement, the Communist Party remained on the sidelines, adding criticism from the left and denied participation by social democracy.

The wage earner fund debate was a struggle over hegemony, covering all levels of Swedish society, the economic, as well as the political and ideological.<sup>16</sup> Different organised class forces and Subjects stood against each other. The key protagonists in the fund struggle followed classical Marxist analytical lines; labour movement (the socialdemocratic actors LO and SAP and the communist party VPK) against bourgeois actors (the conservative party (Moderaterna), the liberal party (Folkpartiet), the "agrarian-liberal" party (Centerpartiet) and organized private enterprise as represented through the Swedish Employers Federation, SAF).

While the labour movement actors failed in forming a hegemonic bloc, the borgeois bloc (in wide meaning), in time, succeeded in forming a united hegemonic force strong enough to force a divided labour movement on the defensive. A divided labour movement could not stand up against a united bourgeois force, and this is a fundamental aspect in explaining the transformation of the funds and the final bourgeois victory.

But not only that. The outcome of this organized class struggle is also fundamental in explaining the whole social development in Sweden since then. The wage earner funds struggle then meant a hegemonic turning-point in Swedish society, and the bourgieous force has ever since been the dominant, on all levels of society economically, politically as well as culturally and ideologically. Until and including the raising of the wage-earner fund debate the Swedish labour movement had for decades gradually moved in the direction of their opponents. This long-time progressive move had been made within the frame-work of the Swedish "historical compromise", between labour and capital. The original wage-earner fund proposal meant a step in another direction, focusing and threatening the fundamental, "sacred core" of the capitalist mode of production; the private ownership of the means of production. With the fund proposal LO hade left the classic socialdemocratic "welfare line", and had again manifested the "ownership line"<sup>17</sup> which had been hidden beneath the historic compromise between labour and capital. The latent class conflict, hidden by the historical compromise, was once again manifest, laid open to the society through the debate. The wage earner fund proposals and the struggle they generated, then can be considered as both cause and effect of the dissolution of the Swedish historic compromise.

The bourgeois bloc won the struggle over the wage-earner funds, and has, since then, the step by step forced the labour movement on the defensive. The bourgeois hegemonic force has prevailed to this day. This is important in understanding the changes that have occurred in Swedish society, changes which question the social democratic welfare model and the "People's home". The wage-earner fund debate, then, meant a very important change in the balance of the organized class forces in Swedish society, which is of big importance in understanding existing power relations of today.

In understanding the changes and the outcome of the wage-earner fund debate and the development afterwards, it is necessary not only to focus on the political-ideological level, but also to take into consideration the changing conditions of Swedish economy.<sup>18</sup> The export-dependent Swedish economy was struck by the international oil-crisis. The profit-rate fell, companies were in crises, there was a need for new investments and risk capital. These economic conditions were used by bourgeois actors as argument against the viability of wage-earner funds and against the equalizing welfare policy at large. In the beginning of the 1980s the conservative-liberal government (at power 1976-82) left the Keynesian economic policy around which had been a consensus among all parties until then.<sup>19</sup> They began to cut public expenditures in line with the new, or maybe the rather old, liberal economic policy now implemented. The Socialdemocratic governments afterwards have never changed that economic/political direction. They have since then, like the bourgeois parties, put low inflation before full employment (which was one of the corner stones of the Swedish Social Democratic Model, as has been mentioned earlier).

Besides the economical factors, another important international factor behind the hegemonic change, in Sweden as in other countries was of course the political/ideological "right wave", droven by the Reagan/Thatcher regimes, which had a world wide impact, and of course also influenced the Swedish political agenda. From this right wing theories/ideologies/politics, the Swedish bourgeois found arguments for their own anti-left campaigns, including and focusing on the "fund socialism" but also against the whole Swedish welfare system.<sup>20</sup>

### *Prospects for the Welfare State from a Left Perspective*

The consequences on the Swedish welfare state of this hegemonic turning-point, have been outlined earlier. I believe it is correct to consider Swedish Social Democracy today, as included in the bourgeois liberal hegemonic force. As has been touched upon, SAP governments during the 1980's and 90's have continued the policy meaning gradually decreasing public sectors share of BNP. In the late 1980' they implemented a tax reform to lower for instance income taxes, which cost many billions of Euros and which did not benefit those with low incomes. In the 1990's SAP as well as bourgeois governments (1991-94) have been very successful in cutting public expenditures, in order to qualify for the Maastricht treaty and the demands for EU and EMU membership.

The consequences of the economic/political development during the 20 years after the hegemonic turning-point is, a gradually hardening Swedish society. This means one of Europes most increasingly gaps between classes. The income differences have been increasing rapidly. There is marginalisation of parts of the population which did not occur 20 years ago. Of course many of the processes described have also occurred in rest of European countries, but I think it is correct to say that the bourgeois/(neo)liberal (including socialdemocratic governments) offense has created an even more drastic changeing of the social conditions in Sweden.<sup>21</sup> This is also an important explanation to the EU/EMU negative opinion. The social development is seen, and is in fact, related to the adaptation to another system, and this also explains the "anti-federalism" in the Left, even sometimes when it comes to Left projects.

To summarize you can say that today political democracy is restricted by the neo-liberal “market”, it is no longer correct to say we have social democracy, and economic democracy seems far away.

The discussion has so far to a large extent dealt with the Social Democracy. This comes natural since SAP-LO was a very strong force for so long time, at the same time the Left “to the left” of Social Democracy was weak.<sup>22</sup> Some remarks should now be made regarding the Left Party. The former Communist Party (VPK) was during the wage-earner fund struggle very critical at the beginning, the actually system transforming proposals were considered as social democratic “reformism” (a position almost everybody today regrets). Today, when the social democrats have become liberals, the Left Party is involved in a very tight cooperation with the SAP government and the Green Party. In the governmental financial plans of today you can read “the long term goal to decrease public sector of BNP continues”. The Left Party on both national and local levels is in some ways critical towards the SAP government “in theory”, and tries to move SAP proposals to the left, but in praxis supports the government policy in large. Now even more heavy cutbacks are planned at the local level, which of course is related to the economic policy on national level. In the county of Stockholm the socialdemocratic/left/green majority are proposed to cut on health care etc equivalent to 200 million Euros. In theory and policy documents, the Left Party does everything to defend the strong general welfare model; at the same time in praxis it supports the SAP governmental policy, which has meant gradually decreasing public sector as share of BNP, and related to that, for instance increasing income gaps between classes as well as men and women.

Since 1989 the long-time strategically oriented discussions have to a large extent been non-existing in the Left Party. The parliamentary compromising policy has overshadowed issues like power/property conditions, overarching structural power balance and relations of class forces, the vision of economic democracy, the socialist strategy etc. In the beginning of 2000 the Left Party congress however decided to once again put this kind of issues at focus. The party board appointed a working group, the so called “power and ownership” group, which in the beginning of 2002 presented a report.<sup>23</sup> In the document adopted by the party, it is stated that a far-reaching democraticizing presupposes a far-reaching change of power and property conditions. In order to reach economic democracy a necessary (but insufficient<sup>24</sup>) condition is to fundamentally change existing ownership conditions. The overarching strategy should then be to gradually expand the common, democratic ownership compared to private ownership so that the main part of the economy becomes democratic and commonly owned. It is said that a modern socialist strategy then needs to include a variety of common ownership forms; social ownership (by national, regional and local governments) as well as co-operative and worker ownership. A crucial question is what kind of left strategy is needed to work this out, and in the document one has looked back on the fund strategies which shook the Swedish society 20-30 years ago.

This is not the place to give detailed descriptions about the fund strategy outlined, I will just mention that both union controlled pension funds and what is called societal funds are being discussed.<sup>25</sup> One important benefit with the wage earner fund strategy was that it was not only vague visions, on the contrary it was a very realistic and concrete way towards economic democracy and a democratic socialism. That was of course the reason why the bourgeois actors reacted with full power mobilizing every resources they had to force the labour movement on the defense. The bourgeois class interests were threatened, and a hegemonic bloc was mobilized to put counter pressure on labour. One should have a lot to learn out of this experience. One conclusion would be that the basic problem with the wage-earner funds was not the funds in itself, but the fact that the labour movement was not united behind this system-transforming strategy, and that the hegemonic formation was too weak. When the Left Party adopted the “power and ownership document” in spring 2002, the

power/property conditions for a week were at focus in the public discussion. Once again the bourgeois actors, parties, press, TV etc were almost shocked. At focus in the debate was the so called societal funds, which were considered as a threat to existing conditions of power and the private ownership of the means of production. This again showed the difference between a vague vision in a party programme and a concrete way of implementation. And, I believe, the necessity for the left to bring these kind of concrete strategies into the discussion, if these important issues should be more than vague and harmless programmes.

One very important learning from the Swedish experience, with the struggle for economic democracy and the decline of the “Swedish model/people’s home” afterwards, is that building a general welfare system without dealing with persisting unequal power/property conditions, is not possible in the long run. That is the reason this paper has focused on these aspects. It is not enough to only focus on social reforms, and at the same time leave the ownership relations of enterprise out of the question. Sooner or later these issues will come back and break through, whether initiated from the left or from the right. The Swedish experience was that when social democracy was achieved, people realized that economic democracy was still far away. Demands for economic democracy were raised among workers, a wave of wild strikes put among other things pressure on organized labour, and the LO wage earner fund proposal has to be seen in this light. When economic democracy was demanded and private ownership of the means of production was questioned, the capitalist owners of big industry and the whole bourgeois mobilized, and then the real power balance of society was manifested. A power balance which had prevailed all the time beneath the People’s home, grounded on the ownership conditions.

Therefore a European left strategy for defending/reconstructing/creating a general welfare system, needs to comprise power/property/ownership issues as a natural part in the strategy. If they are forgotten it seems it is not possible to build any long living general welfare model. In a longer perspective, it is my conviction that social democracy is not possible without economic democracy. It seems necessary to stress this, since these aspects seems much to absent in the left discussion today. In the short term prospects for the European welfare state does not look too well. The development in Europe today seems to be more and more in the direction towards the liberal/american kind of “welfare kapitalism”<sup>26</sup> than the general welfare model that Sweden was a famous example of. In order to change that development there is a need to form a two edged European Left strategy; to try to reconstitute the general welfare state and at the same time point at the necessity for changes of the fundamental power/property conditions. This should mean no less than to openly challenging the development driven by global capitalism and its interests. Perhaps a united European Left and labour movement in a longer perspective could constitute a strong enough hegemonic force for this challenge. This of course is a huge task, but is there any alternative?

A future hegemonic force aiming at economic democracy, a new Socialist Subject, needs to be a broad formation including a variety of progressive actors, inside and outside the parliaments as well as the institutionalized labour organizations, “old” movements like trade unions and political parties as well as the new social movements. At the same time I would say the organized working class and the labour movement needs to be the centrality in this Subject if it should have any possibility to succeed.<sup>27</sup> For the European Left Parties one part in this work would mean coalition building with socialdemocratic parties and unions, at a first step building links with the left wing of these forces. This is strategically important since there is a strong will for defending the general welfare state in these left wings, often in opposition to the socialdemocratic leadership. The second part is perhaps even more difficult; tightening the connections with new social movements to put pressure on the parliamentary forces for another policy, which goes beyond defending the welfare state. In this it is necessary to bring into the debate -at for instance European Social Forum- not only the

analyses of prevailing capitalist power/property conditions, but also to pose the question of the socialist strategy towards economic democracy, which is almost non-existing today. In this work I believe, the GUE (in cooperation with Transform) has a big responsibility.

Stefan Sjöberg,  
PhD, Department of Sociology at Uppsala University,  
secretary of the Centre for Marxist Social Studies in Stockholm

Stefan Sjöberg  
Centre for Marxist Social Studies  
Box 12 660  
112 93 Stockholm  
SWEDEN  
[stefan.sjoberg@soc.uu.se](mailto:stefan.sjoberg@soc.uu.se)  
+46 8 651 70 04, +46 70 394 37 18

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<sup>1</sup> The concept was first used in the end of the 1920s by socialdemocratic prime minister, Per Albin Hansson.

<sup>2</sup> In Gösta Esping-Andersens famous study, *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* (Polity Press, Cambridge, 1990), he considers this "Nordic" form as one of mainly three existing forms of "welfare capitalism", the others being the selective liberal and the conservative welfare models. Esping-Andersen exemplifies the conservative model with France and Germany (in a tradition going back to Bismarck) and the liberal with USA. The conservative model is characterized by historical links to the church with traditional family values. The state is strong in this welfare system, but does normally not intervene as long as family can handle the care needed. In the liberal model, social security is selective and beneficiaries handled on low levels to those with low incomes. The state intervenes to a small extent in the market mechanisms, and the model has (especially compared to the Socialdemocratic universal model) a low degree of redistribution among the population.

<sup>3</sup> Rothstein, Bo, *Vad bör staten göra? Om välfärdsstatens moraliska och politiska logik*, SNS, Stockholm, 1994

<sup>4</sup> Olson, Sven E, *Social Policy and Welfare State in Sweden*, Arkiv, Lund, 1990

<sup>5</sup> Clement, Wallace & Rianne Mahon, *Swedish Social Democracy: a Model in Transition*, Canadian Scholars' Press, Toronto, 1994

<sup>6</sup> Ankarloo, Daniel

<sup>7</sup> The description below following Sjöberg, Stefan, *Löntagarfondsfrågan – en hegemonisk vändpunkt. En marxistisk analys. (The Wage-earner Fund Debate – a Hegemonic Turning-point. A Marxist Analysis.)*, Uppsala University, Universitetstryckeriet, Uppsala, 2003, p234ff

<sup>8</sup> Montin, Stig, "Privatiseringsprocesser i kommunerna, teoretiska utgångspunkter och empiriska exempel", in *Statsvetenskaplig tidskrift*, nr1, 1992

<sup>9</sup> The wage-earner fund struggle is analyzed in Sjöberg 2003

<sup>10</sup> Meidner, Rudolf, in collaboration with Anna Hedborg & Gunnar Fond, *Löntagarfonder*, Tidens, Stockholm, 1975

<sup>11</sup> A profit-sharing model was proposed, that would shift the ownership and power structure of companies without influencing their liquidity. A certain share of the yearly profits (the LO-working group talks about 20%) from big companies, should be transferred to wage-earner funds, but not as cash but as new-issued stocks in the company. Thereby the profits would not leave the company but remain an active capital. By relating the calculated sum to the total stock, the amount of new shares could be established. The fund system should comprise only big companies, with more than 100 employees, since power and property is concentrated to these companies. The wage-earner funds, it is proposed, should be controlled by the employees through their trade unions and the members of the fund board should be appointed by union representatives. The fund representatives in each company/managing board should be jointly appointed by the fund boards and the local trade unions. This original wage-earner fund model would mean that the collective fund-share of the big companies would gradually increase in relation to private shares. The working group estimated that in 20-40 years large Swedish companies would be majority owned and controlled by the wage-earner funds. The idea was as simple as it was radical.

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<sup>12</sup> Liberal daily newspaper Dagens Nyheter August 28, 1975. In the LO trade union press you could read headlines like "With the funds we take over!", and "This is how we will take power from the owners of capital".

<sup>13</sup> Gramsci, Antonio, *Selections From the Prison Notebooks*, International Publishers, New York, 1975

<sup>14</sup> Laclau, Ernesto & Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy; Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, Verso, London, 1996 (1985)

<sup>15</sup> Regeringens proposition 1983/84:50, *Löntagarfonder*

<sup>16</sup> This means taking into consideration the "totality" of the "relative autonomous" levels of economy, politics and ideology, following a structuralist influenced Marxist analyses. See Althusser, Louis & Etienne Balibar, *Reading Capital*, New Left Books, London, 1975, and Poulantzas, Nicos, *Political Power and Social Classes*, New Left Books, London, 1975

<sup>17</sup> Lewin, Leif, *Ideologi och strategi, svensk politik under 100 år*, Norstedts Juridik, Lund, 1992, p356ff

<sup>18</sup> Following a structuralist influenced Marxist perspective the interrelation of economical, political, cultural and ideological factors have to be evaluated in any social analysis.

<sup>19</sup> Scharpf, Fritz W, *Crisis and Choice in European Social Democracy*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1991

<sup>20</sup> In some way related to this is also the structural effects of the break-down of the "Soviet bloc" 1989-91. The Swedish welfare state existed in between the two giant hegemonic forces, when one of them swept away, it of course helped the global "market wave" to also sweep the "people's home" with it.

<sup>21</sup> I believe the political violence that has occurred in Sweden during this time also has to be seen out of this social perspective: the murder of Olof Palme 1986, violent confrontations fascists-antifascists occurring from early 90s, nazi serial killer beginning of 90s', nazi car bomb severely hurting journalist and his child -96, nazi murder of syndicalist union activist -99, nazi robbers murdering policeman -00, riots in Gothenburg EU-summit -01 with policeshooting of activists, murder of Anna Lindh.

<sup>22</sup> The Communist party, VPK, gained about 4-6% of the votes from 1950's up to 1998, when the "reformed" Left Party (Vänsterpartiet) gained 12%. Birgeron, Bengt Owe mfl, *Sverige efter 1900, en modern politisk historia*, Bonnier, Stockholm

<sup>23</sup> The strategy document *Power and Ownership* was adopted by the Left Party's party board in April 2002. The working group had prepared a proposal of this document that was dealt with during a conference held in March 2002. The "power and ownership group" consisted of four activists within the Left Party and The Centre for Marxist Social Studies, I was one of them. An English version of the document can be found on [www.econ-pol.unisi.it/econdem/](http://www.econ-pol.unisi.it/econdem/)

<sup>24</sup> Insufficient, since it is not enough to change property conditions, this has to be combined with organizational democracy at all levels.

<sup>25</sup> In the huge amount of workers accumulated pension capital, lies a potential for contributing to the development of a fundbased strategy for economic democracy, based on the principle of one person—one vote. It seems reasonable that the trade unions themselves create pension funds where its members may choose to invest their pension capital, instead of as today (in for example the new the new pension system implemented in Sweden) giving it to privately controlled institutions, investors and stockjobbers. The union members would then appoint the fund board. The union funds would invest the collective capital in companies and different parts of trade and industry. The fund returns could be used for various purposes, decided democratically instead of by private shareholders. The fund boards and local union units could then appoint deputies to shareholders' meetings and in company boards, in a democratic process. Union funds may use their responsibility as owners and the power and influence that comes with shareholdership, for instance to prevent closing-down of profitable companies or the moving out production to low-income countries. In longer term it may be a way of influencing the fundamental ownership relations in the companies. In longer term this fund model would allow for companies that are owned and managed by their workers.

A reasonable strategy regarding the pension system could be to work out a two-edged strategy, comprising both a long time strategy for defending/reconstruction of public pension systems, as well as a strategy for such collective union funds which can work within the new already implemented systems.

Societal funds is another strategy for economic democracy outlined in the "power and ownership document". A fundamental issue when building a fund is the capital supply. An ingenious construction was the one presented in the first wage earner fund proposals, whose profit-sharing model shifts the ownership and power structure of companies without influencing their liquidity. A societal fund could get its capital supply in the same way. It should comprise only big companies since the fundamental power and property are concentrated to these, for instance those with at least 100–200 workers and a certain turnover. The societal funds model should aim at a balance between salaried workers and the interests of civil society; between societal power and workers power/influence and self management. A possible way is here to combine wage-earner influence with societal ownership, for instance regionally based, with a central levelling fund to counteract regional inequalities. Such regional funds could be managed by a board appointed by regional parliaments. The fund deputies at shareholders' meetings and in company boards could then be appointed by the fund board/the regional



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parliament and the company workers, respectively. The fundamental principle of the fund should be one citizen–one vote rather than one union member–one vote (as was the case in the wage earner funds).

Ideas about collectively managed funds (mainly the pension funds described) for influencing the power balance already exist in several countries. (An important contribution to that debate that should be mentioned is Minns, Richard, “The Social Ownership of Capital”, in *New Left Review*, nr 219, 1996.) One can imagine regional and national funds which are linked together to form an international/European system. This system could be one of many counterpowers to global capital, and it would for sure be much more powerful than for instance the so called “Tobin tax” which has been discussed the last years. Such an international fund strategy for economic democracy has not been elaborated yet and needs of course continuing debate and theoretical development. I believe that ought to be an important task for the European left of today.

<sup>26</sup> In Esping-Andersens sens of the concept

<sup>27</sup> In this lies a critique of Laclau/Moffes famous “post-marxist” interpretation of the concept of Subject and its possible formation, a subjekt which in their meaning is without any kind of centrality.